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REFERENCES

BAY, E. G. & DONHAM, D. L. (eds.). – *States of Violence. Politics, Youth and Memory in Contemporary Africa*. Charlottesville-London, University of Virginia Press, 2006.

- 1 The book presents a selection of papers from a conference held in the fall of 2003 at Emory University, Georgia, which put an end to a series of seminars on conflicts and violence organized jointly by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Emory University since the year 2001. Historians, anthropologists, sociologists, human geographers and political scientists propose insights into the various forms of violence that have plagued postcolonial African history. Essays concern African countries where violent power struggles have had long dramatic issue: Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Rwanda. Rejecting culturalist approaches of violence as an expression of African cultures, characterised by savagery, or as the consequence of an upsurge of unbridled and irrational forces leading to sheer anarchy¹, contributors address violence in its context, shedding light on the historical configuration in which it arises. They share a common view that violent events can be directly attributed to the failure of African states to contribute to improve the conditions of life of the population, and the frustrations that result from it.
- 2 The originality of the introduction, which presents each contribution and the main facets of the paradigm upon which contributors agreed beforehand in the study of violence, lies in the fact that her author, Edna G. Bay, proposes an in-depth presentation of the Mau Mau civil unrest in 1950s colonial Kenya to assert the legitimacy of the theoretical approaches represented in the volume. Drawing upon the

well-known works of White, Sabar-Friedman and Lonsdale & Odhiambo², she shows that the Mau Mau movement epitomizes the association of violence with state authority, the implication of the youth, and the working of conflicting and changing memories. This introduction leads to an epistemological essay by Donald L. Donham's on the definition of violence, the relevant paradigm for its study, and the methodological and ethical dimensions which weight on researchers' fieldwork. Presented in general terms as "a force that directly threatens bodies and the bare life of bodies" (p. 18), violence is seen as an outcome of cultural, political, and economic struggles, hence the necessity to resort to its historicization. The author interestingly reminds us of the historical context in which violence has become a subject of study as such for social sciences: the development of human right concerns, the decrease in the tolerance towards sufferings and the birth of the "victims"³. The author stresses the challenges faced by researchers when studying violence, who are caught up between attraction and repulsion, and can sometimes be accused of voyeurism.

- 3 The book is divided into three parts: the first part gathers articles which focus on the impact of the functioning of political authority in the working out of violence, the second part insists on the position and role of the youth in violent actions while the last part concerns the question of the memory of violence. But the fact that contributions clearly resonate with each other shows how the issues of political power, the role of the youth and the construction of memory are deeply intertwined, hence questioning the relevance of this division.
- 4 Two contributions constitute the first part of the volume on the relationship between the functioning of structures of authority and the development of violent actions. Political scientist William Reno asserts that in the eleven-year civil conflict that tore Sierra Leone apart, violence was the result of strategies of competition over natural resources, in the first place diamond mining and trade. Reviewing the historical roots of violent competition as it developed in the 1990s (the consolidation of a patronage-based system of diamond trade by high officials in the 1950s, sustained by armed gangs in charge of the control of markets; its fragmentation due to the development of competition among officials and, as a consequence, of violent actions exerted by armed groups), he explains that violence was a direct result of state collapse. But contrary to the presentation of the Sierra Leone conflict by the media as a widespread and undifferentiated violence, the author shows that the intensity of violence varied from one region to another, following local strongmen's pre-war integration into centralized political networks. Also focusing on structures of power, in her essay on the problems of integration of Fula "strangers" in Diola communities in Guinea-Bissau, the PhD anthropologist Joanna Davidson presents the case of a local dispute—the destruction of a Fula mosque in 2000—through the different narratives that were employed to interpret it. Instead of being satisfied with simplistic ethnicist and religious interpretations of the event, she operates a microanalysis of local narratives that reveals the importance of local issues such as land usage and community norms. But she highlights the fact that these issues are embedded in a broader historical context of ethnic polarization, therefore replacing the question of incorporation and exclusion at the core of violence.
- 5 The second part of the book, which focuses on violence related to the youth in regards to popular distrust of state authority, opens up with an essay on the 1990s Sierra Leone civil war which explores the question of mutilation. Her author, the PhD

