

Papa Samba Ndiaye. *Les organisations internationales africaines et le maintien de la paix : L'exemple de la CEDEAO, Libéria, Sierra Leone, Guinée-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire*. Paris: L' Harmattan, 2014. 338 pp. EUR 33.25 (paper), ISBN 978-2-336-29367-7.

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Peacekeeping Interventions in West Africa

Resorting to different theoretical perspectives of International Relations (IR) as analytical lenses, this book explores various hypotheses to explain the limits of the peacekeeping interventions of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The author focuses mainly on analyzing the intervention in Ivory Coast but gives it a comparative basis by placing the analysis within the wider context of previous ECOWAS interventions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau to assess to how lessons learned from these experiences enabled the organization to act more effectively in the Ivory Coast. Nevertheless, this comparative approach is limited and does not engage with the specificities or the understanding of broader peace and conflict dynamics concerning the first three cases. For instance, in the case of Guinea-Bissau, the author presents a rather partial perspective on ECOWAS's intervention, overlooking the local debates and controversies about the organization's role in the country (one that is not exclusive to the aftermath of the war but that has been perpetuated in recent episodes).

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first places the emergence of ECOWAS as a security actor in the context of West Africa's conflicts, analyzing their origins with special emphasis on the case of Ivory Coast. The second chapter outlines the theoretical framework. Four theoretical perspectives are presented: functionalism, realism, Marxism, and multilevel governance perspectives. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the juridical, financial, and operational limitations faced by ECOWAS. The

fourth chapter follows a functionalist perspective in order to put forward a bulk of lessons learned by the organization and their role in the reconfiguration of ECOWAS's interventions (namely from ad hoc to more structured and professional operations). Chapter 5 uses realist theory to highlight the complex balance of power among different countries in the region and its role in the regionalization of war. The following chapter examines the intervention of former colonial powers, mostly France, from the economic, military, and diplomatic points of view, informed by dependency and structural imperialism theories. In the last chapter, the author resorts to a multilevel governance approach and analyzes the difficult relationship between the UN and ECOWAS and the insufficiencies of both organizations.

The major contributions made by this book lie in its strong didactic component and empirical grounding. Thus, with regard to the first contribution, the detailed methodological assessments, as well as the analysis of the contributions and limitations of different theories of International Relations, must be highlighted. The text then conducts a thorough analysis of conflicts and wars that have taken place in recent decades in West Africa, refusing simplistic and monocausal explanations but placing them instead in the framework of a large "conflict system" (p. 33) and drawing attention to the multiple local, international, economic, and social logics as well as the policies underlying the eruption and maintenance of direct violence.

The second important contribution of this work lies in the methodology used for the research, which breaks away from the more traditional approaches of the field of International Relations and even from those of much of peace and conflict studies. It is grounded on extensive fieldwork, including participant observation (the author had an internship at ECOWAS for a few months), and through this, the author presents in a convincing way some of the experiences and perceptions of the individuals involved in peacekeeping missions and other staff in international organizations, thereby exposing, at some instances, the micropolitics of peacekeeping, absent from most of the literature.

This methodological approach results in a very important contribution to an in-depth working knowledge of ECOWAS, its institutional framework, its activities, the debates and the political, financial, and technical barriers to action, showing the diversity of actors engaged at various levels (identifying, for instance, the differences between member states, and the search for regional hegemony but also looking into the individual points of view and difficulties).

At the same time this is a work that refuses stereotypes of various kinds about African politics. The use of a comparative perspective offers an account of change and development within ECOWAS that challenges the stereotyped image of African politics and the African continent in general as immutable without falling into the opposite extreme of romanticization. In this sense, it shows that improvements in the political and operational dimensions, such as the design of more clear and consensual mandates, the nomination of a civilian special representative as chief of mission, or better coordination mechanisms, run in parallel with the permanence of the financial and logistical weaknesses.

The author describes in a thorough way the contradictions which govern the organization, portraying it as a space where power relations and interests of various natures clash. The smaller scale of the organization is not sufficient to mitigate the latent problems of international organizations in general, including a lack of systematization of knowledge and institutional memory; the challenges of democratization at various levels; the rotation of staff; the distrust of the people against the opulent lifestyles and lack of concern for local dynamics (a lifestyle synthesized in the phrase “avion / palace / per diem,” p. 152) and morally reprehensible or even criminal practices (sexual abuse); the disconnect between mandates and the technical and political capacities; the lack of

coordination between civilian and military dimensions, and between commitment to the organization and commitment to the national authorities; or the contempt with which political and bureaucratic leaders in each country view, in fact, the mission of the organizations, which are often used only as an outlet for skilled labor or seemingly qualified labor. Thus, the author also rejects the temptation of a politically correct, and in some cases essentialist, consensus around the absolute advantages of regional organizations as peacekeeping actors via an apparent cultural affinity and an apparent democratization of international intervention models. However, from a theoretical point of view, the analysis lacks some ambition and novelty. Taking into account the methodological approach and several interesting notes throughout the text, one would expect this study to reach bolder epistemological and ontological conclusions.

