

which might effectively challenge the sinister alliance of international capital and rent-seeking politicians.

This is as far as the present volume takes us. A concluding essay by Ray Bush situates the Zambian case succinctly in the global political economy, but somewhat surprisingly grasps at a romantic vision of ‘community-based’ mining for its strategic blueprint. One should certainly not dismiss radical political innovations out of hand. Still, the two anthropologically slanted case studies in this volume – Patience Mususa’s ethnographic sketch of the everyday travails of women mining the mineral waste heaps, and Rohit Negi’s discussion of how chiefs have responded to the challenges and opportunities of privatised mining investment within their traditional territories – provide little support to Bush’s populist scenario.

One hopes that this excellent volume will stimulate further debate and research. Political ecologists in particular have been left a very fruitful lacuna to fill with a complementary analysis of the spatial and environmental dimensions of the copper economy.

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**The War Machines: young men and violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia** by  
D. HOFFMAN

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Danny Hoffman’s *The War Machines* is an ambitious monograph that presents an ethnographic account of the kamajor militia of the Sierra Leone civil war, within a larger theoretical framework that addresses some of the most prolific and contested discourses in contemporary research about Africa – armed conflict, youth, informal economies, globalisation, patronage and the state, to name a few. From extensive fieldwork that began as photo-journalism during the war, Hoffman presents an anthropological study grounded in political philosophy. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the book oscillates between high theoretical interpretation of the ‘war machine’ and its plateaus, and micro-level narratives of the ‘Big Men, Small Boys’ who are its subjects and with whom he spent much time smoking cigarettes, eating rice and listening to music. It is to Hoffman’s great credit as a scholar and author that his writing in both registers is equally compelling, deftly articulating political philosophical concepts (no small feat with the repertoire he has selected) and evocatively rendering dynamic social environments.

Hoffman accomplishes this through a two-part text that, although largely drawn from previously published articles, presents a cohesive whole, framed loosely around war and post-war, whilst explicating the continuities therein. Part One – ‘Histories’ – is presented as ‘background and context’, indicating the author’s emphasis less on war as such and more on the liminal, highly militarised environment in which he carried out fieldwork, and which, he argues, continues to describe socio-political and economic dynamics. The first chapter presents a concise but wide-ranging chronology in which Hoffman argues that the Sierra Leone civil war can only be understood as a regional

conflict, concluding, 'to the extent that it ever really ended, the Mano River War fizzled' (53). The second and third chapters embark on Hoffman's anthropology of the war and theoretical approach to the social history of the kamajor militia through four plateaus. In these, the strongest and arguably most ambitious chapters of the book, Hoffman applies the framework of the war machine to his extensive empirical knowledge amassed over a decade of research. He traces 'an arc from grass roots mobilisation to institutionalisation; from community defence to full incorporation into the logic of contemporary global capitalism' (60).

Part Two, 'Building the Barracks', delves deeper into an ethnographic study of kamajor fighters' social-political realities at the end of the war. Drawing on Mbembe's 'economy of persons', Hoffman turns away from political, psychosocial or cultural explanations for the war, and commits strongly to the concept of violence as something 'deployed' and exchanged in market terms: 'in the end, the majority experienced the war simply as an intensification of violent instabilities of patronage rather than a qualitative shift in their nature' (142). This understanding of the war *as* patronage, rather than a more measured examination of war *through* patronage, reveals the vagaries of interpretation and analysis in ethnography: it is not clear that his kamajor counterparts experienced the war as a continuation of patronage. Hoffman's narrative approach makes astute use of political philosophy, but at the expense of some of the empirical and theoretical literature on violence and on patronage that might have further illumined this tension. By presenting violence as normalcy, but sidestepping religion, spirituality, family and other forms of (non-violent) production, Hoffman perhaps overdetermines violence in the logic of patronage, and potentially overstates the Mano Region's lack of opportunities for sociability and community-building. However, his central argument for shifting the burden of understanding post-colonial warscares from an exclusive focus on what is destroyed to what is being produced is well wrought (166), as is his adaptation of Simon Njami's concept of the city as phenomenon (177).

