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The young people of the Cameroon Grassfields have been subject to a long history of violence and political marginalization. For centuries the main victims of the slave trade, they became prime targets for forced labor campaigns under a series of colonial rulers. Today's youth remain at the bottom of the fiercely hierarchical and polarized societies of the Grassfields, and it is their response to centuries of exploitation that Nicolas Argenti takes up in this absorbing and original book.

Beginning his study with a political analysis of youth in the Grassfields from the eighteenth century to the present, Argenti pays special attention to the repeated violent revolts staged by young victims of political oppression. He then combines this history with extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the Oku chiefdom, discovering that the specter of past violence lives on in the masked dance performances that have earned intense devotion from today's youth. Argenti contends that by evoking the imagery of past cataclysmic events, these masquerades allow young Oku men and women to address the inequities they face in their relations with elders and state authorities today.