

GUIDE TO CURRENT NATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHIES IN THE THIRD WORLD. By G. E. Gorman and J. J. Mills. Second revised edition. New York: K. G. Saur, and London: Hans Zell, 1987. Pp. xx, 372. \$75.00

If bibliography is considered a secondary, sometimes even an arcane discipline, how much more so the bibliography of bibliographies, and in the case of the volume under review, a *critical* bibliography of bibliographies. The listing of lists, as it were, seems already to be at some remove from the toiling author who provides the raw material for all this activity. One almost hesitates to climb on top of the pyramid with a review, for fear of bringing the whole structure crashing down on the audience. Nonetheless, here are my views, on the views of Messrs. Gorman and Mills, on national bibliographies listing Third World imprints.

But why review a general bibliography of Third World national bibliographies in a specialist academic journal on African history? David Henige has pointed out, in an article which should be required reading for historians of Africa, that there exists a rich profusion of bibliographic sources of use for them.<sup>1</sup> Yet research cited by Henige indicates that such sources, "the basis of all academic study" in A. G. Hopkins's words, tend to remain on the shelves of libraries virtually unused. Many do not, at first sight, seem to have much relevance to the discipline of history, and perhaps even less to the history or histories of Africa; nonetheless, they make up part of a network of bibliographic control which exists for the benefit of us all.

But to the task in hand. First of all it must be said that this book is a model of painstaking and careful research, elegantly and accessibly presented. It is an alphabetical list, by country, of 12 regional and 98 national bibliographies. Some of these services are for the same country, so that fewer than 98 nations are covered. The section on South Africa, for example, lists the *SANB*, the *Bibliography of Overseas Publications about South Africa*, and the *Index to South African Periodicals*.

Each entry consists of the usual bibliographic citation and publication details, with full publisher's address as well as subscription and price information where possible, followed by sections entitled "History," "Scope and Content," and "Analysis." Without question, while the listing and descriptive sections themselves are most valuable, the "Analysis" section is what lifts this book out of the ordinary. Gorman and Mills have applied consistent standards of evaluation, taking into account the specific conditions of each country. They are strict without being harsh; the comments are trenchant and both praise and blame are judiciously apportioned.

The authors present a carefully argued nineteen-page essay on "Third World National Bibliographies and International Standards" which provides us with the theoretical position on which their judgements of the works described are based. This is as well, for Gorman and Mills do not mince words, either in condemnation or commendation; they say of the Zairean *Bibliographie Nationale*, for instance that "there is effectively nothing positive to be said"; but a few pages

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<sup>1</sup>David Henige, "Taking Arms Against a Sea of Scholarship: Serial Bibliographies and Indexes of Interest to African Historians," *History in Africa*, 10 (1983).

later write that "in terms of coverage the [*Zimbabwe National Bibliography*] is beyond criticism."

As far as those national bibliographies with which I am reasonably familiar at first hand are concerned, (that is, Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Africa, Malawi, Zimbabwe), I have no serious disagreement with Gorman and Mills's evaluations.

Gorman and Mills offer the following definitions for the terms "national bibliography" and "Third World": "officially sponsored or nationally recognized guides which aim to provide a full bibliographic record of a country's imprint"; and "any nation which is not a member of the European communities [the EC], the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [the OECD] or the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance [COMECON]." This definition is probably as good as can be had; which is not to say that it is entirely satisfactory.

It excludes Japan (obviously), but admits Brazil, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan, as belonging to the undifferentiated "developing, less developed or underdeveloped" group of countries. This allows even Turkey, a long-standing candidate for EC membership, to squeak in. But it avoids the question of what is a country. Namibia and Hong Kong are still colonies; Namibia may soon become independent and Hong Kong may eventually be re-absorbed into China. The unpalatable truth, of course, is that it is generally at the top end of the continuum of "Third World" countries that conditions and resources are likely to exist domestically for the production of such relative luxuries as national bibliographies.

But back to my original question – what has all this to do with African history? First of all, at a purely mechanical level, the following 26 African countries are covered: Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Egypt, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Tunisia, Zaire, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Admittedly this is, after excluding South Africa, Namibia and Morocco, less than half the old membership of the OAU. But (and second), as Henige points out in the article referred to above, it is "rash to assume that the smaller, very specialized bibliographies are not worth the bother of consulting," precisely because they are built on by the major bibliographies (not the other way around).

It is unlikely that this volume will find large sales among readers of this journal, at \$75 a copy. However, it is to be hoped that it will find some use by African historians in institutional libraries (which are clearly the target market anyway, and all of whom should be pressured to purchase it). National bibliography is the very foundation of universal bibliographic control, and Gorman and Mills have been able to stand back from the hurly-burly of day-to-day autopsy, cataloguing and indexing, and provide us with an elegantly produced, careful and judicious survey. In a rapidly developing field, I fear that in a few years time, they will find themselves under pressure to provide us with a third revision of this invaluable tool.

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