

African

Studies

Review

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Mamadou Diouf

Engaging Postcolonial Cultures:
African Youth and Public Space

Nantang Jua

Differential Responses to
Disappearing Transitional
Pathways: Redefining
Possibility among Cameroonian
Youths

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Child Soldier Clientalism in the
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Civil Wars

Review Essays

Book Reviews

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From the Editors

This issue of the *African Studies Review* is the product of a long process of international interaction and discussion among Africanist scholars. As Mamadou Diouf suggests in his excellent comprehensive article, the subject of African youth, long ignored in the scholarly literature, has become a preoccupation of politicians, social and health workers, and for African communities, albeit for different reasons. Youth as an analytic category of analysis has also come to the forefront of discourse among Africanist scholars of various and often diverse disciplines, so much so that the theme of the 2003 annual meeting of the African Studies Association is centered on it. Yet until very recently, young people and youth in Africa have been the “elephant in the room” to all but a handful of prescient, forward-thinking African scholars like Diouf. Even as Africa’s children grew in numbers to constitute substantially more than half the continent’s population, as an analytic focus and object of intellectual inquiry or discourse, people under twenty-five have been largely ignored. The dominant themes addressed over the past quarter century—the deepening economic and financial crises, the ruptures occurring in efforts at democratization and political disjunction with the inability of African states to solve the national problem, and the shifting alliances that have attended the end of the cold war—have been largely discussed under the rubric of “the State.”

Overwhelmingly, Africanist analysis has focused on all the various historical contingencies that have created a global world in which Africa is virtually ignored. At the same time, African daily life grows more difficult and contested, and African youth have come, numerically at least, to dominate the landscape. They can no longer be ignored. Over the past decade, and accelerating during the last three or four years as access to e-mail and cell phones has become widespread, the context in which Africans in general and African youth in particular live their lives has radically shifted in the wake of what is loosely referred to as “globalization.” These shifts, few of which have been positive for Africans writ large, locate youth at the heart of both analytic inquiry and political action. The essays in this issue address these matters both theoretically and in ethnographic detail. The essays themselves, timely as they might be, emerged from the discussions mentioned above, specifically from a conference/workshop organized at Amherst College in November 2001 by Mitzi Goheen and Sean Redding. This brought together Africanist scholars from a number of African countries as well as from Europe and the United States. Diouf’s excellent essay,

an expansion of his keynote address at the Amherst conference, summarizes the major themes; the papers by Ekambi, Jua, and Murphy describe and theorize these in ethnographic detail while suggesting broadly based political and theoretical themes emerging from their studies.

The following essays are included in this issue of the *African Studies Review* because they so well illustrate the conference themes. We are especially pleased to be able to publish this issue so that it will appear before the annual meeting of the African Studies Association. These excellent essays should provoke and stimulate debate and discussions in Boston. Special thanks go to Mamadou Diouf and Nantang Jua who served as important nodes of communication.

Ralph Faulkingham
Mitzi Goheen
Amherst, Mass.
September 2003

African Studies Review

VOLUME 46, NUMBER 2, SEPTEMBER 2003

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

- 1 Mamadou Diouf
Engaging Postcolonial Cultures: African Youth and Public Space
- 13 Nantang Jua
Differential Responses to Disappearing Transitional Pathways: Redefining Possibility among Cameroonian Youths
- 37 Jacqueline Moutome Ekambi
Les étudiants: La vie, l'amour, et les études
- 61 William P. Murphy
Military Patrimonialism and Child Soldier Clientalism in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean Civil Wars

REVIEW ESSAYS

- 89 "LITTLE PARIS" IN SOUTH AFRICA
Robert Ross. *Status and Respectability in the Cape Colony, 1750–1870: A Tragedy of Manners*
(Christopher J. Lee)
- 92 ETHNIC POLITICS AND ETHNIC CONFLICT
Michael Vickers. *Ethnicity and Sub-Nationalism in Nigeria: Movement for a Mid-West State*
Godfrey Mwakikagile. *Ethnic Politics in Kenya and Nigeria*
Rotimi T. Suberu. *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria.*
(Khadijat K. Rashid)

