

the changing nature of traditional institutions, and the persistence of ethnicity in politics. By taking a predominantly state-centric approach, the volume overlooks the complexities of African politics at the local level, especially with respect to how political authority emerges and manifests in the context of daily life. By generalizing about the “big topics in African studies” from the publications in a single journal which focus mostly on qualitative research and single-country case studies (as the editors note on page 8), the volume neglects the contributions of many experimental, ethnographic, and survey-based studies that have greatly contributed to the study of African politics in the past twenty years. Despite these gaps, the book provides a solid baseline for understanding the state of African studies today.

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Paul Higate and Mats Utas, eds. *Private Security in Africa: From the Global Assemblage to the Everyday*. London: Zed Books, 2017. viii + 184 pp. Acknowledgments. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Paper. £24.99. ISBN: 978-1-78699-025-9.

The aim of this edited collection is twofold. It is first of all an empirical project whereby the contributors have all engaged in providing an ethnographic account of the everyday practices of non-militarized private security in a collection of country case studies in Africa. The book also aims to apply and, in some respects, further develop the global security assemblage framing as developed by Rita Abrahamsen and Michael Williams (who are also contributors). In brief, the assemblage framing abandons a Weberian notion of statehood, as well as the view that private security is always the antithesis of the state, taking instead the viewpoint that there is a need to focus on, as Abrahamsen and Williams themselves explain in chapter 1, “the multiplicity of actors, the different forms of power and resources available to them, and the manner in which they come together in a contingent whole to exercise powerful effects in specific sites.” Each chapter focuses on a specific site and reflects on the nature of the security assemblage that is described.

In brief, the empirical foci of the various chapters are as follows: In Abrahamsen and William’s chapter 1, they explore the assemblages of gold mining in Tanzania, where the need for soft approaches to security inspires relations between corporate, NGO, and community entities. Chapter 2, by William Reno, focuses on private security within the context of Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Somalia, particularly on the distance between the international agenda of reform and the reality of entangled personal, political, and kinship ties. Chapter 3, by Peter Albrecht, focuses on order-making in Sierra Leone, and on how multiple sources of non-state power intertwine with Western reform attempts, rather than being replaced by them. In chapter 4, Maya Mynster Christensen explores the lived experiences

of marginalised Sierra Leonean ex-combatants recruited to Iraq, who experience the effects of “racialized hierarchies of power” when their expectations of reward are replaced by perceptions of slavery. Tessa Diphoorn, in chapter 5, provides an account of the moral ordering and force capital undertaken by armed response private security in South Africa, as well as the complicity of client and state in this “joint performance,” while in chapter 6 Marcus Mohlin describes the role of two American defense contractors in training the Liberian army, again within an SSR program, where global interests rearticulate relations on the ground. Chapter 7, by Jacob Rasmussen, shows how marginal security actors such as the Mungiki in Kenya can move in and out of the center of power within assemblages, whereas Peer Schouten, in chapter 8, explores the coalescing of private security around critical infrastructure in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the need to stay “plugged into broader everyday geographies of complicity...” in order to be effective. These empirical case studies are interesting in and of themselves, and the authors provide a snapshot into complex and compelling scenarios of security governance in spaces where plurality is the norm. All of the chapters acknowledge some aspect of blurring and fluidity in these assemblages—or as Peer Schouten calls them, the “entanglements” and the “complex choreography of security actors”—such as the morphing of private and public, security and insecurity, the shifting criminality of some of these assemblages, and the simultaneity of the local and global.

There are three issues raised by this book that remain with me after reading it. The first is the omission of African scholars on a book about Africa. To the book’s credit, there is a self-awareness, at least in the introduction by Paul Higate, that this is the case, and that the aim of the book is to simply address the “the paucity of work” on this, as Mats Utas outlines in the Epilogue. The second issue is the way in which ‘private security’ is interpreted—the traditional notion of ‘private’ security is stretched to include non-commercial elements, such as in the Albrecht and Rasmussen chapters where local forms of traditional and/or community groups are discussed. In other words, in keeping with its ethnographic aims, the book does not itself fall into a conceptual trap by trying to confine the empirical reality of shifting forms of security into fixed, conceptual boxes of what constitutes ‘private security.’ The third issue is the insertion of the individual into the assemblage framing—many of these assemblages are about the individuals engaged in security performances (as in Christensen’s chapter) and who may reinvent themselves as security actors or partake in “role-switching,” as Utas calls it. The assemblage framing has taken this into account and so is conceptually free to engage fully with what these assemblages are about. Overall, this book is an interesting and compelling read and lives up to its aim of exploring the everyday experiences of security governance in Africa.

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