

## Reviews

**The Security Arena in Africa: local order-making in the Central African Republic, Somaliland, and South Sudan** by TIM GLAWION

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 272. \$99.99 (hbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X22000027

While western scholarship once framed African states as fragile and failing, the tides have turned in recent decades to recognise that the failure may lie with Eurocentric theories of the state themselves. Tim Glawion's new book, *The Security Arena in Africa: local order-making in the Central African Republic, Somaliland, and South Sudan* is a contribution to growing efforts to develop new theoretical and non-normative approaches to political order-making and insecurity in so-called 'fragile' states.

The book is based around the puzzle that even in places where the state is similarly characterised as fragile and conflict-torn, everyday experiences of insecurity vary substantially (218). To understand this variation, the book makes several key claims: first, Glawion argues that security can be helpfully understood through the 'security arena' – his core analytical construct, in which actors 'interact on the issue of physical integrity around a predefined area of study' (25).

Second, security arenas have both an inner circle, defined by physically proximate communities of people who have daily interactions, and an outer circle, where interactions are irregular and mediated through social relations (such as family) or economic activities (such as trade) (33).

Third, within this arena, different actors strategically select their preferred mode of order-making, ranging from fluid orders which are personalised and can be regularly reconfigured, to stable orders which are institutionalised, hierarchical and fixed. While stable orders require extensive resources and produce predictable security outcomes, fluid orders require minimal and occasional resources and allow for 'modifiability' – or space for people to exercise agency (30–1). For Glawion, insecurity can be caused by fluid or stable orders, as well as contests over which type of order should dominate.

The book also discusses centre-periphery relations (mainly treated in historical context), and embedded or detaching interventions (in the context of state reach and foreign intervention).

Finally, Glawion makes a methodological claim. He is a proponent of mid-N studies, arguing that they can provide new comparative insights that are passed over by both single case studies and large-N comparisons.

The book examines nine cases across three countries regularly ranked as the most fragile states in the world. Each case constitutes a discrete security 'arena', with its nucleus a deductively selected urban centre. Through detailed interviews, and multiple trips to the field, Glawion finds that his respondents see urban hubs as the internal circle of the security arena – a space that is defined by comparatively stable forms of ordering (and thus greater predictability). But pass a certain distance from the centre, and respondents articulate an outer circle, typified by fluid ordering.

Beyond impressive fieldwork, a particular strength of Glawion's intervention is his commitment to disentangling security outcomes from the form of political order-making, clearly noting that greater levels of security are no more closely associated with stability than with fluidity. This is a very important finding, helping to counter-balance the too-often uninterrogated assumption that formality and state-ness provide better outcomes for ordinary people than informality and non-stateness. The framework has the significant benefit of putting diverse actors and their jurisdictional claims-making on equal analytic footing, allowing not just a comparison across a range of cases, but an examination of farmers and teachers alongside warlords and international aid agencies to offer a textured picture of everyday security in often overlooked parts of the world.

The book left me with a couple of questions. First, I wondered why Glawion chose (urban) *space* to conceptualise and identify distributions of jurisdictional claims, as compared with other potential axes – for instance, patterns of legal pluralism (see Benton's *Historical Perspectives on Legal Pluralism*, Cambridge University Press, 2002 and Massoud's *Shari'a Inshallah*, Cambridge University Press, 2021) or sites of surveillance (see Purdeková on "Mundane Sights" of Power' in *African Studies Review*, 2016). Intuitively, space seems helpful to understand conflict zones, criss-crossed by frontlines and no-go zones – but this assumption merits elaboration.

Second, while the book purports to delink stable ordering, state control, and security, at times it implies the opposite, for instance, when Glawion notes that the outer circle is characterised by 'unruly actors', 'security-related rumours and the use of violence' (222–3). This left me wondering the extent to which the very real methodological constraints of researching (and thereby literally centring) comparatively safe zones might risk reproducing the very approach that the security arena seeks to critique – namely, the notion of a less-governed and more insecure hinterland (see, e.g. 112–14).

These questions point to the challenge of disentangling complex and contingent political dynamics, and their relation to the elusive concept of security. The book should be applauded for its efforts to investigate often-pathologised places on their own terms, its empirical richness and its theoretical ambition.

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**Mennonites and Post-Colonial African Studies** edited by JOHN M. JANZEN, HAROLD F. MILLER & JOHN C. YODER

London: Routledge, 2021. Pp. 316. \$160.00 (hbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X22000039

This earnest book documents the lives of a cohort of men and women who, in the 1960s and 1970s, helped to define the academic study of Africa. All of the 22 people whose stories are told here were Mennonites, formed in a Christian tradition of non-violence. Most of them were conscientious objectors who refused to serve in the US military during the Vietnam War. Most of them enlisted, instead, in overseas service, principally in the Congo or in Tanzania, where there were long-established Mennonite churches and schools. All of them were purposefully transformed by their period of service, and went on to advanced study in history, medicine or