BOOK REVIEWS

ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

- 99 Steven J. Salm and Toyin Falola. *Cultures and Customs of Ghana.* (Trevor Getz)

Published by the African Studies Association

- 100 Ann B. Stahl. *Making History in Banda: Anthropological Visions of Africa's Past*. (Kenneth G. Kelly)
- 102 Yaa P. A. Oppong. *Moving Through and Passing On: Fulani Mobility, Survival, and Identity in Ghana*. (Donald E. Vermeer)
- 103 Mariane C. Ferme. *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone*. (Lynda Day)
- 105 Kristine Juul and Christian Luund, eds. *Negotiating Property in Africa*. (Brian Siegel)
- 106 Lesley A. Sharp. *The Sacrificed Generation: Youth, History, and the Colonized Mind in Madagascar*. (Luke Freeman)

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

- 109 Oliver Saasa with Jerker Carlsson. *Aid and Poverty Reduction in Zambia: Mission Unaccomplished*. (Thomas R. DeGregori)
- 111 Kim Gehab and Marie-Therese Sarch, eds. *Africa's Inland Fisheries: The Management Challenge*. (Heidi Glaesel)

GENERAL

- 113 George C. Bond and Nigel C. Gibson, eds. *Contested Terrains and Constructed Categories: Contemporary Africa in Focus*. (Ali A. Abdi)

GEOGRAPHY, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND DEMOGRAPHY

- 115 Robert O. Collins. *The Nile*. (Jay Spaulding)
- 116 Amila Toulmin, Philippe Delville, and Samba Traore, eds. *The Dynamics of Resource Tenure in West Africa*. (Donald L. Sparks)

HEALTH AND DISEASE

- 118 Myron Echenberg. *Black Death, White Medicine: Bubonic Plague and the Politics of Public Health in Colonial Senegal, 1914–1945*. (Emily Burrill)
- 119 Emma Guest. *Children of AIDS: Africa's Orphan Crisis*. (Robert L. Ostergard Jr.)
- 120 Cynthia Brantley. *Feeding Families: African Realities and British Ideas of Nutrition and Development in Early Colonial Africa*. (Christopher J. Lee)

HISTORY

- 122 Laura Fair. *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890–1945*. (Jonathon Glassman)
- 123 Karen Jochelson. *The Colour of Disease: Syphilis and Racism in South Africa, 1880–1950*. (Aran MacKinnon)
- 125 Darrell Hall. *The Hall Handbook of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902*.
Martin F. Marix Evans. *Encyclopedia of the Boer War, 1899–1902*.
(Richard Dale)
- 127 Kristin Mann and Edna G. Bay, eds. *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil*. (Solimar Otero)
- 128 Michael O. West. *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898–1965*. (Patrick Furlong)
- 131 David Nii Anum Kpobi. *Saga of a Slave: Jacobus Capitein of Holland and Elmina*. (H. M. Feinberg)
- 133 Alan Schwerin. *Apartheid's Landscape and Ideas: A Scorched Soul*. (Alan Cobley)
- 134 J. D. Fage and William Todoroff. *A History of Africa*.
Christopher Ehret. *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800*.
(Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia)

- 136 Paul Nugent. *Smugglers, Secessionists and Loyal Citizens on the Ghana–Togo Frontier: The Lie of the Borderlands since 1914*. (Benjamin N. Lawrance)
- 138 Owen Coetzer. *Fire in the Sky: The Destruction of the Orange Free State, 1899–1902*. Fransjohan Pretorius. *The Great Escape of the Boer Pimpernel, Christiaan de Wet: The Making of a Legend*. (Richard Dale)
- 141 Andrew Burton, ed. *The Urban Experience in Eastern Africa, c. 1750–2000*. (Garth Andrew Myers)
- 143 Doudou Diène, ed. *From Chains to Bonds: The Slave Trade Revisited*. (Martin Klein)
- 144 Douglas H. Johnson. *The Root Cause of Sudan's Civil Wars*. (Heather Deegan)

