

called the Lord's Day Observation Society, founded in 1831, became increasingly active as it campaigned to maintain Sunday as a respite from the creeping secularism and consumer culture that now threatened every aspect of British life. But in Nead's hands, the atmosphere of Sunday afternoon involves more than conflict between tradition and reform: it also constitutes a tonal range generated by a sexual division of labor that often made the work of Sunday fall wholly on the shoulders of women. Moreover, it includes touches of racial tension, as when the Lord's Day Observation Society complains about concessions granted to Jews "and other aliens" (290).

In her final chapter, Nead persuades readers that changing postwar attitudes and atmospheres can be vividly registered in something as seemingly insignificant as a shift from women wearing dressing gowns around the home to wearing housecoats. It is a subtle analysis and could be superficially understood as arguing that housecoats symbolized a new sense of the domestic interior as rational, modern, and technological. Yet Nead is doing something more sophisticated than trading in symbols of modernity. By the time we reach the dressing gown chapter, we have been sensitized to the way Nead's objects become laminated with layers of meanings and performances that render them not so much cultural symbols as nodes in a complex relay of habits, presentations, and values. In this way, the New Look housecoat does not straightforwardly symbolize the more equal companionate marriages that are emerging in the postwar period; rather, it takes its place as a crucial prop in developing a new amorous ecology and its characteristic moods. At the same time, of course, something is happening to the dressing gown, rendering it more dissolute, more disheveled. The cultural work that recasts these objects, re-moods them, is there in the fashion spreads, in the patterns for housecoats, in the films that offer a new fragility to the "woman in a dressing gown."

To treat atmospheres and moods as objects for historians seems both innovative and right; after all, the best histories do not just tell us what happened but give us a sense of how a period felt. But atmospheres and moods are elusive. With *The Tiger in the Smoke* we have a form of scholarship that renders the vague with rigor and precision, that tracks amorphous qualities with relentless inquisitiveness. It is a stunning example of what interdisciplinary research can accomplish.

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PAUL OCOBOCK. *An Uncertain Age: The Politics of Manhood in Kenya*. New African Histories Series. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017. Pp. 356. \$34.95 (paper).
 doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.71

Paul Ocobock's *An Uncertain Age* is a thoroughly researched, carefully considered study of the interrelationship between masculinity and generational status in colonial Africa. Ocobock positions the book as a series of "coming of age stories" that explain how ordinary and elite young males endeavored to become "men" in British-ruled Kenya. Arranged in chronological order, his chapters reexamine some of the most fundamental issues of Kenyan history—labor, education, urbanization, resistance—through the prism of the transition to adulthood. Ocobock's analysis of these central themes innovatively turns on the shifting and flexible meanings of male circumcision and initiation to manhood. In pre-conquest times, circumcision made East African boys into men as part of a series of customs and rituals that entailed both deference to and defiance of older generations. *An Uncertain Age* shows how the colonial regime, which Ocobock terms the "elder state," attempted to discipline young men by co-opting and

reinterpreting these practices. At the same time, this elder state sabotaged its own efforts through oppressive and exploitive policies, particularly concerning land and labor, that made it difficult for young men to acquire sufficient wealth and autonomy to make the jump to full adulthood. Historians of Kenya have long recognized that British colonial rule was riddled with such contradictions, particularly as regards to the internal tensions it produced within the Kikuyu community that provoked the Mau Mau Uprising. Ocobock's work valuably expands this line of analysis to include a comprehensive consideration of the concepts of youth, masculinity, and generational tension.

One of *An Uncertain Age's* great strengths is Ocobock's thorough mastery of his evidence: the secondary literature, deep and comprehensive archival research, and insightful, respectful, and often unconventional oral histories. The book will interest readers of the *Journal of British Studies* as it usefully contextualizes state policies on youth and juvenile delinquency in both metropolitan Britain and the wider empire. Ocobock has left no archival stone unturned, and he has an admirable talent for teasing out the key elements of the seemingly interminable bureaucratic debates over law and policy that frequently crop up in British colonial records. It is easy to get lost in the thickets of these dense files, and Ocobock's deft summation of the Colonial Office's investigation of child labor laws throughout the empire is a model for novice researchers. Additionally, he also knows what to do with the vast reams of quantitative material generated by colonial bureaucracies. While less diligent scholars might have skipped over mountainous probation service files and the records of court-ordered infliction of corporal punishment ("caning"), Ocobock uses data analysis to strengthen his conclusions about the reach of the elder state without undercutting the clarity of his qualitative social history. On this score, he has been particularly resourceful in tracking down and interviewing a wide variety of informants. Connecting with the more successful graduates of the Wamumu Approved School, which was in fact an elite institution, is not particularly difficult, but getting older, if not elderly, men to speak openly about their youthful delinquencies and transgressions is no easy task. The men's frank accounts of coming of age in the colonial era provide an important and illuminating counterweight to the bureaucratic views of African youth embedded in the archival record. It would have been helpful, however, for Ocobock to have factored in the influence of nostalgia on his subjects' recollections, for, as scholars of memory have noted, the favorable light in which older people often recall their youth can influence narratives of growing up under even the most repressive imperial regimes.

This is a readable book. There are places, particularly when summing up a bureaucratic argument or summarizing several theoretical points, where Ocobock can turn out a wonderfully effective sentence. In pointing out that colonial officials and metropolitan welfare specialists considered cities to be corrupting places for both European and African young people, he offers a telling observation about London and Nairobi: "The city at the heart of an empire metaphorically transformed white Englishmen into Africans; meanwhile, its colonial counterpart out on the frontier conjured Africans into poor white Englishmen" (93). Taken as a whole, *An Uncertain Age* is most successful and satisfying as a work of synthesis. Kenya's colonial past has been explored in depth by a wide variety of scholars, and we have extensive literature that explores the various manifestations of youth, generation, and gender in Kenyan history. Ocobock's great contribution has been to weave this body of work, combined with his impressively detailed archival and oral histories, into a comprehensive narrative of generational tensions in colonial Kenya. Disruptive young men continue to make their presence known, particularly during violent Kenyan election cycles, and Ocobock has productively established that this social turmoil has deep historical roots.

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