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POSTSCRIPT: FROM MEMORY TO CONVICTION AND ACTION

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African modernity surely comprises less pervasive outright violence than is suggested by popular representations – the 'New Barbarism', as Paul Richards (1996) calls it. But by now it surely comprises more violent disjunctures than scholars like me, focusing on emergent and continuous change, have addressed. Uncertainty as a recurrent condition of the *longue durée* in productive and commercial life is rather different to theorize than violent ruptures in the very existence of collectivities or in people's capacity to imagine the future. It is one thing to link conditions to social organization, ecological knowledge and demographic regime (Iliffe 1995; Lesthaeghe 1989), for example to see the connection between the chronic historical vulnerability of the era of the slave trade and the political structures of the time (Ekeh 1990). It is really another to foreground each disruptive event in slow motion, one at a time, and ask how people created particular futures from particular pasts and presents. This shift of focus from chronic conditions to specific intrusions opens up in a new way the space between event history and the *longue durée*. It even puts the whole idea of the *longue durée* into temporary abeyance. Are long-term processes better thought of as created by cumulative discrete and different memories and projections, perceptions and persuasions, rather than by responses straight out of the cultural/institutional repertoire? Or, at the very least, does the relationship of event to process need to be traced out explicitly?

It is the changed incidence of dramatic events in the world – or perhaps just the changed sense of a shared and intimate knowledge of them – that makes such a question empirically addressable as well as theoretically debatable. In postcolonial Africa very widespread areas have known recent military action; many groups have seen regional catastrophes; many communities have suffered epidemic rates of loss from disease; and many, many individuals have been mugged, bereaved or deprived by force. The papers in this symposium on collective memory and reproduction take on historical ruptures and violent intrusions, all suggesting in one way or another that there is no return to the status quo ante in the aftermath. Trauma changes the collective narratives deemed relevant to people's own personal orientations in life. The examples are vivid and convincing on that point, in ways that past work on reproduction has not been (or not attempted to be, because

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focused on trends or cultural constants). They are also imaginative in addressing *which* events are preserved in collective memory and made available – in different ways to different generations – for discussions of reproduction. The papers are methodologically inventive. But the idea of memory inserts so much 'space' between event and process that it reveals a terrain more extremely complex than one imagined at the outset. To the authors' credit, they open up more than can be fully addressed. As a postscript, my own short exploration brings up issues that have been identified in the papers but remain hanging.

The chain of influence from event to historical memory to reproductive ideologies and finally to sexual agency and fertility patterns is long and indeterminate, even if people claim that they are tightly mutually entailed. First and most strikingly, many of the papers suggest that it is not trauma or loss *itself* that provides the emotive force for ideas about collective vulnerability. People do not seem necessarily to count demographic loss in any direct way. They even seem inclined to erase or downplay the particular narratives of physical violence and personal suffering (see Smith). Memories of tactics (including starvation in the Biafran case) as well as the assignment of culpability for specific cruelties or failures seem to be muted in all these cases. In both the Igbo and Bamileke papers, the real perceived threat is collective loss of access to power *subsequent* to the trauma. Minorities perceive that, as a result of polarization by violence, ethnic patronage rules. In the context of a competitive identity politics over scarce goods, the violence of the past is both a sign and a means of marginalization. The moment at which the access gap opens up is identified by a name: the 'troubles', 'Biafra'. That name makes it loom large. But it seems to be the silhouette of 'horror' (see Straight) rather than the specific features that impress. The event is a marker of overall political position and a benchmark for political consciousness, much more (here) than are its components touchstones for moral and philosophical exploration about particular acts and their implications.

So, in these papers, discussions of reproduction become part of competitive dynamics. The next question is: does the organization of the political world matter? Some have argued that in countries with ethnic blocs, democratic one-person-one-vote systems breed a race over breeding. Is there something different about the rationales for the reproductive fears and strategies under systems which political scientists refer to as patrimonialism from those characteristic of democracy? And then, is fertility ideology expressed through an older 'wealth in people' idiom or through a new set of images, perhaps a combination of individuation (for ambition) and control of others (for security)? It may be that personal promotion works through highly selective individuated clientage, whereas hedging against failure drives an accumulative demographic process. This interpretation would bring calculation of current interests into the space between event and reproductive process, in addition to interpretations of past experience. Taking this line of argument further, one could extrapolate from Straight's discussion of the repression of female experience in community contexts to explore

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how memory is worked on, as *ideology*, within larger collectivities. Whose interests does it most reflect? Feldman-Savelsberg *et al.* suggest that the youngest Bamileke cohort, and the one most historically removed from the 'troubles', has the least nuanced and most politicized variation on the theme, implying that the fires of anguish are strategically stoked across the generations. If there 'really' are political and social marginalizing strategies that continue into the present, a political anthropological perspective could focus on how leaders deal *directly* with the source and locus of current discrimination, *without* necessarily reinvoking the danger of ethnic survival in a long-past period of civil war. In this light, there may be different cognitive versions of reproductive ideology. So while the experience of collective danger is a highly plausible *reservoir* of ideas for thinking about reproduction, there remains the question of which experiences, which ideas and which actions become powerfully convincing for action, in relation to political forcefield.

