

# Book Reviews

## Africa

*Artemisia annua, Artemisinin, ACTs, & Malaria Control in Africa: Tradition, Science and Public Policy.* By Dana G. Dalrymple. Washington, DC: Politics and Prose Bookstore, 2012. 253 pp., \$18.95, paperback, ISBN 978-0-615-61599-8.

Artemisinin is an extract of the medicinal plant *Artemisia annua*, which has emerged over the last few decades as the premier treatment for malaria, particularly for *Plasmodium falciparum*, the deadliest form of the disease that mainly affects tropical Africa. The leaves of *A. annua* have for centuries been used in China as an herbal treatment for malaria and other maladies. From the 1980s the Chinese introduced artemisinin in combination with other chemical therapies, together known as ACTs, to the global medical community and public health foundations, as well as to pharmaceutical corporations, as an effective treatment for malaria. This book traces the modern history of artemisinin from Cultural Revolution–era China to the front line in the war against malaria, particularly in Africa, in light of the resistance of *P. falciparum* to other therapies such as chloroquine. Its focus is on public policy ramifications and pitfalls of the use of ACTs for combating malaria.

International organizations, seeking to fight malaria as a “global public good,” have encouraged a few thousand African farmers to grow *A. annua* so that the extraction of artemisinin is close to the region where it is most needed. But the plant does not follow the usual economics of agricultural production. There is only limited demand for *A. annua* for the finite number of doses needed annually for the war against malaria. Farmers must balance growing this crop against the loss of acreage for subsistence crops needed to feed their families. Indeed, most cultivated crop production of *A. annua* for the global market is in China and Vietnam where the industry originated during the Vietnam War. Moreover, ACTs are extraordinarily expensive as a malaria treatment, far beyond the capabilities of most African households, so subsidies are needed, usually coming from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the

US State Department, and from international foundations, which also negotiate maximum prices with pharmaceutical corporations and minimum prices paid to farmers. There is evidence that it is only a matter of time before parasite resistance to artemisinin, especially if misused as (non-ACT) monotherapies, will limit this form of treatment along with its demand as a cash crop.

This is a self-published, non-copyrighted book that evolved from a USAID sponsored research report. It is meant to be downloadable as a “public good.” The book contains substantial flaws, such as repeated sentences, misspellings, and numbers that do not add up (31, 82). A good editor would have trimmed much needless detail and repetition that detracts from the overall value of the information presented.

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## Asia

*Ogata-Mura: Sowing Dissent and Reclaiming Identity in a Japanese Farming Village.* By Donald C. Wood. New York: Berghahn Books, 2012. 262 pp., \$90.00, hardback, ISBN 978-0-85745-524-6.

Building on seventeen years of research, this book is an informed and ethnographically rich account of a farming village in Northern Japan and its experiences of reclamation, rice agriculture, and political conflicts. In six chapters, the author retraces the development of Ogata-mura from the initial planning stages after World War II—when the government attempted to achieve food self-sufficiency through increased rice production—to the present.

Wood begins with an examination of agricultural policies in Japan, before describing the unique reclamation project in Ogata-mura. Founded in 1964 after transforming a large lagoon area into industrial farmland, the village served as a model for ultramodern, mechanized, and highly efficient large-scale rice farming agriculture in a cooperative farming community that attracted settlers from different regions in Japan. However, this egalitarian community was disturbed in the early 1970s, when the government—in reaction to the decline of rice consumption—issued several policies that curtailed production. This led to factions within the farming community. The cooperative farming groups broke down, individual entrepreneurship emerged, and some founded private rice marketing companies by the late 1980s. Long-time mayor, Seiki Miyata (1978–2000), introduced “beautification campaigns”

such as the Sun Rural Ogata Village Hotel to boost the image of Ogata-mura and ease social tensions (101, 104–107).

Ogata-mura is an agricultural and a social experiment. The author argues that a hamlet-based arrangement and the exemption from rice-reduction programs would have improved the farmers' situation, but the village still functions to this day. The efficient large-scale, eco-friendly agriculture of Ogata-mura, which hosts solar and electric vehicle races, presents a laudable model. However, future challenges such as Japan's participation in the Transpacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) can only be met through social and political unity among the settlers.

The strength of this book is the excellent ethnographic account, which reflects Wood's thorough knowledge of Ogata-mura. The village presents a fascinating model of large-scale, community farming and shows how conflicts between national and regional governments can weaken and transform social cohesion. However, had the meticulous account of the political developments been augmented by a theoretical framework, the book could have been more accessible for an audience beyond readers interested in Japanese agriculture. Moreover, a more intensive discussion of the TPP would have underlined the topical relevance. However, these minor flaws do not diminish the significance of Wood's work, which is valuable reading for students of agricultural history who are interested in models of community farming and the interplay between national agricultural policies and their regional implementation.

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## Global

*Black Ranching Frontiers: African Cattle Herders of the Atlantic World, 1500–1900.* By Andrew Sluyter. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. 320 pp., \$45.00, hardback, ISBN 978-0-300-17992-7.