anthropologist Martha Carey, attempts to explain the indulging in arm amputations by young fighters in relation to the myth of Musa Wo, a trickster figure who is an incarnation of the Mande hero Sundiata, and in the lessons it gives about intergenerational relations and local ideas of power. The myth, which legitimates extreme forms of violence in order to better restore social order, constitutes the frame of reference for the youth who uses violence as a form of discourse about their social expectations. Following a similar approach which emphasises the cultural references upon which violence rests, the anthropologist Elaine Salo deals with gang violence in present-day South Africa. She stresses the shift that occurred among coloured communities since the apartheid era. At that time, women, who benefited from privileged access to housing and jobs, used to detain authority within the household, therefore controlling the youth. But since the post-apartheid era, as men have gained access to jobs, women have been relegated to a second position and have lost their authority. According to the author, the involvement of the youth in street gangs violence that resulted from this new configuration can only be understood when connected to local ideas of manhood. Indeed, gang violence is both a “rite of passage” into the masculine world and a symbol of the power of masculinity asserted against the challenged position of women in the social structure. Both articles take into account historical configurations and political structures, but place the emphasis on social representations and cultural values to understand violence as a form of discourse, as a “tool of communication”⁴ for the youth. The contribution by anthropologist Daniel J. Smith introduces a critical perspective on the question of intergenerational conflicts.

After depicting the historical process which gave birth to a street gang called the Bakassi Boys in Nigeria, and focusing on the expectations of a population for which the gang of young men could transform criminal forms of power exerted by the political establishment, the author stresses the failure of the youth. Indeed, not only were the Bakassi Boys used by politicians to boost their popularity, promoting vigilantism as a legitimate popular form of justice, but they ended up being mixed up in the mechanisms of corruption and crime they had claimed to fight.

- 6 The three essays that conclude *States of Violence* focus on the construction of national memory and its association with violence. In her essay on the Alexandra black township rebellion of 1986 in South Africa, the sociologist Belinda Bozzoli relates how this utopian youth rebellion against the power of the state and for the development of a township self-government was appropriated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and symbolically transformed into a nationalist movement whose objectives would have been congruent with those of the African National Congress (ANC). The following essay deals with the use of changing memories of the 1970s war of liberation in Zimbabwe, especially of the role played by war veterans. The two essayists, J. Alexander and J. McGregor, show that over time, the government portrayed different versions of the war to promote a certain vision of the nation and legitimate the use of violence according to its interests. Discussions with veterans of the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army clearly show that the dramatic economic situation made them adopt the state’s homogeneous “war discourse” and accept violent state patronage. The construction of a national memory after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda constitutes the subject of the last contribution by T. Longman and T. Rutagengwa. It describes efforts by the Rwanda government to reshape a new version of history that would change how Rwandans understand the past for the facilitation of national reconciliation. According to this new version, ethnic

consciousness was a colonial construction; in precolonial times, social categories would refer to occupational divisions, hence their plasticity. Although the objective of the present Tutsi-dominated state is to foster unity, the authors regret that the reworking of a violent past glosses over the responsibility of the state in the genocide. In her introduction, Edna G. Bay interestingly underlines that the last three contributions share a common view that not only is history “*written by the victor*”, but also that the state seems “*triumphant*” in shaping and constantly reworking memory (p. 14). Yet, drawing again on the multiple discourses that contributed to create various memories of the Mau Mau movement, she reminds us that memory can never be the monopoly of one group only, be it as powerful as the state.

- 7 As it was asserted in the introduction, all contributors carefully historicise their subject of study, drawing upon past events to better underline social changes and present-day issues. Readers will appreciate this concern and how it was carried out in most contributions. Different dimensions of violence are highlighted, from its relation to state inefficiency and economic collapse to its association with cultural values and social norms; from attempts at its manipulation by the state to its popular use for social change, and possible failure. It is regrettable that this heterogeneity of theoretical approaches, instead of being built upon in order to refine the understanding of violence, is concealed behind the idea that historicization may be sufficient to propose relevant analyses of the phenomenon. Last but not least, the title of the volume, *States of Violence* (not to mention the picture that illustrates the cover, a red African continent on which a big yellow star symbolizing clashes of violence is superimposed) proves at variance with the ambition of the contributors: to challenge the idea that the dark continent would be plagued by an unbridled violence which could not be explained in rational terms.

NOTES

1. R. D. KAPLAN, “The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, and Disease are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of our Planet”, *Atlantic Monthly*, Feb. 1994, pp. 44-76.
2. L. WHITE, “Separating Men from the Boys: Construction of Gender, Sexuality, and Terrorism in Central Kenya, 1939- 1959”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 23 (1), 1990, pp. 1-25; G. SABAR-FRIEDMAN, “The Mau Mau Myth: Kenyan Political Discourse in Search of Democracy”, *Cahiers d’Études africaines* XXXV (1), 137, 1995, pp. 101-31; J. LONSDALE & A. ODHIAMBO, *Mau Mau and Nationhood: Arms, Authority and Narration* (Athens: Ohio University Press), 2003.
3. See M. WIEWIORKA, *La violence* (Paris : Balland), 2004; J.-M. CHAUMONT, *La concurrence des victimes, Génocide, identité, reconnaissance* (Paris: La Découverte), 1997.
4. M. MAMDANI, *When Victims become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 2001.