are definitely Kurdish, and Kurdish identities are forged, sometimes in connection with the other and sometimes, as in southeastern Turkey, in isolation.

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SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA


We finally have a comprehensive study of war and diplomacy in two large areas in East Africa during the nineteenth century. Richard Reid’s new book exposes the historical trajectories of militarism in a region burdened with a weighty legacy of violence. British, German, Italian, and Belgian imperial hubris understood the violence of slavery in the region to flow from the moral shortcomings of “Arab” and “African” society. They intended the imposing force of their righteous arms to correct those failings. The region has struggled to shake both the label and the legacy ever since. Reid’s path-breaking book takes up these big questions with a thematic focus on state-level conflict.

Reid finds states in central Uganda, central Tanzania, central Ethiopia, and Eritrea. Six “corridors of conflict” (p. 4)—zones of intense and cyclical conflict in the nineteenth century—subdivide the region. Geography is important in explaining warfare in East Africa, but Reid is sensitive to the obsession of “indigenous sources” of history with the role of warfare in creating states. He thus explores military process and practice in terms both geographically expansive and ideologically attentive. Reid argues that the violence of war created identities among both conquerors and the conquered “with alternate—and sometimes simultaneous—cultures of victory and defeat, expansion and suffering, emerging” (pp. 7, 102). War created new urban forms and reconfigured older ones. He asserts that political power grew militarized in the two areas during the second half of the nineteenth century but declines to explore the shifting moral and material aspirations of rank and file supporters. This omission perhaps accounts for a degree of misunderstanding in explaining people’s motives for following military leaders. In the increasingly commodified corridors connecting the two oceans to central Uganda and northwestern Tanzania, followers engaged in multifaceted struggles for citizenship in a fractious, cosmopolitan world. The material expressions of that belonging often came to those at the margins by joining violence and consumerism in the labor of ivory and slave trading. Exploring their shifting aspirations would lend greater cultural heft to Reid’s provocative conclusion that war democratized political culture, its role being “to place constraints on the state and engender an even greater degree of popular participation in society and politics” (p. 150).

Reid’s work brings to light an irresistibly concrete political history, created by warfare and militarism, captured by a pithy conclusion: “statehood was often the institutionalization of violence” (p. 231). Cultural legacies of violence, cultivated by states, were “manifest in the creation of chieftaincies and collective memory, and in the articulation of struggle as cyclical and perpetual” (p. 232). Rather more controversially, Reid concludes that “war on the African continent did not lead to innovation or development; yet interaction with the outside world did, as African societies became involved—however unbalanced the relationship might have been—with cultures and civilizations capable of modernizing them” (p. 232). The unmarked spatial and temporal-conceptual boundaries in this claim beg vital questions bearing directly on the book’s main themes. Where are the edges of East Africa in 1800, 1900, or 2000? In what ways does Reid’s claim reify the modern? In what ways are the implicitly early modern or premodern contents of innovation and development invested with meaning? Warning readers away from nineteenth-century myths of primordial mayhem and violence in the region, Reid concludes that a great deal of the postcolonial violence in central Uganda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea amounts to “unfinished business” (p. 235). With this observation, he argues that only a longue durée approach to African warfare reveals the degree to which “the colonial period represented an attempt to impose an armistice, a suspension of hostilities, from above and outside; and in many areas this has created its own tensions and dynamics, warping, breaking apart or reformulating pre-colonial identities and relationships” (p. 235).

