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Robert B. Edgerton. *Africa's Armies From Honor to Infamy: A History from 1791 to the Present.* Boulder: Westview Press, 2002. viii + 238 pp. $30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8133-3947-4.

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African Armies Deserve Better

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Africa's rash of military coups and wars has sent analysts searching for historical connections. This latest attempt to put Africa's armies in historical perspective is written not by an historian or political scientist, but by an anthropologist at UCLA's School of Medicine. Indeed, Edgerton's wide-ranging multidisciplinary interests are manifest in prodigious publications (more than twenty books) on diverse subjects. In addition to works on mental retardation and deviant behavior, which one might expect from a specialist in medical and psychological anthropology, he has produced volumes on the Zulu War, the fall of Asante, Japanese military history, Mau Mau, the Crimean War, the Amazons of Dahomey, and African-American military history, and now *Africa's Armies*. Unfortunately, this rendition of African military history, or more precisely, the role of military institutions in African history, does not do justice to the subject.

The author's impressive output of about one book per year has its price: expertise runs thin, and such tight publication schedules compete with depth of research, analysis, and documentation standards. Edgerton aims his books at the reading public, he does write well, and the thirty pages of notes herein are respectable. But the book suffers from a lack of care and sophistication that are the hallmarks of good scholarship even when popularized.

Africa's Armies comprises seven chapters devoted to traditional armies, resistance to European conquest, armed rebellions against colonial rule, civil wars since independence, military coups and corruption, Rwanda and Burundi as genocide, and searching for solutions. It seeks to be more than a historical study; as implied by the subtitle, it is also a morality tale. Edgerton argues that in traditional Africa, armies were well integrated into their societies, autocracy was rare, war was limited, and soldiers fought with skill, honor, and courage to defend their societies (all that in one nineteen-page chapter). Such characterizations are at best debatable, and generalizations based on a few cited cases do not begin to capture the variations among precolonial societies and their military formations, to say nothing of the relative incidence of autocracy, war, and martial virtues. Even during the colonial period, according to Edgerton, African soldiers continued to exhibit valor, both in armed rebellions against European rule and as loyal servicemen in imperial armies. However, this heroic demeanor suddenly changed with the coming of independent states and armies: political corruption, dictatorship, military coups, civil wars, and genocide became rampant, as did armies that despoiled rather than defended their societies. Why?

Edgerton never really answers this critical question, and the next few chapters are devoid of analysis. Chapter 4, "Civil Wars," begins with the unremarkable observation that "[s]ince independence, Africa's armies have played a role in civil wars" (p. 99). It then proceeds with thumbnail sketches of Angola, Ethiopia-Eritrea (not a civil war), Nigeria, Mozambique, Senegal, Sudan, and Zaire. The next chapter on military coups and government corruption follows the same pattern: short profiles of Somalia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Uganda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Togo, and Tanzania (which never had a military coup), leading to the conclusion that military takeovers almost invariably corrupted the military but that corruption became endemic regardless of who ruled. The chapter on genocide details Rwanda's tragic experience, but notes only that armed forces, militia, and incited citizens were involved; and despite the title of the chapter, little is said about Burundi. In short, beyond stating the obvious in these three chapters, namely that armies have fought wars, staged coups, and corrupted themselves, there is little or no examination of the role of armies or other armed formations, no comparison of the cases profiled, and no explanation of why African armies abruptly exhibited such atrocious behavior after centuries of supposedly honorable service.

Rejecting externally imposed solutions, Edgerton believes that "Africa's problems ... will be solved by Africans or they will not be solved at all" (p. 222). But what solutions? He refers to modest success stories in Mauritius and Botswana, but resorts again to a series of short case studies (Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Uganda, South Africa, Mozambique) whose futures remain in doubt. In the last few pages, after observing the recent decline in military coups and kleptocratic military regimes, he calls for depoliticizing Africa's armies through "concerted indoctrination" (p. 256) along the lines of Sandhurst or West Point, and returning to their historic military traditions of loyal service to the public.

African armies deserve better than the treatment rendered here. The title and subtitle notwithstanding, this book actually says little about armies or their history. It is a series of topical chapters on successive phases or aspects of African history, some of which feature the military (chapters 1-3 and 5), but in rather disjointed ways. "History" starts only in 1791 with a clash between Xhosa warriors and a British patrol, and the organization of the volume makes it impossible to trace connections between past and present. Attention shifts repeatedly among armies, states, regimes, and societies, blurring the focus and reinforcing the historical disconnection between them. As noted above, analysis is wanting where it is needed most, in explaining the changing forms, character, roles, and behavior of Africa's armed forces, and evaluating measures to redirect them toward more professional conduct.

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