TWO VIEWS ON BURUNDI TODAY

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Patricia Daley. *Gender and Genocide in Burundi: The Search for Spaces of Peace in the Great Lakes Region.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Oxford: James Currey; Kampala: Fountain Publishers; Nairobi: E.A.E.P.; Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2008. xix + 268 pp. Maps. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $65.00. Cloth. $24.95. Paper.

Peter Uvin. *Life After Violence: A People's Story of Burundi.* London: Zed Books, 2009. Distributed in the U.S. by Palgrave Macmillan. xi + 211 pp. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $20.95. Paper.

For years I have bemoaned the fact that books on Rwanda are published by the dozen while only a handful of scholars work seriously on Burundi—and even then they usually have done fieldwork among refugees or no fieldwork at all. And now not just one but two new books appear on this fascinating country that has in the past experienced so much suffering and is now experiencing enormous transformations that differ so much from the tightly controlled politics of Rwanda—and that bring hope for a peaceful future, in which people will dare speak their mind. My enthusiasm about the books, when they landed on my desk, was not lessened by the fact that they both deal with other hobbyhorses of mine, such as gender—in particular masculinities—development aid (Uvin), humanitarianism (Daley), mobility (Uvin), and refugees (Daley).

Despite the apparent similarities, the books are different in their ambitions, approaches, and style. While Daley introduces her argument through reference to the latest literature on sovereignty, race, intersectionality, and so on, Uvin's book takes as its point of departure the narratives of ordinary Burundians from all walks of life—collected over a year's fieldwork all over Burundi. While Uvin explores perceptions and opinions, Daley is searching for causes and structures. While Uvin focuses on the local—providing a bottom-up view—Daley argues for the necessity of the grand picture of international actors and influences. She lodges the Burundi conflict in the *longue durée* of colonial history, while Uvin's book is a snapshot of the present. This means that the two books supplement one another quite well; ideally anyone seriously interested in understanding Burundi (or other African countries recovering from conflict) ought to read them both.

In *Life after Violence*, Uvin does not make a clear statement about his objectives or theoretical arguments; instead this is a book that mostly aspires

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to provide insight into the lives and opinions of Burundians. However, I believe that Uvin's deeper ambition is to critique the assumptions of international development agencies and peacebuilding efforts by revealing how much they are out of touch with what people on the ground actually think and believe. At a more abstract level, his depiction of Burundian perspectives on war, ethnicity, youth, gender, mobility, corruption, politics, justice, truth, and trust can also be read as a thought-provoking exploration of African perceptions of self and social identity following large-scale violence. Although Uvin himself does not synthesize these insights into a larger theoretical argument, his extraordinary material, his vivid observations, and his flair for genuinely unprejudiced commonsense analyses make this an enormously rich book—the kind of book that makes you want to take notes all the time and reread chapters in order not to forget the details and fine observations.

I believe that anyone who is interested in understanding Africa—its politics, its conflicts, its masculinities and femininities, and the overwhelming influence of international development agencies—could benefit from reading this book. Practitioners could certainly profit from the essential "reality check" that the book provides. While Uvin does not mince words when criticizing the international aid system for understanding "pretty much nothing of the dynamics of political change" (79), he is determined not to trash international development aid at any cost. In fact—rather surprisingly—he concludes that many of the agencies' assumptions are perfectly in line with the perceptions of Burundians. Academics might also benefit from thought-provoking observations that disturb our concepts and assumptions and may become starting points for further analysis.

Daley's book is completely different both in scope and in approach. This is a book that covers a lot of ground—historically, theoretically, and geographically; in doing so it reflects the author's many years' commitment to the country and the region. I found that especially the second half of the book provided an astonishingly detailed knowledge of Burundian politics over the past decade or so. This is a significant accomplishment, considering the fragmented and constantly shifting nature of politics in Burundi, which also has led to great difficulties in actually getting data on such issues. This is the first book since the mid 1990s to thoroughly analyze Burundian politics—and much has changed in Burundi since then.

As opposed to Uvin, Daley has great theoretical ambitions with her book, wanting to challenge the present approaches to understanding conflict and create a new analytical frame that "requires an epistemological shift in the way we study Africa" (7). Taking what she claims to be a black feminist approach, she claims that "the domination that produces genocide is the outcome of the intersection of race, ethnicity, the patriarchal state, masculinity, the geo-political economy and militarism" (7). Her argument seems to be that an amalgam of these "evils" has spread from colonial pow-

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ers, to the state and further on to rebel groups. The effect of such "militaristic masculinity" and "genocidal thinking," she argues, has led to what she terms the "dehumanisation of the Burundi people."

I generally sympathize with her ambitions to include an international optic in exploring the causes of genocide in Burundi—just as I am convinced that understanding masculinities is key to understanding the violent dynamics of the country. However, I was never really convinced by her ambitious argument. She seems more concerned with *critiquing* (other scholars, the West, the U.N. International Relief Agencies, the military, colonialism) than with *understanding* the processes taking place. Therefore, we never get to know exactly *how* and *why* "militarized masculinity" results in "genocidal mentalities." I miss more details on what actually happened when colonial forms of masculinity met African forms of masculinity, and how European forms of patriarchal domination were distorted in the colonial context. Violence is not something that simply diffuses into society; it is resisted, it constantly changes shape, and over time it becomes something new—taking on unique forms in practice if not in effect. Perhaps it is the lack of primary material that makes it difficult for the concrete and the contextual to emerge in this book and modify the conceptual homogeneity.

Reading the two books together teaches us not just a great deal about Burundi, gender, and genocide, but also about methods—how to approach a particular African society in a manner that allows us to go beyond the assumptions of donors, Africanists, NGOs, and Western feminists. Uvin has spent a long time doing interviews in Burundi, which is itself an achievement after decades of armchair research in this part of the world. The strength of Uvin's book is its openness—free of theoretical exercises and closed arguments—but it also means that the book poses more questions than it answers. Daley, on the other hand, tries to provide the answers without entirely opening up the possible questions. If we are to understand the dynamics of social practice and social change, we need to combine the two. For this we need more detailed ethnographic knowledge of this place and its people. Let us hope that the improved security situation and the inspiring work of Uvin and Daley will encourage new generations of scholars to do such fieldwork.

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