about these 'excluded, poor and marginalised'. At least one would suppose that these people will be given a platform and a voice in the various chapters of the books, with regard to the impact of regionalisation on their daily lives. But unfortunately this is not the case. In some chapters there are references to interviews with all kinds of officials, but none with, for instance, local community members or township dwellers or other more marginalised people. This holds particularly for the second book. James Hentz, writing about the most prestigious project in the MDC, the US$1.365 billion Mozambique aluminium smelter (Mozal) (pp. 83–97), asks: 'for whom?' And while in the 14 notes of the chapter various interviews with (high) officials are mentioned, not a single interview is mentioned with anyone who could be considered a representative of the 'excluded, poor and marginalised' people. When Hentz writes about their protests against the project, this is based on secondary sources, like a trade union magazine. A similar pattern is shown in chapter 6 by Xenia Ngwenga and Ian Taylor (pp. 70–82), who write about the N4 Toll Road. It is explicitly mentioned that local communities protested against the toll road as they had to pay on a daily basis as commuters and local users of the road. The chapter includes 17 notes about who is interviewed and their organisational affiliation: *all* (impressive) officials (also from NGOs), but again not a single 'excluded, poor or marginalized' person. The same holds for Söderbaum's chapter 5, in which he explicitly mentions that there 'have been *many* types of local protests against the MDC' (pp. 66, italics added), but, according to the notes, not a single protester is directly consulted or interviewed. When Söderbaum and Taylor do mention '*en face*' interviews with some informal traders outside Nelspruit in chapter 4, these are the only interviewees mentioned in both books, and still without even their names being mentioned!

I focus here on the second book because its subtitle presents it as a 'case', and therefore one would expect in it the most empirical data from the grassroots level with reference to NRA's 'unbending concern for the excluded, poor and marginalised'. The first book, too, breathes more of an 'official' bias than empirical material derived from the lower levels of society in coming to grips with this 'most important component of the NRA' (Grant & Söderbaum: 9; Söderbaum & Taylor: 16). It seems that the NRA framework as it is put into practice in empirical research and in its policy orientation privileges the views and perspectives from the various elites, be it the project elite, PPP elite, academic elite, IFI elite, government elite or whatever other elite can be discerned. Despite this 'elite bias', the second book makes the mistake of swapping the transport ministers of Mozambique and South Africa. Mac Maharaj was Minister of Transport for South Africa and Paulo Muxanga for Mozambique (Söderbaum & Taylor: 4)!

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Governing Global Desertification edited by P. M. JOHNSON, K. MAYRAND and M. PAQUIN
Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. Pp. 312. £55.00.
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The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is one of the three multilateral environmental Conventions that emerged from 'Rio

Conference' on Environment and Development (1992). It represents the world's principal framework for combating desertification and mitigating drought, particularly in Africa. The UNCCD emphasises many of the recommendations in Agenda 21 in its text, including the need for good governance and the participation of civil society in combating desertification, as well as the need for partnerships to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development. In exploring the relationship between the UNCCD and these elements of governance, *Governing Global Desertification* helps to fill an important gap in the literature. Few articles and books have explored the political nature of desertification in this breadth and depth, or have paid the necessary attention to the links between the social, economic, political and environmental aspects of the issue.

The book is structured in 13 chapters, and covers topics as diverse as the scientific basis of desertification (chapter 2), and decentralisation and sustainable resource management (chapter 10). It neatly outlines the achievements, challenges, tensions and operational hurdles to be overcome in combating desertification at both international and national levels. For the most part, *Governing Global Desertification* is well written and largely accessible to specialists and non-specialists alike, despite the long list of acronyms the reader must familiarise him/herself with – an inherent problem in this subject area.

Although the content is seemingly comprehensive, there are three key themes that the book could have invested more time in unpacking. The first is the way in which local knowledge contributes to the governance of desertification. While chapter 7 provides a useful account of civil society's role in negotiating and implementing the Convention, chapter 11 considers 'knowledge and the UNCCD: the community exchange and training programme', and chapter 2 examines the scientific knowledge base of the UNCCD, none of these chapters clearly draws out the links between governance and local knowledge. In this respect, the book is largely focused on formal political institutions and their procedures, when in reality, informal, local institutions and traditional knowledges play important roles in combating desertification too.

The second area lacking in-depth attention relates to the role of the UNCCD within the architecture of international institutions. This is touched upon in chapter 2 (the scientific basis: links between land degradation, drought and desertification), where some of the earlier attempts to combat desertification are discussed; and in chapter 9 (the Global Mechanism and UNCCD financing: constraints and opportunities), which considers the UNCCD's funding. However, neither of these chapters specifies how exactly the UNCCD tessellates with the other UN agencies dealing with desertification issues. An institutional diagram showing the linkages between agencies and levels of implementation would have been a useful addition.

Finally, the identification of synergy with the other Rio Conventions could be addressed in much more detail, particularly with regard to the lessons that can be learned by the UNCCD from them, as well as the ways in which the UNCCD can act as a role-model and offer examples of best practice. A chapter devoted to synergy could have broadened the appeal of the book and contributed to environmental governance debates beyond 'desertification'. One way of doing this might have been by drawing out the overlaps between the UNCCD's NAPs (National Action Programmes) and the UN Framework Convention on

Climate Change's (UNFCCC) National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs).

Despite these minor quibbles, this is generally a very useful contribution to the literature for anyone wishing to learn more about the UNCCD and the challenges of its implementation, especially in Africa. Even though there are obviously several challenges associated with the global governance of desertification, the concluding chapter does not suggest any (better) alternatives to the multilateral convention approach. For the time being at least, the UNCCD looks set to remain as the world's primary weapon in the fight against desertification, and *Governing Global Desertification* is a useful tool in helping us understand how it operates.

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Conflict & Collusion in Sierra Leone by DAVID KEEN
Oxford: James Currey, 2005. Pp. 340. £16.50 (pbk.).
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Sierra Leone's 1991–2002 war that left over 50,000 dead was best known in Western media for craven fighters and for the victims whose limbs they amputated. Scholars and many others ponder why that war took such a nasty course. David Keen's book is the product of his long wartime association with the country, and of his numerous interviews of people from all sides. In it, he explains why this war was fought as it was and explores the motivations of its fighters.

Keen argues that this particularly vicious style of war was a logical, even if execrable, response of dispossessed people, especially young men, who expressed their rage at their marginalisation in a patronage-based society. Politics in Sierra Leone had long revolved around networks of patronage in which clients expected Big Men to contribute to their welfare. Keen traces how the centralisation of political power enabled these Big Men-turned-politicians in control of state institutions to grab the material benefits of political power for their personal use, and shed their old obligations to take care of those who were less powerful. Average young people who wanted a share of this loot had to compromise with this corrupt system. For many, this meant joining the armed gangs that politicians used to assert their authority in return for a few crumbs. This kind of politics provided the raw materials for this kind of war well before it started in 1991. Fighters, both rebels and renegade army units, fought in the context of the collapse of state services and the unwillingness of politicians to protect them. Only now, the political divides of the previous decades were much more militarised.

Keen's views that the root causes of war in Sierra Leone lie in a specific type of politics, and in individual actors' rational response to this situation, stand at odds with those of journalists like Robert Kaplan and of some scholars, in which fighters lack reason and act on atavistic passions. Keen also departs from his own earlier work in downplaying the lures of loot as a principal incentive for predation, although the reader will see that some informants identify this motive in some of his interviews. His real focus is on a crisis of patronage politics and the collapse of associated reciprocal bonds of social obligation. This brings Keen closer to the recent work of Paul Richards. Keen, Richards and others appear to