

The interests of detailed analysis and thorough treatment of issues would have been better served had the author focused on one or two topics covering carefully chosen regions of the continent. The continent-wide approach not only produces an unwieldy array of facts which are rather difficult to digest but also results in a voluminous book whose price, though not indicated on the book cover, can only be beyond the reach of many potential readers on the African continent for whom, presumably, the book was written.

The above shortcoming aside, however, *A Modern Economic History of Africa* is a welcome and valuable contribution to scholarship which raises the discourse on the African pre-colonial experience to new heights. It is a well-packaged, competently edited and well-written book which should be of use to professional historians, economic historians, high school teachers and any lay readers who are interested in understanding the forces that shaped Africa's historical development on the eve of European colonialism.

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The Political Economy of the Sugar Industry in Zimbabwe, 1920-90 By A. S. Mlambo and E. S. Pangeti. Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1996, iv, 90 pp., ISBN 0-908307-43-8, Z\$50.

The book describes the various stages of growth of the sugar industry in Zimbabwe, and the different types of control that are responsible for getting the industry where it currently is. The authors present the establishment of the industry by individuals like McDougall, and later by government, and then by international entrepreneurs. The book describes the operations of the industry during various government regimes and analyses the impact of international relations on the performance of the industry. The final chapter looks at the marketing opportunities and constraints in the region and in distant international markets.

While the book illustrates the importance of history for the understanding of economic development, the book could be strengthened by paying more attention to economic, political and institutional frameworks or paradigms. Several questions can be posed to draw attention to potential avenues for analysis.

The authors readily present reasons given in the reports they reviewed, without providing critical analysis of their own. It seems that they sympathise with the sugar producers. They suggest that the Zimbabwe sugar industry is in its infancy (p.1). This is a typical argument for government protection against cheap imports of sugar, but one that does not appeal to domestic consumers or tax-payers. Statements like 'domestic retail sugar prices are too low' need some kind of objective justification.

The authors note the industry's contribution to employment generation. While the number of people employed is in the thousands, there is no indication of incomes earned by these employees. Wages may be small relative to other expenses or profits, as is suggested by the strikes in the early months of 1996.

The book pays insufficient attention to the link between government and the economy. As long as the sugar industry makes a significant contribution to the economy, the government will try to keep the industry alive through various forms of preferential treatment, such as monopoly of the domestic market, procurement of African labour, soft loans, and construction of all-weather roads. In the end the distinction between what is private and what is public becomes blurred.

The authors pay insufficient attention to the analysis of government interventions and control. What were the financial reasons behind government take-over of the estates, and their lack of profitability under government control? How are market forces affected by various forms of government support for the industry?

It is not clear how ecological characteristics affected the siting of sugar estates in the Lowveld. Was it drainage patterns, or was it that the extensive production of sugar required vast amounts of cheap land? When the government was pushing for settlers to be part of the production scheme under contract, the Hewletts did not support the idea: readers could be helped by an analysis of alternatives proposed. More could be said on the different treatment of Black and White settler schemes.

Readers would also benefit from a closer analysis of how the industry survived under the economic sanctions following Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Internationally, more could be said on the way cartels control prices of such commodities as sugar.

In the presentation of graphs and tables, more attention should be paid to ensure that figures are comparable, and that the text relates clearly and explains the variations that the figures reveal.

Overall, the book provides a useful descriptive account of the history of the sugar industry in Zimbabwe, but is limited in its economic analysis of the issue that it raises.

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