

are getting old, the concept of blood debt has been transferred by African critics from an obligation to individuals who served the French state to an obligation to the societies from which these soldiers were conscripted. French public opinion does not concur.

All of this is done with clarity and subtlety. This is a superb book, which is at the same time a contribution to the history of Africa and of France.

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THE LIMITS OF INVENTION OF ETHNICITY

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Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana. By CAROLA LENTZ. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006. Pp. xi + 345. £29.95 (ISBN 978-0-7486-2401-0).

KEY WORDS: Ghana, colonial administration, ethnicity, identity, local history, politics/political.

This book is the English version – half the size of the original – of a book on the same subject published in Germany, itself half the size of the author's post-doctoral thesis. She regrets having to omit much of the historical detail so dear to her; fortunately, there is plenty left for the reader to be going on with. Her introduction stresses the long and tortuous process of political and intellectual interplay in what is now the Upper West Region of Ghana, between British administrators on the one hand, and, on the other, local groups and leaders who were initially organized by multiple networks of residence and locality – uncertainly shaped by warfare, slave-raiding, migrations and trade – but were gradually caught up in the opportunities, pressures and contradictions of British colonial rule and then of the state of Ghana.

Lentz explores the ways in which history is produced, not only the political and other motivations of the producers, but the resources available to them at the time. Officially, Ghana divides its population into 'traditional areas', but this andyone expression conceals two ideas introduced by the British and still central to Ghanaian politics: the idea of 'tribe' as the basic unit of African identity, and a distinction between tribes with rulers and those without. Early anthropology introduced the idea that in the earliest phase of social evolution tribes were acephalous and matrilineal; patrilineal tribes with centralized authority came later, demonstrating their superiority by conquering the others. During the nationalist phase of historiography in the 1960s, historians perpetuated this distinction by writing African history as the history of states, neglecting that of the stateless. In modern Ghana, everybody wants to belong to a chieftaincy, partly as a consequence of the colonial ideological legacy, partly in response to the fact that societies with chiefs tend to impose themselves on their neighbors who lack them.

Colonial administrators, adopting ethnic labels introduced by Muslim scholars in the past, thought they were discovering and reconstituting tribes that were naturally there, though damaged by the pervasive violence of the nineteenth century; they did not see how this process provided new political opportunities for the colonized. Over time, regroupings and revised labels accompanied administrative changes made necessary by local leaders with agendas of their own. When the British reluctantly allowed the White Fathers to introduce Christianity and schooling in 1929, a new source of power developed, with a certain realignment

of ethnic labels. Migrants from the Upper West to the mines and farms of the south discovered that they were 'northerners', and hastened to adopt ethnic identities and appropriate manners and customs to shield themselves from southern condescension. Nkrumah and the arrival of party politics created new sources of power and new goals, as local factions aligned themselves with patrons in Accra. Widening horizons brought home new ideas and materials for making history.

The Catholic education program produced a literary elite eager to re-evaluate their ethnic heritages and to argue about history and social structure not only with ethnographers of the north, such as Jack Goody, but with Lentz herself. Intellectuals now strive to create a collective history from local traditions and remnants of ethnography and to represent the result as a respectable element in a master narrative of West African history which will rescue them from perceived marginality (p. 264). Lentz says: 'The interweaving of pre-colonial and colonial models of belonging – ranging from clans and clan-alliances, first-comer/late-comer relations and territorial proximity as defined by earth-shrine parishes, chiefdoms, districts, and Catholic congregations – has created a complex system of available identifications that local actors mobilize in defining group membership and justifying collective action' (p. 271). Intellectuals debate the criteria to be used and the relative respectability of given labels, but ethnicity as a supposedly primordial and absolute identity, however it be defined, provides a basis for political claims and for resisting the claims of others (p. 3). All the labels that are or have been in use are controversial, with the effect that even the author shows some hesitation in applying them. 'No matter how "primordial", ethnic identities are contestable; redefinitions must invoke local affinities and histories and must respect popular ideas of what "custom" is supposed to be, yet must be expressed in terms that are intelligible nationally and internationally, compatible with accepted models of "Ghanaian cultures"' (p. 255).

This book is based on research in Ghana, north and south, over a period of 15 years, and on extensive library research in several languages. Despite the complex and elusive realities of the situation she discusses, Lentz offers a readable narrative that constitutes an important contribution to the history and politics of the north, of the Lawra Confederacy (which is the main focus of the story) and of Ghana as a whole.

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NEW INSIGHTS INTO MOZAMBIQUE'S POSTCOLONIAL HISTORY

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Revolution, Counter-Revolution and Revisionism in Postcolonial Africa. The Case of Mozambique, 1975-1994. By ALICE DINERMAN. London and New York: Routledge, 2006. Pp. xxiv + 394. £80 (ISBN 0-415-77017-3).

KEY WORDS: Mozambique, civil wars, memory, postcolonial.

Possibly Alice Dinerman's study on postcolonial Mozambique will not find a large readership, simply because there is only a rather expensive hardcopy edition of the book, which is based on her doctoral research in Namapa District, Nampula Province, northern Mozambique. This would be regrettable, since the book is of great interest not only to scholars of Mozambique, but also to those of postcolonial