In this fascinating study, based on a tremendous variety of sources spanning the nations and languages of the Americas, Andrew Sluyter makes a major contribution to the efforts of historians, geographers, and anthropologists to explore the ways in which Africans contributed to the establishment of systems of production across the early modern Atlantic world. While black contributions to the cultivation of commodities such as sugar and rice have been widely studied, Sluyter argues that

Africans were equally important to the development of cattle ranching, in French and Spanish settlements on the American mainland, as well as the English Caribbean. By emphasizing the involvement of West African cultures such as the Wolof, Mandingo, and Mende in cattle herding, and the ways in which this expertise was incorporated into the emerging cattle frontiers, from Argentina to Louisiana to Barbuda, Sluyter posits the Atlantic as “a living space of flows” rather than “a dead space of separation” and depicts enslaved Africans as contributing knowledge and skill, as well as labor, to the economies of the Atlantic empires (3).

It may be a cliché to observe that it is difficult, in a brief review, to do justice to the breadth and depth of scholarship of an individual book, but in this instance such a cliché rings true. Sluyter’s monograph takes the reader on a chronological tour of ranching frontiers of the Americas, beginning with sixteenth and seventeenth-century New Spain, particularly the lowland regions around Veracruz, where hybrid Afro-European herding practices first developed, then moving northwards to eighteenth-century French Louisiana, east to the tiny Caribbean island of Barbuda, and south to the Pampas grasslands and *tasajo* (salt-cured beef) producing regions of Uruguay and Argentina. In so doing, Sluyter draws evidence not only from English, French, and Spanish archival sources, but from maps, oral histories, material objects, visual culture (from cattle brands to picturesque images from travel narratives), censuses, archaeological excavations, and genealogies. Although this monograph is a significant contribution to the historiography of black agency in the creation and articulation of the Atlantic world, Sluyter’s work benefits tremendously from his training in geography and anthropology, resulting in something like a “total history” of the African contribution to a crucial but frequently overlooked component of the Atlantic economy from the beginnings of European settlement to the present day. While scholars of the Americas—whose work is not centered on economy and technology, or who study regions not discussed in Sluyter’s study—may not initially see this book as particularly relevant to them, *Black Ranching Frontiers* is a truly important work, one which should be read by anyone who shares Sluyter’s wider goal, which is to better understand the interrelationships between “hybridization of materials and ideas that arrived via shifting networks, repeated infusions of ideas and materials across the Atlantic, and within the Americas, and actors of African, European, native, Creole, and mixed origins” (220). This is a lofty goal for any monograph, but one which Sluyter’s provocative book achieves.

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*The Malthusian Moment: Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism.* By Thomas Robertson. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012. 316 pp., \$25.95, paperback, ISBN 978-0-8135-5272-9.

In this wide-ranging and ambitious book, Thomas Robertson traces the roots and aftereffects of what he calls the “Malthusian moment,” a brief window from 1968 to 1970 when concerns about overpopulation dominated thinking about environment degradation, underdevelopment and national economic decline. For many policymakers and activists it seemed clear that “quantity of life could undermine quality of life” (151). But if the threat of overpopulation led to pessimistic visions of the future, the biological roots of the problem provided a potential solution. By harnessing scientific expertise and technical skills, the crisis of too many people, and thus too few resources, could be overcome. As Robertson outlines, population planning became the catchall solution for issues of poverty, urban riots, suburban sprawl, mass-consumption and even the Cold War.

The first part of the book traces a set of interlocking ideas about consumption, environmental damage, and demographics that combined in 1968 to vault Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb* onto the bestseller lists and into the laps of policymakers on both sides of the aisle. Robertson also demonstrates the ways that Cold War national security concerns over Third World instability fed into and exacerbated Malthusian thinking. It was in places such as India that Americans made important connections between biology and poverty. As journalist James Reston wrote in 1961, “the greatest menace to world peace . . . is not atomic energy but sexual energy” (85). How to manage the population bomb of the Third World became a development goal along with the Green Revolution and ways of state building. In explaining these connections, Robertson makes important contributions to the burgeoning conversation between diplomatic and environmental histories, as well as to our understanding of food policy and development aid.

More surprising are the ways that these ideas (and possible solutions) were transferred wholesale from the Third World to inner city America and then reflected back out into a critique of suburban sprawl. Population growth was a “cancer,” as Ehrlich argued, and it could and would take root anywhere. In the United States, inner city riots and decay were mere harbingers for what was to befall the rest of the nation. So agreed a host of strange bedfellows—women’s liberation groups, environmentalists, Richard Nixon, and baby boomers—who all argued that population control was required to stave off the “Chinification” of the United States. So pervasive was this thinking that, Robertson argues, it animates the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1970.

Robertson identifies the failures and inherent limitations of Malthusian thinking, particularly as it gained prominence in the United States. African American activists suspected racism; the religious Right raised concerns about mass birth control and abortion. A lengthier discussion of these critiques and alternative visions of environmentalism would have been welcome. But in any case, it is clear that many of the solutions offered by environmental Malthusians—think here of forced sterilization—were explicitly coercive and reactionary. Yet the Malthusian moment was powerful in that it helped launch the modern environmental movement. Linking the environment to widespread fears of overpopulation was an effective—if deeply flawed—means of gaining support. *The Malthusian Moment* reminds us once again that ideas, even bad ones, have power and consequences.

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