

claims about the regional and global system, Hoffman succeeds in making the political, economic and social connections he sets out to make. *The War Machines* provides a welcome addition to the modest Mano River canon, and a valuable entry point for academic visitors in and voyageurs out.

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Africa's Moment by J.-M. SEVERINO and O. RAY (trans. D. Fernbach)

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011. Pp. 352, £20.00 (hbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X12000468

Accelerating with the turn of the millennium, the study of where Africa 'is', and where it is 'going', has blossomed into a cottage industry of pan-African polemics. It is among such works that *Africa's Moment* is decidedly at home. Taking urban population growth as their starting point, Jean-Michel Severino and Olivier Ray outline the nascent 'great African upheaval' (3) and map its potentialities. Unfortunately, the result is a series of thematic sketches that adds little to an already-cramped debate.

Severino and Ray venture many reasonable predictions, for instance where they forewarn the danger of ecological mismanagement and anticipate a continued surge in religiosity. Yet such vast claims are consistently delivered on thin evidence. Broad assumptions are followed by a barrage of factoids – 'the 124 kilowatt-hours that an average African consumes each year are scarcely enough to power a 100-watt bulb for three hours a day' (201) – with scant attention given to the scholarly literature. This frequently results in shaky analysis. The Rwandan genocide is ascribed to growing tensions over land (183), while large-N macro-economic indicators alone lead the authors to proclaim that 'structural adjustment did succeed' (79).

Troubling *Africa's Moment* throughout, such questionable conclusions result from a narrative utterly devoid of politics. Steady growth in Mozambique and Burkina Faso is explained as due to these countries' leaders having 'avoided the mistakes' of unsound social and economic policies (168), in contrast to what the reader must presume were the honest errors of, for instance, Abacha and Amin. Even conflict and criminality are stripped of their surroundings: violence is explained as the product of *anomie*, 'a form of revenge against a stifled destiny' that is 'the only way of explaining' rape, torture and child soldiering (106). Here, as throughout the work, all-important political context is ignored amid impossibly wide assertions. This tendency to essentialise is particularly problematic where the authors' sweeping generalisations encroach on one another. Most notably, the fifth chapter ends with admonitions against 'reductionist' explanations for economic stagnation, notably geographic and cultural fatalism. The 'African tragedy', the reader is rightly told, 'is a tenacious myth' (63). Immediately following this apt critique, however, the sixth chapter brings the claim that fifty years of stalled growth are 'only a banal tragedy of economic cycles' (64). Successive crises of rich-country debt and commodity shocks supposedly vitiated all African agency; 'no country, no people could have grown and developed' (75) in the latter decades of the twentieth century, despite the authors' acknowledgment elsewhere that Botswana and other

developing countries, particularly in East Asia, did so. After assiduously picking apart arguments that depict Africa as a hapless victim of circumstance, Severino and Ray thus happily embrace their own variant of determinism.

Forward-looking analyses of continental trends have an important place in the academy. Disappointingly, however, Severino and Ray attempt too much with too little evidence, resulting in numerous unsupportable claims. Rarely are such large hats hung on pegs so small.

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Liberating Namibia: the long diplomatic struggle between the United Nations and South Africa by E. I. UDOGU

Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2011. Pp. 253, \$55.00 (pbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X1200047X

This monograph is based on an earlier doctoral dissertation, 'South West Africa People's Organization of Namibia as a non-state actor in the Namibian issue'. It has shifted its focus to 'a special context of a conflict-resolution scheme that taxed the diplomatic and political wit of some major international actors' (1). The emphasis on international diplomacy and especially the negotiations between the United Nations, South Africa and the liberation movement SWAPO is enhanced with the inclusion of the original documents that were relevant for the Namibian independence process since the League of Nations and the establishment of the UN Trusteeship Council. However, the book, one third of which consists of appendices (as well as many more pages containing the reproduction of relevant documents), remains disappointingly descriptive and lacks analytical depth. Much to the surprise of this reviewer, the Nigerian author fails to give sufficient recognition to the roles played by the frontline states in the negotiations during the 1980s and, even more surprisingly, the relevance of Nigeria's mediation under the then military junta led by Obasanjo.

Eight chapters present a summary, starting with the nineteenth-century history and ending with the conclusion of negotiations prior to the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 435 in 1978. Most notable in a positive sense is that the author refrains from a 'patriotic history'. He does not shy away from acknowledging that the liberation movement had an external and an internal wing, the representatives of which at times differed considerably on substantive policy issues. He also acknowledges that SWAPO was never the sole agency of the Namibian people (93), and stresses that SWAPO did not achieve national sovereignty through armed struggle, which 'did not reach the scale of success of other such liberation groups' (129).

Such realistic assessments contrast with the odd Pan-African perspective in literature of a similar kind, often guided by a triumphant anti-imperialist diction, celebrating anti-colonial struggles by definition as heroic victories over settler colonialism and its Western allies against all odds. On the other hand, the real processes behind the negotiated settlement remain vague and often invisible. Several sloppy mistakes are also disturbing. Riaan Eksteen, the South African permanent representative to the United Nations between 1976