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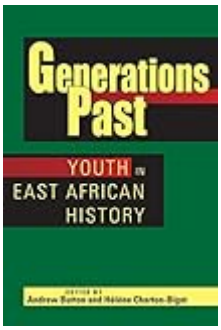

Andrew Burton, Hélène Charton-Bigot. *Generations Past: Youth in East African History.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010. 301 S. $64.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8214-1923-6; $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8214-1924-3; ISBN 978-0-8214-4343-9.

Reviewed by Susann Baller

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A. Burton u.a. (Hrsg.): Generations Past

The issue of youth is one of the most urgent challenges in Africa. Given the demographic dominance of young people on the African continent, the issue of youth intersects with questions of economic crises and political marginalization, with the search for more social influence in the public sphere and with new forms of cultural expressions. Recent research has stressed the ambivalent social, cultural and political position of young people in Africa, considering them âmakersâ and âbreakersâ, as well as âvanguardsâ and âvandalsâ. Filip De Boeck / Alcinda Honwana (eds.), Makers and Breakers. Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa, Oxford 2005; John Abbink / Ineke van Kessel (eds.), Vanguards or Vandals. Youth, Politics and Conflict in Africa, Leiden 2005. Few researchers, however, have considered youth in Africa in a historical perspective. This volume on âGenerations Pastâ edited by two historians, Andrew Burton and HÃ©lÃ¨ne Charton-Bigot, wants to contribute to this research gap by focusing on youth in East African history. Burton and Charton-Bigot remind us that the predominance of young people has been characteristic of African societies at least since the late 1940s. Yet, simple statistical data do not tell us why and how âthe young matterâ (p. 2).

The essays in this volume cover a wide range of East African countries â mainly in the geographical area of todayâs Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda â and explore the meaning of youth and generation from the mid-18th to the 20th century (even though only one paper by Richard Reid is fully dedicated to the 18th and 19th century). It is a volume of twelve well-researched and thought-provoking case-studies which provide insights into the multifaceted and changing character of youth in Africa. The essays consider the thematic areas of (1) youth, war and conflict; (2) the specific experience of different generations; (3) shifting conceptions of youth and generation; (4) the political role of youth; and (5) youth in relation to sexuality and gender. A recurrent issue is the question of how youth intersects with power and authority â either in precolonial, colonial or postcolonial contexts, and both on a more private, family level and on the level of state power.

The main issue discussed from different perspectives is the tension between the âyoungâ and the âeldersâ, often connected to a struggle over political change. Youth,

as James J. Giblin argues, should be considered as actors in their own right. Reid demonstrates how the young in Buganda and the Ethiopian highlands in the 18th and 19th century sought to challenge the state and utilized violence to bring about change. Dave Eaton shows how âyoung men have bitterly contested the authority of their elders for centuriesâ (p. 48) in Northeastern Uganda and Northwestern Kenya. Charton-Bigot describes in her paper how Kenyan students defied the colonial social order after the Second World War. And James Brennan, examining the TANU Youth League in Dar es Salaam, indicates how young men were prone to seize political opportunities in the 1940s and âformed an increasingly powerful political force in their own rightâ (p. 196).

âYouthâ has often been perceived as a âconstant threadâ (Reid, p. 28), as troublesome, as âidle and belligerentâ (Waller, p. 136). Tanganyika Sunday News, as Andrew Burton mentions, called âworkless youthâ a âproblem of our futureâ in the late 1950s (p. 108). Richard Waller underlines that the idea of a delinquent and disruptive youth was first applied by colonial authorities in the Kenyan countryside during the interwar period in order to describe Maasai warriors in the bush. How much such an image persisted becomes obvious when reading Justin Willisâ essay on the story of an alcohol advertising ban in 2005 in Kenya, âthe latest round in a long cultural argument over age and authorityâ (p. 281), as Willis writes, and an expression of the âwide anxiety about youthâ (p. 280), their âunrulinessâ and their âdisobedienceâ (p. 283).

The authors, however, do not construct a simple image of âyoungâ versus âoldâ, but invite the reader to understand the relations between young and elders âin more subtle and balanced termsâ (Giblin, p. 81). âThere are powers in the youth and also in the oldâ, quotes Eaton (p. 62) a cattle raider from the area of the Kenya-Uganda border. Young people were victims and practitioners of violence, describes Reid. In colonial Tanganyika, as James Giblin analyses, youth challenged their elders by entering mission communities, longing for greater autonomy, but also remained within networks of mutual obligation and responsibility to kin. The image of youth was not as clear-cut. Youth labor camps in revolutionary Zanzibar were intended to construct âhappy images of youth building the nationâ (Burgess, p. 227), creating âa new type of citizenâ (p. 224). Yet, Thomas Burgess depicts that many young were simply unwilling to conduct routine work in the camps and camp discipline was sometimes âchaoticâ.

For a German reader it might be surprising to read a volume on âGenerations Pastâ, in which Karl Mannheimâs concept of generation is not mentioned once. Karl Mannheim, Das Problem der Generation, in: Wissenssoziologie. Auswahl aus dem Werk, introduced and edited by Kurt H. Wolff, Neuwied / Berlin 1964 [1928], S.Â 509-565. Charton-Bigot and Burton write about âyouth cohortsâ, Waller about âage-setsâ. Shane Doyle sees marriage as âthe most significant marker of the end of youthâ (p. 237). It would have been desirable to read a bit more on the issue of how to conceptualize youth and generation and how to embed the different case studies on East African history within broader current debates on youth and generation in other regions of Africa and the world. Avoiding getting back to Mannheim, however, has also something intriguing. As Brennan points out, the concept of âyouthâ understood as both category and group during the 20th century was rapidly changing (p. 196). There was neither one generation nor one youth at any given time in East African history. Youth and generation have been âin fluxâ (p. 186). The colonial context âundermined the categorical stability of generationâ even further, as Charton-Bigot and Burton notice (p. 9), while changing gender conceptions intersected with concepts and experience of youth and generation, as Doyle as well as Joyce Nyairo and Eunice Kamaara demonstrate. Moreover, Carole Summers recognizes that she mentioned âfew actual youthâ in her essay, but wrote much more about shifting âmetaphors, ideas, and concepts of social orderâ (p. 189). âYouthâ can be described as a âsocial shifterâ Deborah Durham, Youth and the Social Imagination in Africa, in: Anthropological Quarterly 73 (2000) 3, S.Â 113-120. , an indexical term, such as âhereâ and âthereâ, which points to the relational context in which young people define themselves and are defined. Also, âyouthâ can be a âclaim-making conceptâ, utilized by young and elders to bring about social change, as I would add. The authors in this volume provide many rich examples for such a dynamic idea of youth and generation.

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