HUMAN RIGHTS

- 146 Wolfgang Benedek, Esther Kisaakye, and Gerd Oberlietner, eds. *The Human Rights of Women: International Instruments and African Experiences*. (Adetoun Ilumoka)

LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

- 148 Ann Hecht. *The Art of the Loom: Weaving, Spinning and Dyeing across the World*. John Gillow. *Printed and Dyed Textiles from Africa*. (Lisa Aronson)
- 150 Charles R. Larson. *The Ordeal Of The African Writer*. (Glen Bush)
- 152 Okwui Enwezor, ed. *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994*. (Kennell Jackson)
- 154 Sada Niang. *Djibril Diop Mambety: un cinéaste à contre-courant*. (Sheila Petty)
- 155 F. Abiola Irele. *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*. (Glen Bush)
- 157 Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike. *Questioning African Cinema: Conversations with Filmmakers*. (Sheila Petty)
- 158 Mildred Mortimer, ed. *Maghrebian Mosaic: A Literature in Transition*. (Beverly B. Mack)
- 162 Susan Van Zanten Gallagher. *Truth and Reconciliation: The Confessional Mode in South African Literature*. (Annelies Verdoolaege)
- 164 Dubem Okafor, ed. *Meditations on African Literature*. (Glen Bush)
- 166 Kenneth W. Harrow. *Less Than One and Double: A Feminist Reading of African Women's Writing*. (Andrea Rushing)
- 167 Christine Mullen Kreamer and Sarah Fee, eds. *Objects as Envoys: Cloth, Imagery and Diplomacy in Madagascar*. (Andrew Walsh)

MEMOIRS AND BIOGRAPHY

- 169 Deborah Scroggins. *Emma's War: Love, Betrayal, and Death in the Sudan*. (Alex Little)

POLITICS

- 171 Ashwin Desai. *We Are the Poores: Community Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. (Kimberly Lanegran)
- 172 Michael Barnett. *Eyewitness to a Genocide: The United Nations and Rwanda*. (Charles K. Mironko)
- 173 Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson, eds. *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Lyn S. Graybill. *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Miracle or Model?* (Annelies Verdoolaege)

- 176 Mario J. Azevedo. *Tragedy and Triumph: Mozambique Refugees in Southern Africa, 1977–2001*. (Loren Landau)
- 177 David Pool. *From Guerrillas to Government: The Eritrean People's Liberation Front*. (Tricia Redeker Hepner)
- 179 Jonathan K. Gosnell. *The Politics of Frenchness in Colonial Algeria, 1930–1954*.
Matthew Connelly. *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for the Independence and the Origins of the Post–Cold War Era*.
(Matthew Hounnikpo)
- 182 John F. Clark, ed. *The African Stakes of the Congo War*. (Didier Gondola)
- 184 Jonathan Crush and David A. McDonald, eds. *Transnationalism and New African Immigration to South Africa*. (Elizabeth L. Normandy)
- 186 Robert I. Rotberg. *Ending Autocracy, Enabling Democracy: The Tribulations of Southern Africa 1960–2000*. (Marion E. Doro)
- 187 Arye Oded. *Islam and Politics in Kenya*. (Mustafa Kemal Mirzeler)
- 189 Don Petterson. *Revolution in Zanzibar: An American's Cold War Tale*.
(Jennifer Betowt)
- 191 Pierre du Toit. *South Africa's Brittle Peace: The Problem of Post-Settlement Violence*.
(Elke K. Zuern)

SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

- 194 Barry Hallen. *The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful: Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture*.
Barry Hallen. *A Short History of African Philosophy*.
(Judith Gleason)

WOMEN & GENDER

- 199 Kathleen E. Sheldon. *Pounders of Grain: A History of Women, Work, and Politics in Mozambique*. (Inge Brinkman)

201 BOOKS RECEIVED