In his own words, Hoffman has undertaken to explain 'the intersection of forces (political, economic, historical, and social) that set [the Mano River War] in motion, shaped its path, and will determine its relevance in the future ... to document its troubling position at the boundaries of novel transnational trends in the ordering of violence and labour' (xiii). The research agenda presented herein raises important questions about whether the capitalist mobilisation of violence is taking new forms as described by Hoffman, and whether it is equally salient in different regions and types of conflicts. Further, scholars of the region may use Hoffman's thesis to examine whether the war machine describes experiences unique to kamajors, or ex-combatants more generally, or all males; as well as whether there is a non-violent alternative means of production for young men, or indeed young women, in West Africa. It is worth noting that his analysis of young male post-modernity in West Africa – with mobilisation for violence as an extension of global capital – closely examines the young men navigating a globalised, impoverished political economic landscape, but engages little with society as a whole or the inter-generational and gender relations that also structure these young men's lives. Despite these definitional limitations, through both micro-level insights on the kamajors and broader

claims about the regional and global system, Hoffman succeeds in making the political, economic and social connections he sets out to make. *The War Machines* provides a welcome addition to the modest Mano River canon, and a valuable entry point for academic visitors in and voyageurs out.

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**Africa's Moment** by J.-M. SEVERINO and O. RAY (trans. D. Fernbach)

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Accelerating with the turn of the millennium, the study of where Africa 'is', and where it is 'going', has blossomed into a cottage industry of pan-African polemics. It is among such works that *Africa's Moment* is decidedly at home. Taking urban population growth as their starting point, Jean-Michel Severino and Olivier Ray outline the nascent 'great African upheaval' (3) and map its potentialities. Unfortunately, the result is a series of thematic sketches that adds little to an already-cramped debate.

Severino and Ray venture many reasonable predictions, for instance where they forewarn the danger of ecological mismanagement and anticipate a continued surge in religiosity. Yet such vast claims are consistently delivered on thin evidence. Broad assumptions are followed by a barrage of factoids – 'the 124 kilowatt-hours that an average African consumes each year are scarcely enough to power a 100-watt bulb for three hours a day' (201) – with scant attention given to the scholarly literature. This frequently results in shaky analysis. The Rwandan genocide is ascribed to growing tensions over land (183), while large-N macro-economic indicators alone lead the authors to proclaim that 'structural adjustment did succeed' (79).

Troubling *Africa's Moment* throughout, such questionable conclusions result from a narrative utterly devoid of politics. Steady growth in Mozambique and Burkina Faso is explained as due to these countries' leaders having 'avoided the mistakes' of unsound social and economic policies (168), in contrast to what the reader must presume were the honest errors of, for instance, Abacha and Amin. Even conflict and criminality are stripped of their surroundings: violence is explained as the product of *anomie*, 'a form of revenge against a stifled destiny' that is 'the only way of explaining' rape, torture and child soldiering (106). Here, as throughout the work, all-important political context is ignored amid impossibly wide assertions. This tendency to essentialise is particularly problematic where the authors' sweeping generalisations encroach on one another. Most notably, the fifth chapter ends with admonitions against 'reductionist' explanations for economic stagnation, notably geographic and cultural fatalism. The 'African tragedy', the reader is rightly told, 'is a tenacious myth' (63). Immediately following this apt critique, however, the sixth chapter brings the claim that fifty years of stalled growth are 'only a banal tragedy of economic cycles' (64). Successive crises of rich-country debt and commodity shocks supposedly vitiated all African agency; 'no country, no people could have grown and developed' (75) in the latter decades of the twentieth century, despite the authors' acknowledgment elsewhere that Botswana and other