



Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group



Histoire économique du Congo 1880-1968 by Samir Amin; Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch

Review by: Zbigniew A. Konczacki

Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1971), pp. 365-367

Published by: [Taylor & Francis, Ltd.](#) on behalf of the [Canadian Association of African Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/484184>

Accessed: 15/06/2014 09:07

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Taylor & Francis, Ltd. and Canadian Association of African Studies are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

COMPTES RENDUS BOOK REVIEWS

Histoire économique du Congo 1880–1968, by SAMIR AMIN and CATHERINE COQUERY-VIDROVITCH. I.F.A.N., Dakar; Editions Anthropos, Paris, 1969. 204p., paperback.

The general premise from which the authors develop their approach is that the triumph of marginalism in economic theory led to the abandonment of the pre-occupation of the classical economists, of the first half of the nineteenth century, and later on Marx, with the understanding of the deeper dynamics of the capitalist system. By having become a-historical and having acquired a largely mechanistic bias, economics ceased to be a true social science. On the other hand, the birth of the discipline of economic development, in more recent years, was in a sense a miscarriage. Its contents have been largely of a pragmatic nature. Little has been done to create a foundation in the form of a general theory of economic development which would turn economics back into a social science par excellence and provide it with a historical content. The indifference of the majority of economists to history, has prompted the authors to make a contribution to the economic history of an African region. They believe that historical studies, oriented towards the analysis of the evolution of the various types of the less developed areas, should serve as a preliminary step in the formation of a modern theory of development.

The book consists of three parts. The first part, written with considerable ability by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, deals with the period extending from the conquest, at the end of the nineteenth century, to 1920. It covers the economic history of the “French Congo”, that is the territories which were to form the French Equatorial Africa. Their present backwardness is traced back to the era of the great companies which were granted concessions to develop the country, but instead engaged in its despoliation. Though their profits were moderate and their contribution to capital accumulation in France was insignificant, the company system retarded progress in Africa and its disastrous consequences are felt to this day. A comparison is then made with the parallel developments in the French West Africa.

Parts Two and Three, written by Professor Samir Amin, cover the period between 1920 and 1968. The author deals with the territories of all the member countries of the present Central African Customs and Economic Union (Central African Republic, Chad, Congo /Brazzaville/, Gabon and Cameroon), but he pays particular attention to the area which in 1958 became the Congo Republic (Brazzaville), and he mainly concentrates on the period between 1960 and 1968. The purpose of the short first chapter of Part Two is to fill in the time gap between the period covered in Part One and the subject matter of the rest of the book which covers the years 1960–1968. This rather weak link indicates that the intention of the authors is to juxtapose the earliest and the latest periods of development, thus bringing out the contrast between the immature colonialism and the economic policies of the newly independent countries.

In spite of its sketchiness this chapter shows clearly that the tropical colony which was the scene of Céline's adventures described by him in his "Voyage au bout de la nuit" was very different from the then French Congo on the eve of independence in 1958.

Since then, the urban population grew from a fraction to as much as 21 per cent of the total population, whereas the latter increased from 600,000 to almost a million. Thus the Congo became one of the most urbanized French colonies in Black Africa.

Having shed the characteristics of primitivism the Congo changed into a typical modern less developed country, which "grew" but did not "develop". With a weak agriculture and rudimentary industry, unable to absorb the increase of the urban labour force, the country supported a top heavy public sector. Between 1960 and 1968, investment, both from the internal and the foreign sources, reached a very high annual average of 30 per cent of GDP, but the rate of growth, in real terms, was only 3 per cent per annum.

Until 1963 Congo's economic policy continued along the lines of the "mise en valeur" colonial style, and hence it tended to perpetuate the weaknesses of the inherited economic structure. Since then the new regime, supported by the urban proletariat, and presided by Massemba Débat, introduced a socialist approach. Its achievements, however modest, are undeniable.

A book of this kind was badly needed. There is a dearth of studies providing a critical assessment of the economic progress during the colonial period and of the policies undertaken in the more recent times in Africa south of the Sahara.

The authors ought, therefore, to be complemented on their successful effort to carry out such a study. Their work is well supported with quantitative data, and the reader will find a large number of useful statistical information.

But there is some doubt as to the appropriateness of the title. The bulk of the book deals with the years 1960–1968. The policies and measures initiated at that time have only partly borne fruit and their assessment cannot yet be com-

plete. The economic history of that period will most probably need some re-writing, when sufficient perspective becomes possible.

This, however, is a minor point of criticism which in no way detracts from the value of this study concentrating primarily on the most recent economic developments.

Zbigniew A. KONCZACKI
Dalhousie University

Ne-Kongo en Afrique Centrale, by FRANÇOIS BAZIOTA. Officium Libri Catholici – Catholic Book Agency, Rome, 1971. 100p.

This small 100 page work, subtitled “sociologie-politique de Kongo” is a curious amalgam of academic scholarship with all the trappings of notes, citations, and terms, the acknowledgement of patronage, and private myth. Based on a doctoral thesis in sociology at The Angelicum in Rome in 1967, it contains a preface by, and photo of, the Congolese ambassador to the Vatican. Yet its explicit aim is to reconstruct the origins of the ancient Kongo kingdom and the relationship of power at that time. The book is studded with generous quotations and paraphrases from French works on Kongo by Van Wing, Cuvelier, Soret, Polis, Balandier, and others, but the juxtaposition of these scholars with the designs of the work strike the reader as a bit forced. Only the long passages from Fukiau’s *Nza-Kongo* (Cosmogonie-Kongo) are an exception to this, and it is clear why Baziota has placed them at the head of his introduction and methodological discussion.

Baziota acknowledges the many good works on Kongo by both foreign and native scholars, but of them all he prefers Balandier and Fukiau. The former because of his critical working approach (“précieux instrument critique de travail”), and the latter, even more helpful, and preferable to Balandier, because his (Fukiau’s) reflections on Kongo are more methodological, and besides, he’s a MuKongo himself. This statement indicates the thrust of Baziota’s work to be that of myth-making, for the “methodology” of Fukiau, as those who have read his *Nza-Kongo* will know, is to reconstruct cosmologie from the inside, the believer’s position. Fukiau calls this “cosmogonie,” a term which best describes Baziota’s work as well. The main difference between Baziota’s and Fukiau’s work is that the former is framed in academic terms, and paraphrases many sources at cross-purposes to his real intention, the confirmation of a myth of political origin. Fukiau does all this unsurreptitiously.

After stating his preferences for myth in the introduction Baziota discusses an idea given much credence in the colonial era Catholic literature: with generous quotations from Van Wing, the matrilineage and “clan-famille” is claimed to be