foundation is composed of personal networks—networks sustained by shared commitments to the rule of law. Nor should it be any surprise that these emergent networks of integrity are engaged in pitched battle with those that sustain the neopatrimonial state, operating at a distinct disadvantage—but like Achebe’s anthills, “surviving to tell the new grass of the savannah about last year’s brush fires” (28).

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LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS


The task of finding solutions to the conflicts in Africa remains urgent and topical. Although there have been fewer large-scale wars in the continent since the end of the Cold War, other forms of warfare persist. These include small-scale conflicts involving factionalized insurgents, electoral violence, and violence over access to resources within and between states. The social, economic, and human cost of these conflicts is just as devastating.

In *Peacebuilding in the African Union,* Abou Jeng explores options for sustainable peacebuilding in Africa. The book seeks to gauge the relevance and applicability of international law in confronting postcolonial internal conflicts in Africa. It examines the philosophical and structural limitations of international law in the context of peacebuilding and considers whether this necessitates reconceptualization through the framework of the African Union.

The central argument of the book is that international law has largely failed to provide effective and sustainable solutions to postcolonial internal conflicts in Africa. In its normative and institutional framings, international law has proved incapable of advancing innovative approaches to confronting African conflicts. A major reason for this, Jeng argues, is that international law is “still overwhelmingly trapped in dialogues of historical contradictions and controversies” (278). These contradictions arise partly from the Eurocentric historical framework from which contemporary international law emerged. Dominant peace advocacy has therefore generally conceptualized peace and peacebuilding in the context of “Eurocentric thinking” (6).

The role of the Organization for African Unity (OAU), founded in the immediate aftermath of colonial rule in the 1960s, epitomized the limitations of international law. The OAU’s principle of nonintervention in the
internal affairs of member states proved to be an impediment to addressing conflicts in the continent. With the proliferation of internal violence, unconstitutional governments, and human rights violations in the 1980s and 1990s, it became increasingly clear that the initial vision that inspired the OAU had failed and that transformation was needed to meet the new challenges of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The establishment of the African Union in 2002 to replace the OAU offers a new peacebuilding framework.

Jeng proposes that the transformative peacebuilding approaches articulated in the Constitutive Act of the African Union offer more relevant and appropriate engagement with internal conflicts in Africa. The principle of nonindifference enunciated in the Constitutive Act marks a radical shift from the OAU’s principle of nonintervention. According to Jeng, the nonindifference principle in Article 4 represents a “robust challenge to the dominance of the neoliberal international approaches to peace” (10). It marks a departure from aspects of international law’s foundational ethos that have conditioned and constrained postcolonial Africa’s peacebuilding initiatives.

The author offers two case studies of recent interventions in African conflicts to buttress this point. The discussion of the African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB) and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) focuses on the potential and challenges of the African Union’s practices of peacebuilding. In spite of their limitations, AMISOM in Somalia and the proactive internal peacebuilding initiatives in Somaliland are seen as a departure from previous tepid responses to internal conflicts in Africa. The approaches to conflict and peacebuilding embedded in the Constitutive Act of the AU, Jeng concludes, offer a window of opportunity through which a more peaceful Africa can be envisioned.

The book, which is theoretically grounded in so-called Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL), offers original and engaging insights into understanding the legalities of peacebuilding in postcolonial Africa. Although the book is largely a work of international law, it succeeds in going beyond a discussion of legal processes to include relevant historical, political, and sociological perspectives. The case studies of Burundi and Somalia offered in the later chapters provide appropriate and convincing justification for the author’s key arguments. As the author acknowledges, however, the political conditions in these countries are still evolving, and as such, some of the book’s conclusions are tentative at best.

The main limitation of the book is its narrow engagement with the concept of peacebuilding—a term that figures prominently in the book’s title and underpins most of its arguments. The book would clearly have benefited from a more robust engagement with the conceptual and theoretical discourse on “peacebuilding” itself, which is a relatively new term in international law and conflict transformation in Africa. Another limitation has to do with narrative style. The frequent reference to the views of
Out in Africa examines lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activism in South Africa and Namibia between 1995 and 2006, primarily through ethnographic observation and interviews with the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) in Johannesburg, and Sister Namibia and The Rainbow Project (TRP) in Windhoek. Impressively researched, pragmatic, and even-handed, Out in Africa is an important contribution to the fledgling field of African queer studies and to scholarship on global LGBT politics. Currier’s book complements, in particular, the work of Andrew Tucker on queer visibility in Cape Town, Kapya Kaoma on the U.S. religious right and political homophobia in Africa, and Rafael de la Dehesa on sexual rights movements in Latin America. Currier adds to a larger critique of the neocolonial aspects of Western advocacy for gay rights in the global South, and her emphasis on women’s organizations is much needed. The book questions the assumption that “visibility” should be the measure of LGBT movement success; she sees visibility, instead, as a strategy that is used in conjunction with deliberate forms of invisibility. Perhaps her most crucial point is that international organizations and donor nations involved in Africa—and indeed scholars—need to be far more aware of what visibility strategies local activists are using when they bring publicity to LGBT issues, since what Currier calls “uncontrolled visibility” can make same-sex loving and gender-nonconforming people extremely vulnerable.

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