

Where are the Ancestors? Changing Culture in Zimbabwe *M. F. C. Bourdillon*. Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1993, 129 pp, ISBN 0-908307-35-7, \$33.

This is a short but provocative book, clearly written by an experienced anthropologist who is not new to the study of Black Zimbabwean culture. Bourdillon looks at the tensions and contradictions that arise for individuals experiencing a culture in transition. Although, as he points out, he raises points within the context of Shona culture, what he says generally applies to 'the Ndebele, the Tonga and other groups in Zimbabwe as well' (p. 3). It is not clear whether it also applies to the culture of White Zimbabweans.

Changing culture

Bourdillon's analysis focuses on the fact that culture is dynamic and it demonstrates some of the implications of this fact. He argues that cultural practices persist as long as they serve useful functions and are dropped as soon as they stop doing so. He identifies a number of factors that influence the way people behave. These include habit, material interests, the need for power and control, as well as the respect for certain ideas and values. Bourdillon does not rank these factors according to significance. However, the attempt to maintain that 'No one factor is independent of the others' (p. 16) leaves us confused. On the one hand, Bourdillon argues that 'people are ready to drop the traditions that become useless', (p. 28) and on the other, he maintains that people '... think in terms of the values they were brought up to accept' (p. 29). His attempt to balance these factors is not convincing in light of his own wonderful illustrations of how people, mostly interested in money, power and authority, are selective in their interpretations of what culture prescribes in specific contexts.

Bourdillon's book is most interesting when demonstrating how the pursuit of money, power and control influences individuals making decisions about their personal lives, in the context of marriage, family life and inheritance, as well as in the wider social, economic and political realm. Bourdillon must be congratulated for making a contribution in the process of demystifying hegemonic struggles in family and kinship relationships as well as in religious, political and bureaucratic structures.

The traditional and the modern

Bourdillon understands culture within the context of what he sees as the social movement, both in space and in time, from the traditional to the modern, 'from a life-style based on subsistence agriculture supplemented by trade to one based on cash incomes through labour or trade or cash crops, often supplemented by growing for subsistence' (p. 3). Thus cultural changes are understood in relation to 'material factors'. Hence, '... culture is not independent of the material factors in our lives' (p. 4). This movement from the traditional to the modern way of life causes tensions 'in all branches of Zimbabwean society' (p. 2). The major theme of the book is to identify the tensions and the areas of life in which those tensions occur. This is done by identifying the major traditional institutions for the purposes of comparing and contrasting them with those of modern

Zimbabwe. Accompanied with this is a comparison and contrast of the world views and values that inform the human relations between people in those respective societies. Bourdillon's analysis is guided by the principle that '... we should expect even beliefs to change as society experiences material changes' (p. 6). He then makes a leap in his argument to identify the traditional/modern distinction with the rural/urban distinction. What he attributes to the traditional he also attributes to the rural society and what he attributes to the modern he attributes to the urban. He then concludes from this that, 'A person who was born and brought up in an urban area has a different set of institutional responses from a person brought up in a more traditional rural area' (p. 81).

It is true that in Zimbabwe, there is a growing number of Black Zimbabweans who are becoming totally urbanized. It is also true that these Zimbabweans are beginning to have an impact on the nature of culture in Zimbabwe. However, the majority of Zimbabweans are not totally urbanized. Even if it were true that the majority of Zimbabweans were totally urbanized, in the sense that they no longer had contacts with the rural areas, it would not be true that those people's world views and values would be completely modern. In fact, it would not be difficult to demonstrate, as Bourdillon himself illustrates in his section on 'Authority and power', that some of the problems of performance and efficiency that contemporary Zimbabwean institutions are facing are a result of attempts by Black Zimbabweans to work in modern institutions according to traditional world views and values.

Thus, Bourdillon has somewhat overplayed the contrast between 'the traditional rural area' and 'the modern urban area'. By implication, he has oversimplified the nature of cultural changes in Zimbabwe by collapsing them into a single process which some writers call 'modernization'. The movement to modernity should be understood in terms of the interaction of a number of separate processes of change. The processes are political, economic, social and cultural. Each process proceeds at its own pace so that when it interacts with the other processes, the outcome is contingent and unpredictable.

Bourdillon recognizes, but does not bring out clearly, the implications of the fact that most Black Zimbabweans shuttle between rural and urban areas. The Zimbabwean rural life is not as traditional and the urban not as modern as he suggests. This point can be appreciated by looking at the political, economic, social and cultural processes of modernization within the African context. For instance, the contemporary Zimbabwean rural space and life-form has largely been created by the forces of modernity. It is true that the majority of Black Zimbabweans have pride in their rural homes and many often identify these rural homes as representative of their traditional life and culture. Yet it is not long ago since their own forefathers and foremothers were crying foul for having been forced into those very rural areas and rural life. Although most Black Zimbabweans would like to consider life in the rural areas as the foundation to their authentic identities, they also should recognize that it is a result of the disruptive political, economic, social and cultural forces of modernity. There is no 'traditional farming community', not in some way created and

recreated by modernizing processes. The migrant labour system alluded to on page 48 shows how we cannot unproblematically identify the rural with the traditional.

Privatization of the traditional

The self-validation of modern institutions within the colonial and post-colonial context leads to the marginalization of traditional value systems and societies. Bourdillon clearly identifies some of these processes of marginalization. For example, he describes how churches, schools and modern medicine undermine, not necessarily on the basis of evidence, the status and knowledge of traditional wisdom. Thus, 'In the traditional system, rituals were nearly always public affairs' (p. 75), but they have been marginalized to the private sphere where they have been turned into 'attempts to overcome private problems and worries, or to fulfil secret or private desires and ambitions' (p. 76).

Conclusion

Bourdillon has clearly and competently demonstrated that 'Today, we must make sure that Zimbabwean culture is able to adapt to the needs of all its people: the young as well as the old; the poor as well as the wealthy; and the minority as well as the majority' (p. 24). However, although he is sometimes tantalizingly suggestive, he is hesitant to say anything that might begin to give direction as to how we can do this. He relies on the liberal principle that 'rather than criticizing those who behave differently from ourselves, we should try to understand why they behave as they do' (p. 123). Although he wants to talk about 'Zimbabwean culture', he says very little about where White Zimbabweans, for example, might come into play in this culture.

I have selected the above points for discussion to demonstrate how provocative Bourdillon's book is. It should be read by all Zimbabweans and anyone interested in the cultural landscape of Zimbabwe.

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Grassroots Leadership: The Process of Rural Development in Zimbabwe
By C. G. Mararike. Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1995, xiv, 114pp., ISBN 0-908307-39-X, Z\$40.

The book *Grassroots Leadership: The Process of Rural Development in Zimbabwe* is based on the author's applied research experience in the Buhera District of Manicaland province. The book, inappropriately titled, revolves on the interaction between grassroots communities and development agents rather than on leadership at the grassroots level.

The book begins with a discussion on research and its place in development. Mararike urges that African countries cannot afford research that has no applied value. All research must contribute to a change in people's lives.