

Making Ethnic Ways: Communities And Their Transformations In Taita, Kenya, 1800-1950

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Reviews

Ghana: transition to democracy edited by KWAME A. NINSIN
Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA, 1998. Pp. x + 252. £13.95 (pbk.).

Ghana has had a chequered post-colonial political history. After independence, in 1957, a decade of initially democratic, latterly dictatorial, rule by Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party government ended in 1966 with a joint police/military *coup d'état*. After handing over power to elected civilians in 1969, the military struck again in 1972. Following a junior ranks' coup in early 1979, which brought Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings to power for the first time, an elected civilian government took charge following elections later the same year. After a traumatic two years of conspicuously unsuccessful rule, Rawlings returned to power via a further coup in late 1981. Nearly two decades later, Rawlings is still there, now an elected head of state presiding over a democratic political system. Initially rejecting 'Western-style' multi-party democracy as 'unsuitable for Ghanaian realities', over time Rawlings became an apparent convert. Elected president by impressive margins over his nearest challenger in 1992 and again in 1996, his party, the National Democratic Congress, managed to achieve substantial parliamentary majorities in the two elections.

It would be fair to say that Rawlings is a controversial figure, not so much internationally where he is widely regarded as one of the 'good guys' for his strong determination to liberalise Ghana both politically and economically, but at home. To certain sections of the Ghanaian population, especially many among the intellectual elite clustered at the Department of Political Science at the University of Ghana at Legon, he has been a political charlatan or chameleon, someone who presents an appropriate image to the relevant audience but without sincerity. Certainly this reviewer found that several of the contributors to this book who he met in the 1980s and early 1990s viewed Rawlings in this way.

The book, distributed by the African Books Collective (The Jam Factory, 27 Park End Street, Oxford OX1 1HU, UK) then is of personal interest to me, not only for its impressive content but also in that it indicates generally that there is now greater acceptance of Rawlings and his works among the intellectual elite than there was a decade ago. Unfortunately, however, in several chapters the analysis ends in 1994; consequently, the second national level elections in 1996 and their outcomes are not comprehensively dealt with, although Ninsin's concluding chapter does examine some of the issues inherent in the 1996 elections and their aftermath. This is unfortunate, since looking at the two elections and their aftermath more comparatively and in a more focused manner would have been interesting.

The chapters, ably marshalled by Kwame Ninsin, erstwhile senior lecturer in the Political Science department and now at the African Association of Political Science at Harare, nevertheless cover much ground: from the political impact of structural adjustment to the involvement of the

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