

Erik Doxtader and Charles Villa-Vicencio, eds. *Through Fire with Water: The Roots of Division and the Potential for Reconciliation in Africa*. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, Inc, 2003. 405 pp. Maps. Notes. \$29.95. Paper.

Carolyn Nordstrom. *Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. 293 pp. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$50.00. Cloth. \$19.95. Paper.

Through Fire with Water and *Shadows of War* document the pervasive, endless, and complex political conflicts that have afflicted sub-Saharan Africa in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As such they are essential reading for specialists and nonspecialists alike who would seek to understand in greater depth the weakness, fragility, and even collapse of post-colonial sub-Saharan African states. Each volume, moreover, brings to the table atypical perspectives on these conflict syndromes. Carolyn Nordstrom offers the insights of an anthropologist on subjects that have tended to be dominated by political scientists. Erik Doxtader and Charles Villa-Vicencio have assembled the much-too-infrequently heard perspectives of African scholars and practitioners and others who have immersed themselves in the postindependence stories of African countries.

Through Fire with Water is a collection of essays profiling the historical roots and course of internal conflicts in fifteen sub-Saharan African countries, together with assessments of prospects for peace-building and reconciliation. It is introduced by the distinguished jurist Richard Goldstone. The essays are arranged according to estimates of the status of the conflicts: countries in the process of healing with potential for transitions to stable polities; countries in the midst of ongoing and recurrent conflicts; and finally those that are wrestling with the challenges of democratic consolidation.

The countries selected are from all regions but with a predominance of southern and eastern African entries, although Nigeria and Sierra Leone are included among the countries estimated to be in healing phases. All five of the essays focused on democratic consolidation are about southern African countries. A remarkable and important inclusion is Botswana. Long recognized as one of two sub-Saharan African stable democracies since independence (the other is Mauritius), Botswana nonetheless exhibits weak opposition parties, low and declining voter turnout, simmering ethnic tensions, a globe-leading HIV/AIDS pandemic, and shortfalls in observance of human rights. Presumably for reasons of length, there are no chapters on major conflicts in Liberia and elsewhere in the Horn of Africa besides Somalia.

The essays are all detailed, comprehensive, and, it would appear, balanced. For that reason, this collection will be useful to students, scholars, and policymakers alike, although they are long on description but short on analytic depth in pinpointing the dynamics of efforts at peacemaking and

postconflict political reconstruction. Part of the reason for this omission may be that while a few in-depth scholarly treatments of these subjects are listed in the bibliography, they are very infrequently cited. Linkages to the broader literature on postconflict reconstruction are, therefore, lacking. There is no concluding essay, and the introductory essay is short on comparisons of the cases.

Shadows of War is an immensely empathetic portrayal of the grassroots human dimensions of state decay and collapse—indeed, the disappearance of the public sector itself, in Habermasian terms. In this it complements Will Reno's two important works on warlord capitalism and corruption in West and central Africa. *Shadows* also centers on conflicts in southern African countries. Reno's work and many other works have identified the importance and debilitating consequences for governance of informal economies and black markets. What stands out in Nordstrom's book is the immensity, pervasiveness, and comprehensiveness of these sectors. Indeed, from the perspective of *Shadows*, it is formal economies that are sector exceptions to the rule of black market economies, and the state appears distant, preoccupied with violence, and largely meaningless in the lives of African peoples living in these circumstances.

Nordstrom's book is replete with insightful observations on the larger meaning of these "shadow" realities, many of which point to systemic features underlying their anarchic appearances. Her reflections on the meaning of power in these circumstances are particularly revealing and provocative. Implicitly, she reads these states as failing the Weberian requirement of monopolizing the legitimate use of force. More fundamentally, she observes that power in military and political terms is so broadly diffused throughout these shadow landscapes that, as she puts it, "power brokers, political and military alike, have the option of accepting responsibility for ground-level actions or risking the appearance that they aren't in complete control, that they don't represent the font of power" (80).

In their very different ways both books are effective in presenting the realities of conflict, but they have little to say about how, if at all, more orderly and transparent polities might be fashioned or about what insights, if any, peace-makers on the ground may have gleaned.

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E. Gyimah-Boadi, ed. *Democratic Reform in Africa: The Quality of Progress*.

Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004. vii + 351 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$23.50. Paper. \$59.95. Cloth.

More than a decade after Africa's so-called "second independence," assessments of the continent's democratic experiments have taken on a much