

its cosmopolitan origins and the questions they raise about the making of “patriotism” and identity—national and local—might have a past as well as a future worth considering.

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Hannah Whittaker. *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Kenya*. Leiden: Brill, 2015. ix + 178 pp. Acknowledgments. Maps. Bibliography. Index. No price reported. Paper. ISBN 978-90-04-28267-4.

In December 1963, just weeks after Kenya’s independence and only a few years after the ending of the Emergency that had led to it, a new State of Emergency was declared in northern Kenya. It lasted four years, killed or displaced perhaps a fifth of the population, decimated the herds on which communities depended for survival and prosperity, and deepened, embittered, and politicized the longstanding divide between the northeast, especially its Somali communities, and the rest of Kenya. Whittaker’s book examines the issues at stake on all sides in this complicated internal war, discusses local insurgency and state response, and analyzes its aftermath. Drawing on field interviews as well as colonial and postcolonial archival material, she argues that although the direct cause of the Emergency was the threat of armed Somali secession from Kenya, the conflict operated at several levels, of which pan-Somali irredentism was only one, and not necessarily the most significant on the ground. Individuals and communities chose whether to support secession or the government for very local reasons, within a context of competition over pastoral resources and economic opportunity, and framed by networks of enmity and alliance. As in the previous Emergency, the roots of violence were deep and tangled. Ethnic communities and alliances split under pressure: Muslim Boran in Isiolo sided with their stronger Somali neighbors, but they did so in part to get the weapons they needed to defend themselves; Marsabit Boran supported the government and expected to move into the trading niche hitherto occupied by Somali; Rendille, under pressure from Boran raiding, voted for secession.

The book is quite narrowly focused on the Shifta War itself, as its title suggests, but it does give enough background to enable readers to see what was at stake and how and why choices were made and sometimes later reconsidered. However, a deeper historical context would have helped, especially regarding pastoral movements and expansion during the colonial period, and the postwar debates over the future of the Somali territories as a whole. The decision not to create a single “greater Somalia” was perhaps regionally inescapable, but it did give secessionists some reason to believe

that they had been “betrayed” by the outgoing colonial government. While the author notes the importance of the ecological dimension at the local level, she does not explain this in much detail; nor are the maps very helpful in showing where the key water and grazing resources are and who controlled them. The limits of contextualization make it difficult to understand that the Shifta War was the latest, but not the last, iteration of a shifting struggle that had begun a century earlier.

The government response to the insurgency drew heavily on both previous experience of Emergency, in which senior officials had participated, and on the armory of restrictive legislation left behind by the colonial regime. As before, the response had two prongs: repression, to end the fighting; and development, to incorporate the inhabitants of the region more closely into the emerging nation-state and, perhaps, to give them some reason for “loyalty.” Inevitably, the first was more in evidence than the second. Whittaker shows clearly how forced “villagization,” seen as the instrument of both suppression and modernization, worked in practice to undermine the local economy and to marginalize the inhabitants of the northeast still further. Prevailing developmental orthodoxies and negative stereotypes of “traditional pastoralism” notwithstanding, the environment generally did not allow for the “modernization” of the subsistence economy through the introduction of sedentary agriculture and wage labor. This was modern development at its most brutal—and least effective.

There is a wider and more general theme in this book, though it is not fully explored: the meaning of nationhood and the reciprocal expectations of state and citizen. Who were citizens and what made them so? Mau Mau first raised the question of Kenya nationhood in the 1950s, for Mau Mau was, among many other things, a struggle between different ideas of identity and belonging. The Shifta War in the 1960s, with the possibility of an outright rejection of Kenya citizenship, raised similar issues even more acutely. Could mobile pastoralists on the periphery of the state, with a history of ignoring boundaries and a “backward” way of life, ever become modern Kenyans? What authority and force did national boundaries have? Once violence had begun in 1963, a flexible form of citizenship was no longer negotiable. What was left was either coerced belonging or exclusion—or a combination of the two, shaped by the interaction between repression and development in the (“protected”) villages. Whittaker’s tale, like similar studies elsewhere in Africa and the world, reminds us of something important: states can be made and nations imagined, but the idea of citizenship and the sense of belonging are part of that local internal architecture that emerges out of debate and individual commitment and cannot be either imposed or enforced except at terrible cost.

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