What is at stake is not the validity of the conclusions or analysis. The author explains very well the limits of a functionalist approach to organizations, demonstrating that learning is not sufficient for organizational transformation. He points out the complexity of the definition and the questionable use of the realist imagery of national interest (which he incidentally defines well as a rhetoric used by different groups for different purposes) and the profound contradiction of actors intervening for peace who often are also involved in the dynamics of violence (in a more obvious or disguised form), highlighting the complex game of alliances forged and broken in the last decades. Finally, he inserts the dynamics of West Africa in a wider context, based on the thinking of Johan Galtung about structural imperialism, which emphasizes the contradictory influence of the economic and strategic policy of the countries of the geopolitical “center,” namely the former colonial powers and particularly France, as well as how the military training provided by them leads to the strengthening of authoritarian regimes as a form of containing terrorism, aiming principally to protect the power centers.

In this context, the author also escapes the temptation to attribute the dynamics of violence to a mere automatic consequence of global structural violence dynamics, emphasizing both the role of African elites and local power relations as well as the historical dynamics of politics and economics in the reproduction of violence and the limitation of organizations. Also, recognizing a logic of “sharing the African burden” (p. 246) reigning between the various Western powers (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Portugal), he emphasizes that the effectiveness and legitimacy (based on the assessment by

the populations) of each intervention should also be analyzed case by case, with the main objective being to avoid or end humanitarian disasters. These observations are widely supported by a vast literature on the political and operational limits of peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations, namely in the specific case of ECOWAS.[1]

The key issue, from a theoretical point of view, is that the book limits itself to testing hypotheses within a limited conceptual framework and a relatively closed ontological universe. Despite wanting to distance itself from the traditional and dominant approaches in International Relations, it does so in a somewhat timid way, without questioning some of its essential assumptions, such as its extremely restricted ontological universe, and excluding much more interesting perspectives that have contributed decisively and incisively to renewing the theoretical corpus of International Relations and peace and conflict studies. A stronger book would have required going beyond the initial question, which does not question the broader meanings of existence and functioning of international organizations, and beyond a somewhat mechanistic approach that seeks to mainly establish cause-effect relations in the interaction between units. It would have required going beyond a “problem-solving” approach.[2]

The proposal for overcoming the limits of the functionalist, realist, and Marxist (or structuralist, in some categorizations) perspectives is to present the perspective of multilevel governance as an analytical lens. First, as is rightly pointed out, it is not an equivalent approach to the ones presented above. Further, also for this reason, it does not bring anything really new. Although the book breaks a little with the state-centrism of IR, there are other approaches that could be included in the perspectives listed and that would lead to somewhat different conclusions. Thinking beyond the state is increasingly present in IR, and even more in peace and conflict studies. However, what is less present are ways of thinking that counter in a more consequential manner the division between local and international, between formal and informal, between political and nonpolitical violence, and between exceptional and everyday violence. This means that the types of actors analyzed, as well as the kinds of relationships and dynamics at stake, remain in the same small restricted ontological universe of realism-liberalism: formal actors in some way related to the state, seen as political by actors with the power to define and close to, or seeking to influence, the spheres of recognized political power.

An approach that exposes significant gaps in the dominant IR paradigm can take several paths. It could, for example, question ECOWAS as part and expression of a global governance system—and not just a unit affected by relations between states, international organizations, and organized civil society. Assuming that systems are characterized by flexibility and the ability to self-regenerate, the ability to create images of themselves that conform to ideal visions, some argue that this global governance system creates its own reality depending on the reproduction requirements, making it an auto-poetic system.[3] To take another example, such an approach could also be based on an analysis of imperialism or empire, observing not only the territorial logic of occupation and expropriation but also their interstitial, biopolitical, and symbolic logics.[4] It could, for example, question the meanings, expressions, or divergences of the legitimizing discourse of liberal peace in the African context, reflecting on hybridity, co-option, and resistance.[5] It could focus on the silenced voices, the everyday life experiences of marginalized groups in the analysis of IR and often depicted by anthropology; it could question the assumption that IR refers “to relations between organized political societies” (p. 297) and look for the micro, dispersed, fragmented, and everyday expressions of the limitations and contradictions of a peacekeeping system that frequently also maintains the status quo.

Notes

[1]. Cyril I. Obi, “Economic Community of West African States on the Ground: Comparing Peacekeeping in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and Côte D’Ivoire” *African Security* 2, nos. 2/3 (2009): 119-135; Peter Arthur, “ECOWAS and Regional Peacekeeping Integration in West Africa: Lessons for the Future,” *Africa Today* 57, no. 2 (2010): 2–24.

[2]. Robert Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Order: Beyond IR Theory,” *Millennium: Journal of International Politics* 10, no. 2 (1983): 126-155; Michael Pugh, “Peacekeeping and Critical Theory,” *International Peacekeeping* 11, no. 1 (2004): 39-58.

[3]. Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, “Global Governance, Liberal Peace, and Complex Emergency,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 25, no. 1 (2000): 117-143.

[4]. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Mark Duffield and Nicholas Waddell, “Securing Humans in a Dangerous World,” *International Politics* 43, no. 1 (2006): 1-23.

[5]. Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2001); Oliver Richmond, “A Pedagogy of Peacebuilding: Infrapolitics, Resistance, and Liberation,” *International Political Sociology*, 6 (2012): 115–131.

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