

Reviews

Foreign Intervention in Africa After the Cold War: sovereignty, responsibility and the war on terror by ELIZABETH SCHMIDT

Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2018. Pp. 472. \$36.95 (pbk), \$85.00 (hbk).

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The complexities of Africa's diplomatic history since 1991 are on full display in Elizabeth Schmidt's *Foreign Intervention in Africa After the Cold War*, a study of the external political and military interventions in Africa that follows her 2013 study of interventions during the Cold War. Like its predecessor, the book under review is a collection of case studies of the continent's better-known conflicts, presented in political narrative form followed by short conclusions and lengthy discussions of suggested readings. Schmidt argues that the main shift in interventions after the Cold War occurred in the realm of justification for intervention, which was no longer about containment but instead a 'response to instability, with the corollary of responsibility to protect, and the war on terror' (2).

After elaborating this premise and surveying the key intervention actors since 1991 – which include regional and international organisations as well as nation-states – the author proceeds through highly readable case studies of Somalia, Sudan/South Sudan, Rwanda, Zaire/DRC, Liberia/Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, the Arab Spring, Mali/Nigeria, US Africa policy, and a speculative epilogue on Trump and Africa. While much of the material within these narratives will not be new to specialists, Schmidt does offer some fresh emphases, such as the scope of political machinations that enveloped the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) which contributed to the country's 1994 genocide, and the degree of opportunism in the anti-Islamicist posturing of Somali politicians since the 1990s. The narrative of DRC's post-1991 diplomatic and military history is a model of succinct, accurate summary of a devilishly complicated and fraught topic, as too is the clarifying account of the Arab Spring and its messy aftermath. Schmidt is a reliable guide with a solid sense of causal proportionality across these conflicts, within which local actors and external intervenors find themselves in varying states of frustrated interdependency.

This book best serves as a reference tool, particularly for its sensible and compact narrative histories and its surprisingly thorough and useful literature surveys. While the author avoids policy prescriptions, she does not hesitate to evaluate the motives of key actors and the outcomes of their various interventions. In general, she finds most humanitarian-minded interventions as occasionally positive in the short term but destabilising in the long term, while the 'war on terror' interventions are invariably destabilising. As a book intended for policymakers, students and general readers, the animating spirit of these evaluations is to correct Western stereotypes about Africa and to challenge broader assumptions about the motivations and effects of intervention. Yet, in so doing Schmidt resides comfortably within the orthodoxies of contemporary Africanist academe – orthodoxies that oppose military

intervention and neoliberal austerity policies *tout court*, that criticise the self-interest, condescension and frequent cluelessness of humanitarian intervention, and that spiritedly defend African sovereignty; yet that also turn evasive when pressed to define just what (or who) best represents such sovereignty.

To take one example, Schmidt concedes that President George W. Bush's PEPFAR initiative to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa 'played a central role in stemming the AIDS tide in Africa and elsewhere', and then lists at length criticisms levelled against the programme – imperious religious-cultural requirements, subsidies for US pharmaceutical corporations, and unilateral diversion of funds better spent in multilateral fashion (339). All fair enough, yet in the book's epilogue addressing the Trump Administration, which currently questions the continuation of PEPFAR, Schmidt presents the programme in glowing terms as having 'promoted increased social stability and economic development' (385). Where, then, might one look for a guide to evaluate PEPFAR as a form of intervention, given the differing views stated in this book? The general device across Schmidt's book to address thornier questions of intervention is to defer to 'the voices of African civil societies' (9) and to support policies that address their underlying grievances. Yet, as with so many other issues relating to foreign intervention, these voices are inherently cacophonous; they readily inhabit positions both in favour and against interventions such as PEPFAR. The book's corrective-minded characterizations of foreign interventions do not affect the reliability of its conclusions, which are never really wrong. But they are somewhat defensive and risk averse, and are never counterintuitive.

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Distant Justice: the impact of the International Criminal Court on African politics by PHIL CLARK

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Recent developments in The Hague support the idea that the international criminal justice project, epitomised by the International Criminal Court (ICC), is in crisis. In *Distant Justice*, Phil Clark first re-examines the Court's operational flaws and the damage the court has done to African societies and then proposes radical changes. Centring primarily on Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Clark critically assesses the impact of the ICC, both on national politics and the everyday lives of citizens, analysing the Court 'as an external *intervention* into African societies that experiences a range of *intersections* with domestic actors, institutions, networks, and processes' (6, emphasis in the original). In doing so, Clark uses the central concept of *distance*, which examines the effects of delivering justice from afar, but also the philosophical underpinning of the ICC's model as 'neutral and impartial', given the Court's primarily non-African staff with limited experience on the continent. The political and philosophical conceptions of distance that the ICC has espoused are visible in the ways the Court has framed itself as superior to national institutions, which are viewed as infected by political, social and cultural influences from which the ICC claims to be insulated (303). Ultimately, the Court failed to