

**Teodros Kiros, ed. *Explorations in African Political Thought: Identity, Community, Ethics*. (New York: Routledge, 2001). X + 214 pp. Diagrams. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$22.95. Paper.**

*Explorations in African Political Thought: Identity, Community, Ethics* is a collection of ten essays written both by newcomers and by well-known African philosophers. Most of the authors are currently teaching in American universities. It is part of the growing literature that cements African philosophy as an integral part of the discipline of philosophy while charting new venues for the field. The objective of this book is to illustrate that African philosophy can serve African people as a moral activity guided by the principles of practical reason in addressing the underlying problems of African economic, political, and social institutions. Teodros Kiros, the volume's editor, chose the contributors because they were willing to describe phenomenologically entrenched practices of today's Africa, "subject them to critical assessment, and, when necessary, displace them with better visions and research." Kiros writes in the introduction that the authors address "perennial cultural, political, and ethical problems that plague the human condition in Africa."

The interdisciplinary sweep of this study is extraordinary, incorporating as it does examples from the anthropology, history, law, political science, and sociology of Africa and elsewhere. As such it has meaning for practitioners of the social sciences and the humanities. In the first chapter Gail M. Presbey argues that there are many wise sages in Africa who warrant further study by philosophers and others. She begins by referencing subjects of H. Odera Orika's "sages philosophy" project which began in 1977 and introduces candidates from Kenya she believes merit consideration as sages. Her approach should ask social scientists to broaden their notions of leadership and community improvement. Claude Summer uses his "The Proverb and Oral Society" to venture from his lifetime devotion to working on the Oromo to "delve into the *problematique* of orality." By

*problematique* Sumner means not just “the problem itself but also elements of the problem, its ‘situation,’ and the context within which it arises and grows.” G. Katsiaficas’ explorations into Ibn Khaldun’s theory of an Ethical Community are addressed to historians as much as to philosophers, Katsiaficas’ primary audience. So too is Kiros’ own chapter on the 17th century Ethiopian philosopher Zara Yacob. Readers of *Ethnic Studies Review* should find K. Anthony Appiah’s “Ethnic Identity as a Political Resource” especially appealing. Appiah, who wrote the introduction to the volume, uses the Asante of Ghana to argue that ethnicity is a materially and psychologically useful political resource and not merely a part of civil society.

This work should be stimulating to devotees of philosophy in general, not only African philosophy. Critical rationalism, communitarianism, and justice and morality are among the topics covered. Some of the authors engage the work of other contributors. Gail Presbey’s criticism of D.A. Masolo and Sumner is a prime example of the latter. Some engage the work of Eurocentric philosophers. Katsiaficas, for example, reminds us that Ibn Khaldun was indeed an Islamic philosopher as philosophers in the West European tradition portray him. Departing from the mainstream of Eurocentric philosophy, however, Katsiaficas also reminds us that Ibn Khaldun was also very much an African and an African philosopher whose relevance transcends geography and time to have meaning for modern and post-modern Africa.

Tradition and the modern state are central to the analyses of Ali Mazrui, I.A. Menkiti, Ajume Wingo, and Kwasi Wiredu. Mazrui revisits assertions that he made earlier elsewhere, that ethnic identity and other treasured African values survived the colonial experience. He maintains that colonialism resulted in uniting societies who traditionally had lived separately, thereby generating or furthering discords and conflicts. He contends that in the interest of peace and stability peoples with shared values and perspectives should be allowed to live together, a transparent suggestion that borders inherited from European colonial states should be reconsidered. The inviolability of borders created by European colonists is a sacred tenet of postcolonial Africa. Wingo, like Mazrui, holds that precolonial Africa had

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ways of promoting positive values, and in turn those values led to compromise, peace, and stability. He concludes that modern leaders and their states need to inculcate youths with those positive values. Wiredu is insistent that consensus was a trait of traditional Africa. As such he also builds on a thesis featured in other of his works. He asserts that consensus was a democratic trait, especially in non-centralized states. He reasons that leaders of postcolonial Africa should recognize that it is in their self-interest, as well good policy, to promote it. Menkiti also delves into the issues of political stability and instability. From his perspective instability resulted from the failure to incorporate African values into Western style systems.

*Explorations in African Political Thought: Identity, Community, Ethics* makes a significant contribution to African philosophy. Although some undergraduates may be challenged by a number of the examples used by authors, the book makes for stimulating and useful reading on the graduate and professional levels. Policymakers and executors of public policy will find the work enlightening and thoroughly absorbing.

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**Matibag, Eugenio. *Haitian-Dominican Counterpoint*. (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2003) 269 pp. \$55.00 Cloth.**

Those unfamiliar with the Dominican Republic and Haiti would probably think that the two countries with their different languages and cultures are distinct and separate historically as they are culturally. The French and African heritage of Haiti is often contrasted with the Spanish heritage of the Dominican Republic. Matibag demonstrates that the two cultures and nations are intertwined at a level that would surprise even the informed scholar.

The book is scholarly and interesting. It covers the history of the Dominican Republic and Haiti in a coherent and wide-ranging fashion. The text not only offers insights into the conflict