

David Kimble, 1921–2009

The Journal of Modern African Studies records with great regret the passing of its founding editor and guiding spirit, David Kimble, who died at the age of eighty-seven on 8 March 2009.

Unlike many academic journals, which come into being as the mouth-piece of a learned society or association, or in order to fill a gap in the market, JMAS was very much the creation of its first editor, who then edited it for the astonishing period of thirty-five years. David was the son of the village cobbler – a trade of universal utility, as much in demand in rural Africa as in the Sussex of his childhood – and first went to the Gold Coast in 1948, where he headed the newly-established Extra-Mural Department of the then University College of the Gold Coast, later the University of Ghana at Legon. African education, and especially adult education, was his lifelong passion, and he chose to spend his entire career working in Africa. After fourteen years in Ghana, during which he wrote his only major book, *A Political History of Ghana*, he moved in 1962 to become professor of political science at the University of Dar-es-Salaam, then one of the centres of intellectual ferment in newly independent Africa. In 1967, he was appointed to the prestigious post of Director of the Centre for Training and Research in Administration for Development (CAFRAD), a UN-funded organisation based in Tangier, Morocco, but the life of an international institution was not to his taste, and in 1971 he became professor of government and administration at the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS) in Maseru. With the inevitable break-up of UBLS, he was a key figure in the creation of the University of Lesotho. Finally, from 1977 until 1986, he served as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malawi – a particularly challenging appointment under the Banda regime, though he commented that he found it easier working with Kamuzu, who wanted a high quality university but had few ideas about what it should look like, than with Mwalimu Nyerere in Tanzania who had an academic agenda of his own. His experience of working in every region of Africa – west, east, north, south, and central – helped him to keep in touch with developments throughout the continent, and make JMAS a lively forum for continent-wide discussion and debate. He then retired to the village of Chagford in south-west England, from which he continued to edit JMAS for a further eleven years.

Conceived and planned in Ghana, the first issue of JMAS was edited from Dar-es-Salaam in 1963, and for the next twenty-four years the editorial office followed him around Africa, while he also carried massive responsibilities in his official posts. The first eleven volumes were co-edited with his first wife, Helen Kimble; subsequently he was greatly assisted by Margareta Westin, who was to become his second wife. His vision for the journal was clear from the first issue, insisting that it should be Africa-wide in scope, interdisciplinary in academic focus, and independent of any political viewpoint or ideology. He sought to bring scholarship to bear on issues of immediate importance and concern to modern Africa, and to do so in a way that would be comprehensible not just to academic specialists, but to anyone concerned with the welfare of the continent. In keeping with this vision, he avoided abstruse theoretical debates, and while recognising that theoretical and indeed ideological visions had a vital role to play, insisted that these be clearly related to observable realities in Africa. He was likewise keen to promote the work of Africans (indeed, the first article in the first issue, ‘A United States of Africa’, was written by none other than Mwalimu Nyerere), and to encourage younger scholars. The present editor’s first academic article, on the Ethiopian coup d’état of December 1960, was published in JMAS more than forty years ago. I remember with gratitude the personal attention and encouragement that I received at that time and afterwards, and trust that *The Journal of Modern African Studies* will continue to uphold the ideals which David Kimble held dear.

CHRISTOPHER CLAPHAM

I am grateful to David’s longtime colleague, Lalage Bown for permission to draw on material from her obituary in *The Guardian*.