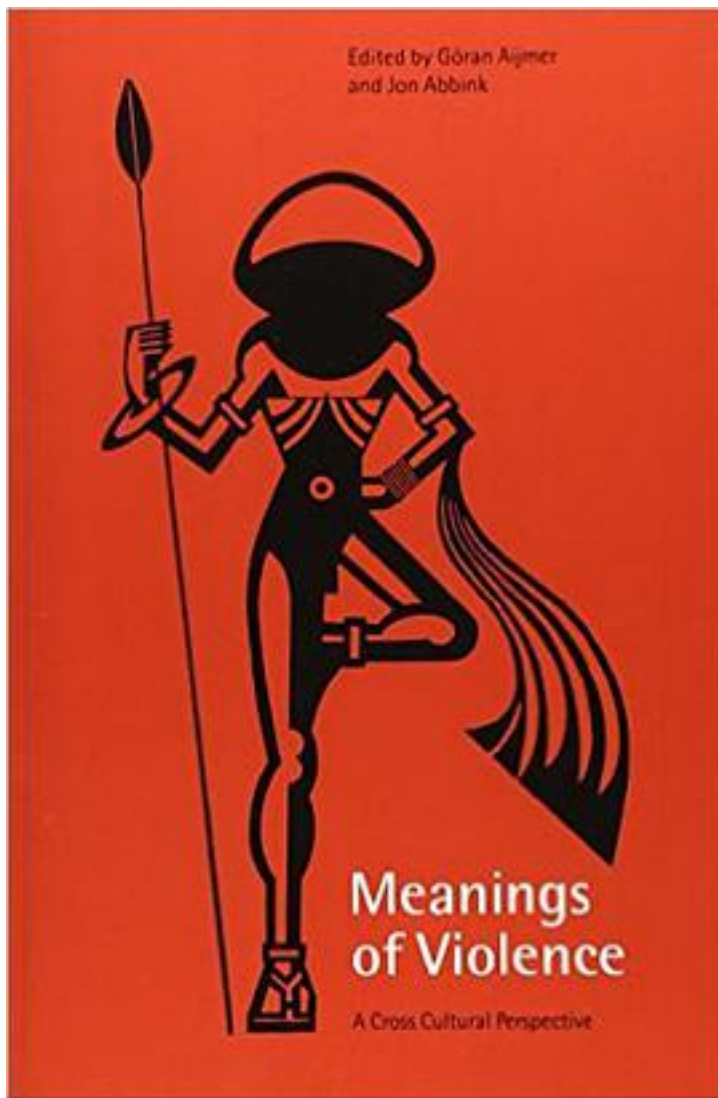


Meanings of Violence



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出版者:Palgrave Macmillan

出版时间:2000-5

装帧:Pap

isbn:9781859734407

There are good reasons to look at violence from new perspectives. In its endless manifestations violence is part and parcel of human existence, and is very probably a constituting element of human society. And yet violent action - warfare, penalties, insults, feuding, assault, murder, rape, suicide, sports - remains in all its complexity one of the least understood fields of human social life.

The book's contributors identify the symbolic and ritualized aspects of violence, and suggest ways of 'reading' violence as it occurs in the world, whether as violent duelling and age-group violence in Southern Ethiopia, bullfighting in Iberia, cattle rustling in Kenya, guerrilla and militia wars in Colombia, or public executions in China.

These case studies suggest that 'violence' is not a simple, universal urge, but is contingent and context-dependent, shaped by social relations of power, force and dominance. To be the victim of violence is a humiliating and frightening experience. But the many ambiguities that occur in the use of violence must be considered, to understand why peace seems only to exist as a contrast to the violation of peace.

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