

crime fighters' but then discredited after political elites were nevertheless able to corrupt them. It becomes clear that as long as this crisis of youth is not addressed properly, there will always be *States of Violence* in Africa.

KRIJN PETERS
Swansea University

Snakes in Paradise: NGOs and the aid industry in Africa by H. HOLMÉN
Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press 2010. Pp. xxiii + 293, £22.50 (pbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X10000728

The last chapter of *Snakes in Paradise* concludes: 'The most effective way in which northern governments and international institutions can help Africa is not to "do development" but to remove obstacles and then leave development to the Africans and their organisations ... African governments must be allowed to protect their emerging markets ... debt cancellation should become a reality ... It would also make sense for African governments to invest in infrastructure and human development' (p. 230).

For Hans Holmén, the book's author, this is what *should* happen if rural Africa is to develop in the future. It is also an unlikely prospect. 'Another world is possible', the title of the final chapter, presents Holmén's hope for Africa, a hope that is negated by the detailed analysis of the current situation in preceding chapters. *Snakes in Paradise* gives a clear sense of the constrained opportunities and weakly institutionalised organisations that characterise much of rural Africa. False starts are more common than meaningful change, and most organisations are fairly conservative in orientation, rarely achieving the sorts of transformation imagined by outsiders, mirroring rather than shaping their environment (p. 50).

Most of the book consists of a survey of NGO experiences in rural areas over the past decade. Part one introduces us to the particular sorts of organisations Holmén is interested in: peasants associations and rural development organisations. Part two looks at the experience of these organisations in eastern and southern Africa; part three repeats the exercise for western Africa. The final section brings together these findings, before going on to recommend the indigenisation of African development and the withdrawal of Western donor agencies. Most of the cases are drawn from Anglophone Africa, or from the scholarship of development practitioners and researchers working in English.

The merit of the book is its consistent focus on rural organisations, notably cooperatives and farming organisations. It is here, where funding is often erratic and the attention of outsiders occasional, that the book makes a significant contribution. Though they are alluded to in the literature on NGOs or civil society, the sorts of rural organisation discussed here are rarely surveyed as a category in themselves. We get a detailed description of cotton farmers associations in Burkina Faso, including a fairly cautious assessment of the developmental impact of the Naam movement (p. 154). From eastern Africa comes a discussion of recent reforms in the agricultural sector in Uganda, which shows the fairly feeble reality of the formal shift from 'supply-led' extension work towards 'demand-led' advisory services.

These earlier chapters lack a single unifying argument. At times, I found myself formulating Holmén's argument for him. I arrived at the following: self-sustaining producer organisations in rural Africa typically mix a market-oriented approach with some sort of sharing mechanism or public good (p. 202). Those that survive tend to be indigenous and internally focused rather than externally generated and outwardly oriented; working with the state is not as good as some would imagine; success is less common than failure; and, rural organisations are rarely in and of themselves transformative. Holmén thus offers a critique of liberal conceptualisations of development, and challenges the way in which Western development agencies think about NGOs and civil society organisations. It is an important, if conservative, thesis (and a more conservative thesis, perhaps, than the author would like to make).

In terms of presentation, the text repeats some of the idiosyncrasies of the wider literature on NGOs. There are fifty-five abbreviations or acronyms, twelve of which refer to different sorts of organisation (CBOs, COs, CSOs, FOs, GONGO, INGOs, LOs, NGOs, POs, QUANGOs, SACCOs, VOs – though interestingly there are no FBOs). The language sometimes slides into the slippery prose of project assessments or programme evaluations, making for a more difficult read than is really necessary. In the case studies, the more personable voice of Holmén comes through, and one gets a clearer sense of his argument and how this differs from what others are saying.

Snakes in Paradise is similarly perplexing for the way that it takes a fairly nuanced approach to peasants associations and rural development organisations, but paints 'development' and the 'aid industry' with fairly broad brushstrokes. The frequently crude analysis of these larger structures and regimes limits the overall success of the argument. Reservations aside, Holmén provides an important new synthesis on the work of producer organisations and rural cooperatives, and a useful reminder of the often conservative nature of economic development and social change in Africa.

BEN JONES

University of East Anglia

War and Survival in Sudan's Frontierlands: voices from the Blue Nile

by W. JAMES

Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. 339, £25.00 (pbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X10000741

With this book, James completes a trilogy of monographs on the Uduk people of the Sudan/Ethiopia borderlands which bears comparison with her teacher, E. E. Evans-Pritchard's, famous Nuer trilogy. James has worked for over forty-five years with the group who are generally known – if known at all – as 'the Uduk'. In this time, she has followed their history of survival (the key word in the subtitle of her first book, *Kivanim Pa: the making of the Uduk people – an ethnographic study of survival in the Sudan–Ethiopia borderlands*, 1979) in the face of conflict, suffering and multiple displacement. Her linguistic and other ethnographic skills are today unparalleled in the region. Unlike Evans-Pritchard's Nuer books, however, her work is as historically and politically aware as it is ethnographically deep and anthropologically sophisticated. It represents something of a climax (one hopes