

## Culture



**Robert SHENTON, *The Development of Capitalism in Northern Nigeria*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1986. 169 pages. \$12.50 (paper), \$27.50 (cloth) / B. JEWSIEWICKI and J. LÉTOURNEAU, *Mode of Production: the Challenge of Africa*, Ste-Foy, P.Q. : Éditions Safi Press, 1984. 174 pages**

Michael D. Levin

Volume 6, numéro 2, 1986

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078754ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078754ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA),  
formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne  
d'Ethnologie

### ISSN

0229-009X (imprimé)

2563-710X (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer ce compte rendu

Levin, M. (1986). Compte rendu de [Robert SHENTON, *The Development of Capitalism in Northern Nigeria*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1986. 169 pages. \$12.50 (paper), \$27.50 (cloth) / B. JEWSIEWICKI and J. LÉTOURNEAU, *Mode of Production: the Challenge of Africa*, Ste-Foy, P.Q. : Éditions Safi Press, 1984. 174 pages]. *Culture*, 6(2), 126–127. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078754ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne  
d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society /  
Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1986

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des  
services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique  
d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

**é**rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de  
l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à  
Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

les sacrificateurs sont tenus pour supérieurs aux dignitaires mais ils sont délibérément exclus des discussions politiques. Les dignitaires voient d'un mauvais oeil que les sacrificateurs obtiennent des privilèges sans les payer. De plus, récemment quelques sacrificateurs sont devenus dignitaires, cumulant ainsi statut rituel et statut politique, d'où quelques frictions. Mais le système traditionnel était en équilibre, la loi rituelle intangible s'exerçant parallèlement à la loi démocratique qui se fait et qui s'adapte. L'auteur y voit une interdépendance plus qu'une simple complémentarité mais l'équilibre demeure, malgré les contradictions. C'est la variation ochollo des rapports entre l'Église et l'État, ici démocratique.

Ce livre s'adresse à tous ceux, politologues et autres, qui s'intéressent à l'Éthiopie et au problème des sociétés démocratiques et redistributives. Les Ochollo sont un exemple de société où les richesses individuelles sont mises au service de la communauté tout entière, où l'on veille à ce que l'accumulation des biens ne puisse servir au riche pour manipuler ceux qui possèdent moins, comme dans un système de clientage. Le système fait tout pour convertir les biens en statut mais, c'est là l'astuce principale, ce statut ne confère aucun pouvoir réel car celui-ci reste aux mains des citoyens ordinaires.

---

Robert SHENTON, *The Development of Capitalism in Northern Nigeria*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1986. 169 pages. \$12.50 (paper), \$27.50 (cloth).

B. JEWSEWICKI and J. LÉTOURNEAU, *Mode of Production: the Challenge of Africa*, Ste-Foy, P.Q.: Éditions Safi Press, 1984. 174 pages.

By Michael D. Levin  
University of Toronto

Shenton's *The Development of Capitalism in Northern Nigeria* is an excellent study of colonial commercial policy and practice. His style, described on the back cover as "sinewy" is lively and contentious, and makes what could easily be tedious, interesting and vital.

Shenton sets out to do a study of the evolution of the social formation of Northern Nigeria as it became progressively integrated, through the creation and consolidation of the colonial state, into the capitalist system. Beginning with the pre-colonial state, the Sokoto Caliphate, and concluding with the consolidation of the tax system and marketing boards for

export produce in Northern Nigeria, using the Nigerian Federal Archives, Colonial Office records and other documents, he traces the policies and practices of the colonial government (the establishment of colonial rule in early years of this century, the debates about the form government should take to affect production, and tax collection in the countryside) through sixty years of policy and administrative practice. He attributes the agricultural crisis of today in Northern Nigeria to the misguided policies and ignorance of the colonial officials.

Shenton's book is the demonstration of Geoffrey Kay's mordant observation "... that capitalism has created underdevelopment not simply because it exploited the underdeveloped countries but because it has not exploited them enough." The reader is left with no doubt about Shenton's opinion of the competence and motives of the colonial officials, but on many issues one is left wondering, given Shenton's low opinion of their character and wisdom, whether on the one hand, there were better or worse colonial officials and policies, and on the other, if there was an alternative historical course. It is impossible not to agree that Nigerian agriculture both export and food crops, in the North and South, has suffered neglect, if not systematic destruction, through misguided policies, and that the underdevelopment of Nigerian agriculture is in greater or lesser part due to colonial policy and misperceptions of the levels and organization of agricultural production. In this work it is not clear whether Shenton believes that it would have been better if British colonial policy in Nigeria had exerted the most extreme economic pressure on the rural producing sector, had swept away, not merely circumscribed, pre-colonial authorities, and accepted the short-term, but perhaps catastrophic, disruption of Northern Nigerian society, so that a fuller, but unspecified capitalism might have taken root and "exploited them enough". But to what end?

