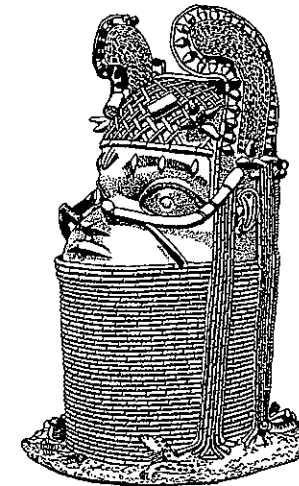


# THE AUSTRALASIAN REVIEW OF AFRICAN STUDIES

VOLUME XXVIII 2006/7



AFRICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION  
OF AUSTRALASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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# THE AUSTRALASIAN REVIEW OF AFRICAN STUDIES

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The introductory article in this edition of the *Australasian Review of African Studies* is a retrospective piece by Emeritus Professor J.C.Caldwell of the Australian National University who is in many ways the doyen of African studies in Australia. Certainly he is the only Australian academic to have won a United Nations award for his research on Africa.

This issue of the *Australasian Review of African Studies* contains more polished versions of a number of the papers from the annual African Studies Conference held at Macquarie University in Sydney in September 2006. This eclectic conference moves around Australia to allow the maximum number of impoverished students and funds-strapped academics to experience the pleasure of exchanging views with people with a common interest in matters African.

The 2008 Conference will be held at the Australian National University in Canberra

These papers reflect the wide ranging interests of people living in Australia who are studying Africa and Africans from the labour force in Eritrea, and Gracia Machel's contribution to combating child soldiery, to the history of links between Sudan and Australia, and African views on Australia's divorce laws. As the numbers of Africans living and studying in Australia grow we can expect to see more Africans studying their own diasporas. As always it will be vital to ensure a balance between the maintenance of academic standards and allowing an authentic African voice,

## Youth Denied

**David Keen, *Conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone*, Oxford, James Currey, 2005. pp. 270. ISBN 0-85255-883-X (p/b).**

In *Conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone* David Keen seeks to separate his text from similar publications on the topic by examining the sociological and psychological perspectives of the war. The author is wary of assumptions concerning political struggles in Africa, and his study attempts to "blend an analysis of the political and economical functions of violence with an exploration of how violent people see their own violence". Towards this, he focuses on what he sees as several neglected areas of research.

As explored by the author, the roots of the conflict reveal an early ethnicisation of the army, based upon a north-south divide. Presenting a chronological account of events, Keen attributes the ethnic imbalance in the army to the violence and intimidation which marred Sierra Leone's elections after the withdrawal of the SLPP, a Mende-based party. As has been well documented, Sierra Leone's youth played a major role in the civil war, and Keen posits that election violence from the early 1970s onwards set dangerous precedents which were taken up by the youth. The author blames the state for having failed to provide adequate education, especially to young males, many of whom would become combatants in the war. Through the testimonies of informants Keen illustrates the sense of betrayal and rejection felt by Sierra Leone's youth, many of whom were hired by political parties and instructed to intimidate civilians. It was these same political parties, asserts Keen, who whether in power or in opposition failed to provide the young with any real alternative other than political violence. The very word "youth" took on a sinister meaning in Sierra Leone, and a "psychological gap" developed where the youth were left isolated. A sense of betrayal by

the nation's leaders was palpable amongst the young, a situation which would have dire consequences for the country.

With regards to the main causes of the conflict in Sierra Leone, Keen dismisses several commonly held beliefs as misconceptions. In particular, the author focuses on the diamond trade, and argues that it was not the prime motivating force behind the conflict. Though all forces, including ECOMOG, mined for diamonds, and indeed ECOMOG traded their guns to the RUF rebels for diamonds, Keen asserts that the violence in Sierra Leone was very widespread and was often centred on regions bereft of rare minerals. The author notes the importance of forced labour used in cash crop production, and posits this as one of the motivators behind the violence, reminding us that large tracts of fertile land were held under rebel control. Keen's strategy is to show that rather than simple greed being the cause of the conflict, there were a host of reasons which contributed to the war. Rather than diamonds, the Sierra Leonean civil war was driven by issues such as education, unemployment, and the failure of local justice.

*Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone* attempts to discover the "elements of rationality in conflicts that have been dismissed as irrational", and in the text the author reveals the political goals of the parties involved. One example Keen uses is of hostage taking by the RUF. He argues that such actions were designed to counter the military government's assertions that the rebels were disunited and uncoordinated. He points out that the rebels did not seek money for their captives' release, but rather satellite phones so that they could communicate their political objectives to the international community.

The tragedy of the war is also revealed by Keen, especially the suffering of Sierra Leone's civilians, who had to endure years of persecution by both rebel and government soldiers alike. These so-called "sobels", many of them teenage youths, fought each other, the civilians, local kamajor fighters, imported mercenaries, and

ECOMOG forces, in a conflict that few could see any resolution to. Keen points out that to many of those involved, the aim of the war wasn't to win, but to assert the rights of a multiplicity of disenfranchised groups. In trying to understand the extreme nature of the violence, particularly that perpetrated by rebels on civilians, Keen focuses on the absence of democratic politics and the endemic corruption which characterised Sierra Leonean political life. In a world turned upside down, asserts Keen, extreme acts possessed a kind of logic which ultimately drew in successive factions. The author emphasizes the need to understand notions of social exclusion, and his text represents a study which investigates the conflict from a psychological perspective which few authors have attempted. His research is augmented by numerous interviews with informants, including those from senior ranks in the government, military and rebel commands.

*Graeme Counsel,*  
*Melbourne University*

### History for Tanzanian Secondary Schools ?

**Gregory H. Maddox & James L. Giblin, *In Search of a Nation. Histories of Authority and Dissidence in Tanzania*, Oxford, James Currey; Dar Es Salaam: Kapsel Educational Publications; Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005. pp. xiv+337. ISBN: 0821416642 (pbk).**

This collection of 17 essays is the result of a festschrift in honour of historian Isaria Kimambo and was prompted, at least in part, by calls for more relevant historical and historiographical materials from frustrated history teachers in Tanzania's secondary schools; the authors have responded well to the call. Adhering, if perhaps only peripherally in cases, to an overall theme of nationalism and knowledge, the essays that follow the editors' introduction are divided into four groups on a chronological basis: pre-colonial, colonial, independence and contemporary.

In the first section, two articles deal with issues of access to power. Steven Feierman skilfully analyses Shambaa ritual processes that are engaged upon the death of the king, showing how a body of ritual knowledge is held collectively, thus reinforcing social cohesiveness and identity and preventing the appropriation of the totality of the ritual by any one party. Competition and cooperation are both shown to be essential elements in establishing the succession, highlighting the dynamic and contingent character of social interaction. That the value of ritual knowledge lies in its restricted circulation is echoed in the following article, Edward Alpers' teasing out of the convoluted, complex and often contradictory processes by which one specific local ruler used both matrilineal and patrilineal claims to succession to fuse local and Swahili forms of authority, linking the



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