Journal of Conflict Studies

Conflict in Africa

Richard Dale

Volume 25, numéro 2, winter 2005

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs25_2re01

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (imprimé)
1715-5673 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer ce document

Dale, R. (2005). Conflict in Africa. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, *25*(2), 150–152.

REVIEW ESSAYS

Conflict in Africa

Kadende-Kaiser, Rose, and Paul J. Kaiser, eds. *Phases of Conflict in Africa*. International Studies in Social Science, vol. 6. Toronto: de Sitter Publications, 2005.

Conflict studies have evolved in academia into both institutes of various names as well as a bevy of monographs, conferences, journals, and course offerings at a wide array of universities, particularly in North America and Western Europe. They are also a staple of think tanks that usually include governments among their clients. There are, moreover, conflicts over how best to study conflict in the intellectual marketplace – should there be case studies, which academic disciplines are the most creative (and hence worthy of funding), should the focus be micro or macro or a mix of both in scope, what geographic areas and historical periods are best suited for research, what paradigms are the most apposite, and so on. In short, conflict studies are alive, well, and thriving.

Conversely, some would contend that portions of the African continent are not so well and are beset with a range of maladies; indeed, a whole set of neologisms has cropped up to describe such ailing political systems and structures. The University of Pretoria political scientist Anton du Plessis has provided a thoughtful guide to these political pathologies, using such terms as quasi-states, weak states, lame states, appropriated states, paper states, felonious states, and rogue (deviant) states in his chapter dealing with "State Collapse and Related Phenomena: Select Theoretical Perspectives," in the monograph *State Failure: The Case of Zimbabwe* that he co-edited with Michael Hough (University of Pretoria Institute for Strategic Studies ad hoc publication no. 41 [November 2004], pp.10-14).

Like many other publications in academia, *Phases of Conflict in Africa* is the result of a scholarly conference, namely, "War and Peace in Contemporary Africa" held on 31 January 2003 at the African Studies Center of the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to the editors' rather short, yet terse introductory chapter, the book includes seven substantive chapters, two of which address (in an adversarial fashion) the subject of United States-African relations with respect to the post-11 September 2001 management of various facets of the war on terrorism. The remaining five chapters are case studies of specific past (pre-independence) and present conflicts in various Western African nation states. The book suffers from the lack of maps and a chronology to help acquaint the non-Africanist reader with the continent as a whole and with the particular nation

states that are covered in the book. There are thorough author biographies, references, and endnotes as well as tables and figures for the chapters, along with a well-designed index for the entire book, all of which enhance the appeal of the volume to advanced students and more specialized readers.

One of the most original chapters examines the received wisdom regarding the geographic spread of ethnic conflict using the flight of refugees from Rwanda into neighboring Tanzania and (the Democratic Republic of) Congo. Drawing from her 1999 University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill dissertation on the subject, Professor Beth E. Whitaker of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte shows that the political stability and legitimacy of the host state is a significant independent variable in her case study. She offers the aside that "In Southern Africa, refugee flows generally have not been associated with the spread of conflict." (p. 75) This was certainly the case with the dismantling of white power regimes, and the current exodus of economic and political refugees from present-day Zimbabwe to South Africa and Botswana will be a crucial test of her research findings. Another chapter, by Tatiana Carayannis, a doctoral candidate at the City University of New York, breaks fresh ground in her exploration of the three different wars in the Congo, beginning in 1996. She avers ". . . that since the [Congolese] state had long ceased to perform the functions expected of the modern . . . state, it is . . . changes in the structure of the international system – in which these war networks are embedded – and thus the changing identities of state and non-state actors, that may better account for this conflict's regional transnational and networked character." (p. 100)

Dr. Dorina A. Bekoe, who is with the International Peace Academy in New York City, draws upon her 2002 Harvard University doctoral dissertation to provide an exceptionally nuanced analysis of the implementation of peace agreements, using Liberia as a case study. Her contention is that ". . . given that the concessions offered in a peace agreement will bring some change in vulnerability among the factions, it is only when the faction leaders feel equally vulnerable that the implementation process will advance. Indeed, signatories to the peace agreements deem the promises for concessions more *credible* [italics in the original] if fulfilling them creates a degree of vulnerability to adverse actions by the other party . . .." (pp. 107-08) She utilizes the precepts of contract theory to buttress her argument that "The ability to sanction each other for non-compliance creates mutual vulnerability," (pp. 109-10) which provides the necessary self-enforcement of the implementation phase.

Dr. Abdul R. Lamin, a postdoctoral research scholar at the Center for Africa's International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, examines the use of judicial and quasi-judicial institutions to ameliorate the traumatizing effects of civil conflict in Sierra Leone and to address the legacy of war atrocities. Such instruments are a reflection of the choice made between restorative or retributive justice in transitional societies, such as Sierra Leone and South Africa, which served as a model for other African political sys-

tems with its well-known Truth and Reconciliation Commission chaired by Desmond Tutu, a Nobel laureate and Anglican cleric. His work meshes well with the findings of Michelle Sieff's 2002 Columbia University doctoral dissertation, "Reconciling Order and Justice?: Dealing with the Past in Post-Conflict States," which covers Sierra Leone as well as Rwanda, Namibia, and South Africa. As was true for South Africa, financing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Special Court in Sierra Leone is a vexing matter for this post-conflict state and its patrons in the international community.

The fifth substantive chapter by Professor Benjamin A. Talton of Hofstra University concerns the Konkoba ethnic group in Ghana. Based upon his 2003 University of Chicago doctoral dissertation, his research suggests the extent to which colonial policies and practices regarding ethnic typologies and (indirect) governance can set the stage for subsequent inter-ethnic strife. "Ghana's post-colonial regimes," he contended, "maintained the British administration;s stance toward non-centralized groups and did little to reform local political systems to allow for greater political equality between groups." (p. 58)

Two of the beginning chapters are only tangentially apposite to the central concern of intra and interstate conflict in Western and Central Africa and represent an attempt to reflect the disparate views of the current administration in Washington, DC and its opposite numbers in the African continent. Professor Harvey Glickman of Haverford College and Dr. Adekeye Adebajo of the Center for Conflict Resolution at the University of Cape Town are the representatives of these relatively divergent views which add somewhat more heat than light to the debate. These vantage points could well be subsumed in Professor Joseph S. Nye, Jr.'s innovative conceptualization of international politics as a complex game of three-dimensional chess which includes military, economic, and transnational issues as the three tiers (*Soft Power: The Means To Success in World Politics* [New York: Public Affairs, 2004], pp. 4 and 136). There is less of a disjunction, however, between the five core chapters and the introductory one by the editors, who are affiliated with the African Studies Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Although they furnish a remarkably succinct definition of conflict (p. 1), drawn from Kevin Avruch's *Culture and Conflict Resolution* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998) and develop a thoughtful chart of the phases of conflict (p. 2), adapted from Chandra Sriram and Karin Wermester's *From Promise to Practice: Strengthening UN Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), these exercises are principally post hoc ones for they do not explicitly inform the discourse in the remaining chapters.

Richard Dale is a retired Associate Professor of Political Science at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. He currently resides in Fountain Hills, Arizona.