

conflict-resolution initiatives in Africa. The book is a major contribution to the literature on the three conflicts. It provides useful insights into the main causes of the political and socioeconomic problems facing the subregion, and helps readers understand the phenomenal tasks that lie ahead of ECOWAS in the 21st century.

NOTES

1. Although some genuine concerns and criticisms were leveled by Nigeria's allies in the peace missions, some francophone member states—like Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, etc.—exploited Nigeria's perceived hegemony to serve their self-serving interests by supporting the rebels in the Liberian crisis. The disunity between the anglophone and francophone states demonstrates the extent to which the linguistic dichotomy in West Africa has divided the subregion—a dichotomy that has led to internal and external political constraints that hinder cooperation among ECOWAS members.

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Desai, Ashwin. 2002. *WE ARE THE POORS: COMMUNITY STRUGGLES IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA*. New York: Monthly Review Press. 153 pp. \$19 (paper).

Ashwin Desai is an organic intellectual who consolidates the experiences of local social movements. His insights often stem from inside observations. In *We are the Poors*, he describes and affirms the forming of a group identity for poor people involved in the struggle for decent housing. He does not limit his account to a generic struggle of the poor: the book is multifaceted in its ascription of agency to multiple bodies in the selection of somewhat composite narratives. Desai jumps freely among biography, policies of the local state, and the initiative of local labor and community movements. The last is most difficult to grasp, as it "is impossible to chronicle how disillusionment turned into dismay and finally to antagonism." Desai anyhow uses his empathetic listening to give useful hints: "At first, people say they felt utterly alone and leaderless. Some spectators tried to resist but were easily driven off by police. Others discussed the evictions wherever they could, trying to provoke in others the outrage they felt. Bus stops and washing taps became centers of lamentation for weeks after the first evictions" (p. 38).

The primary focus here is on the collective response of poor people in Chatsworth of Durban Metro, South Africa, to evictions from homes and disconnections of water and electricity. This reader is not entirely convinced that the present stage of South African grassroots struggles "began in Chatsworth and spread from there" (p. 142); however, there is no doubt that the commitment and engagement of the people of Chatsworth

stand as a powerful example to poor people all over South Africa. They were widely reported, and helped inspire other organized groups grappling with their increasingly divided loyalties between the ANC in power and the poor people.

The ANC in power has increasingly turned to eliminating the culture of nonpayment among people with hardly any income, while the growing wages of ANC-connected bosses in the private and public sectors are financed through retrenchments. Ashwin Desai is unimpressed with the social policies of the ANC: he lambastes the ANC's culture of nondelivery to the poor.

The use and response to the water meters of an increasingly privatized water supply is a central issue. Interestingly, the making of the poor into customers of community services prevents them from becoming consumers of necessities. If they have unpaid bills on electricity or rent, their water will be disconnected, leading them to neighbors, who might develop unpayable bills from fulfilling other people's basic needs, and eventually to the contaminated water of streams in the vicinity. Thulisile Manqele's legal battle illustrates how the legal system has managed to dodge the limited social rights entrenched in the South African Constitution, thus replacing constitutionalism with "executive sovereignty" and "the ideology of the market" (p. 72).

The local acts of solidarity with the evicted and the disconnected have increasingly turned to extralegal direct action, such as the collective eviction of evictors, and the protective popular shield around reconnectors of water and electricity. The community organizations evolving around these forms of collective action have also turned to other forms. Two of the collective actions that Desai highlights could be useful pointers to the paths that collective action for basic social rights will take in the future.

In one case, that of the response to a disconnection in Soweto, protesters decided to use the same means against Amos Makondo, Mayor of Johannesburg. They marched to Makondo's plush home, where his bodyguard shot at them. Despite the wounds received by two protestors, they managed to disconnect the mayor's water. The police arrested and charged all protesters with malicious damage to property and let the sniping bodyguard go (pp. 147–148).

In another case, that of Hammarsdale's township Mpumalanga, which was an epicenter of the civil war in Natal around 1990, the dissent of the poor people assumed a different character. Faced with exorbitant debts to be paid before they could receive their ration of free drinking water, they quietly prepared a march to the rent office, where thousands and thousands of people demanded to pay the ten rands that they could afford for their access to water. This form of action publicly ridiculed the ANC's derision of the culture of nonpayment and showed the poor as principled and dignified but with limited means (p. 90).

A major point of the book is that the new movement is inclusive. The unity of former Inkatha and ANC warriors in Mpumalanga exacerbates the point: "Beautifully, the brave, responsible, physically capable youth of

the Inkatha Youth Brigade and the hip, intellectual and earnest youngsters from a Congress tradition reached out to each other" (p. 88). Desai clearly allows all parties to sustain the political identities they hope to bring to the movement of the poor.

Desai's high regard for this inclusivity is responsible politics; the future success of the poor people's movement is tied to its cross-sectional appeal. However, his repeated pointing to the newness of the inclusivity is somewhat oblivious to the experiences of resistance to apartheid in the late 1950s and the early 1980s when mass-movements gained momentum by including a greater diversity of people.

The overall impression is that Desai's vivid detail, his empathy, and his overall sense of purpose have successfully connected his intellectual effort with the contemporary growth of a real movement, which cannot and should not be ignored. Sequels will come, and they will be indebted to Desai.

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Donham, Donald L., and Wendy James, eds. 2002. *THE SOUTHERN MARCHES OF IMPERIAL ETHIOPIA: ESSAYS IN HISTORY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY*. Oxford: James Currey; Athens: Ohio University Press; Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press. 308 pp. \$24.95 (paper).

This book is the unrevised and reissued edition of the Cambridge University Press publication of 1986, which was itself based on conferences held in 1979 and 1982. This "new" book, therefore, goes back more than two decades in its inception, and is based on research carried out no later than the 1970s. It is, however, not out of date, and is still an essential resource in trying to understand the nature of historic Ethiopia, including the post-Derg regime, since 1991. As explained in the preface to this edition, it has been republished as a companion volume to the new volume, *Remapping Ethiopia* (2002), by the same publishers.

Chapter 1, by Donald Donham, remains a brilliant tour de force, attempting an analysis of the social history of "Old Abyssinia and the new Ethiopian empire," focusing on the institutions of the northern core regions (Abyssinia) before the end of the nineteenth century, and an explanation of the creation of the new empire incorporating vast new regions in the south during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Ethiopia). The use of geography to explain not only the crucial differences between highland and lowland regions (though the description should have included more strictly geographic data, such as elevation and rainfall), but also to elucidate the boundaries of "macro-regions" based on watershed areas, is innovative and convincing. The use of selected political-military-economic information, including the mention of key trade routes and three military conflicts,