Reid’s focus on warfare keeps him from analyzing the moral divides between sanctioned and illegitimate modes of violence. Was warfare’s violence sui generis, something people understood as legitimate solely in terms of the breadth of its effective scope (p. 146)? If so, how did that come about? If not, what other discourse and practice disciplined the material and experiential costs of war? For a book squarely focused on state-level conflict, we learn surprisingly little about the complex relationships among warfare, law, and sovereignty. Reid’s nineteenth century raises questions about the precoloniality of the subject matter. In an influential volume on the effect of expanding imperial powers of all sorts, the authors concluded that the violent edge of empire ran well ahead of the warriors’ warm bodies (R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead, eds., War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare [1992], p. 28). Disease, ecological transformation, technological and social change—all topics Reid treats in passing—mark the areas touched by the imperial phases of modern history, rendering them anything but pristine settings for colonialism. Reid’s path-breaking book refutes the persistent popular images of Africa’s nineteenth century as a time when the outside world peered in on a region of primordial violence. Do his principal conclusions reveal the early

Helena Pohlandt-McCormick’s book is a comprehensive and intimate account of the revolt that broke the silence of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Pohlandt-McCormick reopens the evidence on the events of mid-1976 and brings in new evidence gleaned from interviews with participants conducted twenty-five years after the uprising. This review is of the e-book whose form, with clickable links to archives, photos, commission reports, and interview transcripts, makes for an incredibly rich reading experience.

The book starts with the photograph of a dying Hector Pieterson carried in the arms of a friend. Pieterson, a young African student, was widely believed to be first to die in the Soweto uprising, although Pohlandt-McCormick notes that a different student probably was killed before him. This photo “became an icon of history—constituent part and instrument of collective history and memory” (chapter one). The photo as an icon has been appropriated by the official narratives of what happened in Soweto in 1976.

Pohlandt-McCormick describes three different narratives as claiming official status or authority: the first was written by the commission convened by the apartheid state, the second by the African National Congress (ANC) leadership in exile at the time of the uprising, and the third by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the immediate post-apartheid era. The apartheid state had to create an official memory of the largely unforeseen political violence as part of its attempt to regain control. The resulting Report of the Cillie Commission, named for the judge who presided over it, reconstructed the state’s power by reconciling the right to control with the apparent loss of control, and the right to exclude Africans politically with the inclusion of coerced African witnesses. The state’s self-serving explanation of what happened in Soweto was that a small group of instigators among the protesters had initiated the violence and the state simply defended itself and justifiably clamped down on black political organizations.

The ANC also appropriated events for the burnishing of its own image as the preeminent anti-apartheid movement. The ANC had faced serious competition from black consciousness organizations in the 1970s, particularly among African youth too young to remember the ANC from the period before it was legally banned in 1960. The organization wanted to reinstate its own authority. In a speech made in 1985, ANC President Oliver Tambo revealed what had become the dominant ANC narrative of the events of 1976: the uprising was a heroic movement that showed that “the people” were ready for revolution and it was only necessary for the leadership to educate and lead. ANC leaders believed that the students needed the discipline that the ANC could provide.

The third official narrative was that developed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But Pohlandt-McCormick finds that account disappointing because it largely accepted the ANC version and did not take into account dissenting voices either about the details of the protest movement itself or about the overall meaning of the violence that broke out on June 16th.

Pohlandt-McCormick faults the official stories for lacking depth and nuance. She turns instead to interviews with eyewitnesses and participants to get to some of the grittier details. The individual memories, she notes, tend to be messy and fragmented: participants’ “memories resonated with the outrage, exhilaration, fear, and fervor that the experience of this historical series of events still aroused. They also spoke to quotidian concerns—about, for example, a good pair of shoes left behind in a looted store” (chapter four). People joined the protest against apartheid education for many different reasons, ranging from deep political commitment to simply being swept along with a growing crowd of peers.

Ultimately, however, what interests Pohlandt-McCormick is the way that the violence that people experienced in the uprising as well as in their daily lives under the apartheid regime has left scars on their memories. The sharp pain of death and loss, of fear for oneself and for one’s family members, and of the mind-numbing terror inflicted by the bureaucracy of apartheid have all altered people’s memories of events and of their own actions. The sixth chapter, “Memory and Violence,” is the most haunting and evocative part of the book. It draws on the literature on the intersection of personal and public memory, individual and collective history but again brings in the stories told by individuals about their own experiences. It is the ability of the book to negotiate both the broader historical questions and the intimate personal details of individual people’s lives that makes it such a thoughtful and compelling work of history.

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