

BOOK REVIEW

Louisa Lombard. *Hunting Game: Raiding Politics in the Central African Republic*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 272 pp. List of figures. List of maps. List of acronyms and abbreviations. References. Index. \$44.99. Paper. ISBN: 978-1108746182.

Louisa Lombard, an anthropologist at Yale University, has been interested for several years in spaces where the authority of the state participates in a dynamic of negotiation and sharing among several actors. *Hunting Game: Raiding Politics in the Central African Republic* analyzes the question of how power is exercised through hunting and raiding practices in the northeast region of the Central African Republic.

Beginning with the introduction, Lombard poses the question of sovereignty, that is, who decides on the social and political life of the people? In order to answer this question, she clearly situates the objective of her work by explaining that she wants to study the concept of sovereignty through the “experiences of the people in the North-East of the Central African Republic” (4). In this manner, the author distances herself from the definition of sovereignty made by Thomas Hobbes through the figure of the Leviathan, who holds the monopoly of authority resulting from the collective will of his subjects. The context of the Central African northeast, marked by weak political authority, could be read through Hobbes’s analysis, but this weak authority of the public administration does not mean that there is a kind of generalized violence in the territory. Through the study of the practice of hunting and *razzia* (a plundering raid), Louisa Lombard analyzes the exercise of power through the relationships of entanglement and temporality that exist between several actors. This space is the site of a long history of *razzia* and colonial domination, which today connects several actors with practices where the border between legal and illegal remains uncertain.

The book is well written, using the sources that the author has mobilized, which include interviews, observations, archives, and iconographies. The quality of all this survey data, along with the description and analysis through the prism of a long duration of the political, economic, and social order of the northeast region, contributes to the richness of this book. Through the subjects of hunting and raiding, the author makes it clear that she views

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these activities not as a source of economic accumulation, but rather as a practice of acquisition. Acquisition is a concept for analyzing this hunting and raiding economy in the area under consideration. The author situates the origin of this concept through philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, but she tries to push the reflection to adapt it to the context of the Central African northeast through the practice of hunting.

In the context of the northeast CAR, where laws and political authority are permanently in a situation of negotiation and arrangement between different actors, citizens, trackers, public agents, international actors, and rebels, the concept of acquisition allows us to grasp the uncertain and blurred status of the political and economic order, notably through the practice of hunting. Although the boundary between hunting and resource plundering remains fluid and blurred, acquisition is, according to the author, part of a “disturbance-based ecology,” in which many species sometimes live together without harmony despite conquest.

Through the study of the hunt and the raid, the author examines the question of political order on the basis of the analysis of the state and the non-state. She clearly distances herself from the concept of the “weak state” or “failed state” that is most often applied to African states, especially in the context of the Central African Republic. For her, the uncertainty and vagueness of the political and economic order in this area does not necessarily explain the weakness of the state. The state itself, through its representatives, local or public authorities, is one of the actors who participate in this game of negotiating and renegotiating their roles.

The book is organized around nine chapters; a long introduction sets out its main research questions in a clear and heuristic way with a theoretical coherence, using field investigation and historical narratives. Chapter Two analyzes the attitudes and positions of the actors through the term “Zariba.” The author situates Zariba in its historical context by explaining that it was a space or enclosure built to contain objects and people resulting from the looting and raiding of slaves. The presence of this Zariba dates back to the nineteenth century, which underscores the dynamics between the different actors in this space which constitutes a meeting point between Europeans and Muslim merchants. Forced acquisition became, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a strategy of political and economic domination by French colonial administrators. One can see in this analysis a kind of legacy in the practice of acquisition, the heritage that is the product of the meeting of the French colonizers and the Muslim merchants.

In the continuation of this historical analysis of the practice of hunting, the author retraces in the third chapter the search for laborers by the Europeans, within the framework of forced labor. But she also notes the interest of hunting for economic reasons, notably the commercialization of elephant ivory. Thus, in the 1930s, hunting zones were demarcated for the safari. The fourth chapter analyzes the adoption of rules for the protection of animal hunting during the period of the Ubangi Chari, the former name of the Central African Republic. This law, written in a decontextualized manner

by colonial administrators, and with an ethic that does not conform to the realities of the local population, reinforces the fluidity of its interpretation, which generates modes of camouflage and denunciation (Chapter 5). The use of force, even armed force, as a strategy for protecting hunting areas, allows us to understand the acquisition strategies that were put in place by the different actors involved in the practices and protection of hunting areas.

This use of force is a factor that contributes to the acquisition process, as in the case of certain rebel groups in this area (Chapter 8). This book offers an opportunity to understand the lived experience of precariousness, as well as the adventures and constraints that result when acquisition fractures sovereignty and distribution. The author concludes with a reminder of the centrality of acquisition to the practice of hunting and raiding in the final chapter, identifying acquisition rather than production and management as the only means by which political-economic relations take place in the world.

This book poses several questions that fall within the framework of analyzing the political in spaces where the state, according to Weberian definition, remains weak or limited. Through this study of hunting and raiding, Lombard examines the state in its day-to-day functioning, by attempting to grasp this political order through a hybridization of temporalities and actors in this practice. Reading this book through the lens of political science, and especially Africanist political science, I place these analyses in the wake of the work of the authors of “politics from below” (such as J.B. Bayart and Achille Mbembe). As Lombard states, “Understanding the trajectory of politics in northeastern CAR can enrich and change the way we think about political-economic processes much more broadly” (11). But beyond the political-economic process, this book sheds some light on the issue of violence and its *modus operandi*, including the problem of rebellion in this “buffer” region.

Kelma Manatouma 

Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA - University of Ghana)
Accra, Ghana

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ma.kelma12@gmail.com

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