

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

be converging on a rough agreement that the breakdown of political authority, especially in terms of people's social expectations of what politicians should do for them, is a key cause of Sierra Leone's recent woes.

Though Keen writes about Sierra Leone, his analysis can be applied to recent conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Congo. It may be that patronage-based politics in some African states simply provides poor terrain for building bureaucratic states, and linking them to the contemporary world economy in ways that provide benefits for a wide array of citizens. But one wonders why patronage politics in other countries like Botswana or Ghana, or for that matter, in South Korea or China, does not suffer the same crisis of legitimacy that afflicted Sierra Leone, as insiders appropriated resources and shirked customary obligations to share. Is there something in Sierra Leone's brand of patronage politics that makes it especially unsuited to state-building in comparison with other types of patronage?

Keen offers that inadequacies of local justice and the petty tyrannies of local administrators have to be addressed to remove the root causes of this kind of war. This would break apart local tyrannies of privilege, and would force government to acknowledge direct obligations to citizens to provide services and other benefits. International support for this state-building is unlikely in the wake of developments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Instead, international organisations rely on the local actors that Keen condemns to run programmes that neither state agencies nor foreigners are willing or able to run. Nonetheless, Keen's lessons about political crises and conflict mean that this book should be of interest to many more than the specialist of Sierra Leone.

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The Battle of Adwa: reflections on Ethiopia's historic victory against European colonialism edited by PAULOS MILKIAS and GETACHEW METAFARIA
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The dedication and preface of this book rang alarm bells – especially the constant mention of the value of Adwa for the oppressed peoples of the world – not least because of the contradictory role of Ethiopia as both Empire and independent African nation. That is not to say that such descriptions are not valid; however, this simplistic presentation of Adwa clouds a much more complicated history.

Taken as an academic study, it is the partisan nature of the contributions that is most problematic. Especially revealing are the various codas to the pieces presented in this volume. Almost all of the contributors manage to denigrate the present Ethiopian regime, and explicitly or implicitly criticise the existence of Eritrea. Moreover, the recent border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea overshadows the 'reflections' presented in this collection. It would be unfair to single any one contribution as an example of this, but certainly the constant berating of the current political arrangements in Ethiopia, and nationalist tub-thumping, is tiresome.

Indeed while much of what is presented here is hardly ground-breaking, this is a collection that could satisfy those who want to know more about the