These papers take several major steps towards exploring that terrain. The indirectness of the pathway from event to memory and reproductive logics is evident from the fascinating contradictions the papers indicate. Bamileke are economically powerful and highly fertile and yet cultivate a sense of being embattled as a community; the Igbo diaspora reconstituted apparently fearlessly and successfully almost immediately after the Nigerian Civil War and yet worries profoundly about numbers and modes of access to power; Samburu women have suffered acutely and personally from sexual transgressions that they nevertheless are more or less encouraged to undertake; hardships of the past *reinforced* Yoruba disciplinary institutions whereas in the hardships of the present parents led to *loss of control* over their children; and, even well into a funeral, Batswana are still bringing definition to the meaning of the deceased's life and death for kin relationships and claims in the future.

Creating a meaningful narrative of collective past and present is clearly a struggle, and one has the sense that the problem goes far beyond an interest-driven political struggle. Criteria for coherence may be really difficult to formulate. Feldman-Savelsberg *et al.* show how important are the hometown associations to maintaining a coherent memory of the 'troubles' in Cameroon. Klaits puts the production of coherence into detailed slow motion in the case of death from AIDS in Botswana. Gottlieb shows how the colonial broken promise has taken on coherence by its grafting onto what must be much older ideas about human ontology. In fact, these events are all cognitively deeply disturbing. To some degree they defy the political effort at reworking, in part – the authors imply – by their very magnitude. And memory of events coexists with the relentless ongoing necessity of living in the present, with its own exigencies and competing ideologies from religious revivalism to the pragmatics of making a living. The important thing here is that the symposium members do take up the apparent anomalies, recognizing another dimension to the indeterminacy – the reflective agency – that links historical events to reproductive practices.

They do not, however, leave the issue there, conveying only a sense of the struggle to make sense of a highly disturbing world. They do not give

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up on a causal link between events, processes and action as too distant or too complex to trace out. Their success in showing the active reworking of reproductive thinking suggests that the next step, of submitting actions themselves to the same scrutiny, may be reachable. To do this, there may need to be an explicit consideration of the difference between reworked narratives and older 'cultural logics'. It is not yet clear how the historical reworking of ideas translates into prospective reworking of actions. The implications that communities draw out of their experience here actually result in reaffirmation of familiar themes from cultural anthropology: sexual freedom for men; incentives to high fertility; the concept of humans as travellers from other stages of life and other worlds; and so on. Or are there specific fine-tunings to nuptiality, fertility and kinship 'regimes' that would demonstrate the innovation that experience alone can generate? Looking worldwide, the confirmation of pronatalism has not been a necessary implication of collective trauma and massive demographic loss. Many catastrophes of the modern era have not resulted in forceful narratives of need for demographic replacement. The Second World War for most Jews and for the Japanese, and the Korean War for Koreans, have been followed by *limitations* on fertility, at least in part due to even more powerful arguments about the link between population growth and poverty. The main example of major change in generational practice in these papers comes from Renne's paper on parental authority, where one could infer a rationale to fertility control: not however, due so much to attempts at investment in children as to unease with the likely returns.

So these populations may be re-animating, with new experiential and ideological components, a much older 'demographic regime'. Clearly to some extent they are. The papers show that. They also liberate analysis from the two poles of interpreting behaviour as either the emanation of cultural logics or the rational assessment of immediate conditions. The question is: which details, components or elements are being significantly shifted by collective memory, and how do they cross the generations? Ron Lesthaeghe (1989) introduced the concept of reproductive regimes to African fertility. In the ecologically demanding context of Africa, he argued, low age at first marriage and childbearing, universal marriage for women, childbearing until menopause and long child-spacing through breastfeeding formed an effective combination under African conditions, reproducing and slowly growing the population. But this comprehensive coverage of the entire female reproductive capacity left no 'slack' to be tapped into in case of a collective need or desire to replace catastrophic losses rapidly. Bledsoe and Cohen's review (1993) of adolescent fertility strongly suggested that the main change in African fertility was that the age at first marriage was rising, while the age at first birth for women was not. The other components of the 'regime' have moved forward more or less unchanged, with birth control methods used more to reinstate birth-spacing than to reduce total numbers of births. Bledsoe's further work (2002) has shown how individual reproductive experience, including trauma, shapes these quite classic strategies for reproductive success.

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She has opened up a major space for addressing trauma, and showing the processes by which experience and fertility practices are linked to one another.

The missing link in all these works is precisely between the collective level of an historically constructed shared reproductive ideology of vulnerability on the one hand and individual and aggregate action on the other. The next challenge for the papers in this collection is to move further along the chain of causation to show the precise junctures in reproductive lives at which collective memory plays its most persuasive role in defining the convictions that motivate people's actions. Are these ideologies focused on sexuality or fertility, on fecundity or parental authority, on numbers or generational loyalty, on the beginning or the end of the reproductive career? The authors have shown the promise of their approach, so it is more than worthwhile to draw out the next logical implications. The world of events 'out there' is making it ever more clearly imperative to develop the line of thinking that these papers lay out.

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