Of particular interest and extremely valuable is the discussion in Chapter 3, "The Foundation of Colonial Capitalism in Northern Nigeria" where Shenton discusses Lord Lugard's *Political Memorandum* of 1906, the unexpurgated version of the later published version of 1910. The inside look he provides us of the debates on colonial rural policy in Northern Nigeria of Lugard and his successors is a uniquely important contribution. The theoretical examination of different likely outcomes of the different proposed policies would be very interesting and Shenton is the scholar most likely to do it best.

Shenton's book is based on his Ph.D. thesis and it bears some of the less desirable marks of coming into being as a thesis. The same passage is quoted in subsequent chapters, and this is but a symbol of other

unnecessary repetition. The praised sinewy style occasionally leads to punchy but meaningless expressions, e.g., “rampant subimperialist”, “intense struggle of a social formation”, “mock feudal bureaucracy”, and “... Nigeria could no longer afford the colonial state”, “the abolition of the legal right to own property in land... was... in the interests of capital as a whole”.

The collection of papers (some of which were published in the *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 19 [1985] 1.) in *Mode of Production: the Challenge of Africa* brings together papers by major French contributors to the mode of production debate, Coquery-Vidrovitch, Rey, Dupré, and Terray, and a few other European commentators, and North American Africanist historians. The state of discussion on the meaning and utility of this concept is well represented by the headings under which the papers are grouped: “Reflections and Commentaries on a Worn Out Debate”, “Seizing Reality Using the Concept of Lineage Mode of Production and Articulation”, and “Suggestions for a New Start”. The editors “stress that [their] own texts... are... two very personal readings on certain issues.” From these headings and the indirect disclaimer of the editors there is an indication of the conclusion and disarray in the literature on the concept of “mode of production” as applied to African traditional societies and others. What can “seizing reality” possibly mean? Why mix the concrete and the abstract? Is African history and anthropology long-winded and tendentious poetry?

The papers themselves range widely in intent and subject. They range in length from 2 pages to 11 pages. Some are personal reflections, of which the most interesting as intellectual history must be Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch’s as she was one of the earliest to discuss an African mode of production in 1969. Some seem too arrogantly personal, as the author who confesses that “had I understood my ‘early Marx’ properly I could have avoided all the problems in which I found myself ensnared.” Others are defenses of the utility of the concept in regard to the author’s own work or the work of a group of historians, e.g., Peter Harries on the historiography of South Africa. A number attempt to place the discussions of the concept in a wider political or scholarly context. Some have taken to using capitals for names and sentences as if language must be given impact by graphics. A few provide independent reviews of the problem and these will be the most useful to the reader interested in the issues of research and theory in the debate. Of value in this respect are the papers by Dupré, MacGaffrey, Jewsiewicki, Amselle, Kitching, and Létourneau. The bibliography of 23 pages is an excellent resource

for the student of these questions; but in regard to the papers themselves one would wish to have citations for place of original publication as many are published elsewhere.

---

Manoly R. LUPUL (ed.), *Visible Symbols: Cultural Expression Among Canada’s Ukrainians*, Edmonton, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1984. 204 pages, illustrations.

By David Scheffel  
University of Alberta

Based on contributions to the fifth annual conference on Ukrainians in Canada held in 1981, *Visible Symbols* aspires to capture the essence of Ukrainian cultural identity in this country. The result is uneven, which is perhaps due to the varied backgrounds of the authors: twenty-six artists, civil servants, and academics whose contributions range from page-long abstracts to lengthy scholarly articles. The essays are presented in six parts, each devoted to a cultural theme—such as material culture, music, dance, politics—each concluded with a lively discussion.

Which symbols does a Canadian Ukrainian associate with his social background? According to a study conducted by sociologist Wsevolod Isajiw, most Ukrainians perceive their cultural distinctiveness through food, embroidery and the command of a few Ukrainian expressions (in that order). What is intriguing about these dominant symbols is their congruence with the stereotypes held by non-Ukrainian Canadians and the extent to which these symbols are derived from former rather than the present homeland. In Isajiw’s words, “There are practically no Ukrainian Canadian novels, no original classical music and very few painters like William Kurelek who have interpreted the Canadian experience” (p. 127). The lack of Ukrainian *Canadian* symbols seems to be taken very seriously by the majority of the contributors. There is good reason for this concern since the authors are the most visible symbol of the impact of the Canadian experience upon the Ukrainian community. They are members of the rapidly emerging urban intelligentsia whose aspirations and self-image differ from those of their peasant-like parents and grandparents. To the highly educated professionals of today, Ukrainian food, embroidery and spoken (rather than written) ancestral language are folk symbols of a distant past, which fail to express their own complex cultural identity.