

## Book Notes

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Autesserre, Séverine (2010) *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 344 pp. ISBN 9780521156011.

Séverine Autesserre's book on the Congo peacebuilding effort has already been awarded more than one academic award, and deservedly so. It is relevant, timely, and carefully researched; and the topic has received surprisingly little rigorous attention in the literature. Drawing from more than 330 interviews and extensive field research, Autesserre develops a case study of the largely unsuccessful international intervention in the DRC from 2003 to 2006. The main proposition in the book is that the international effort failed due to a lack of understanding of the complex local context and conflicts. Need for a micro-level focus is not a new insight per se, but the argumentation and the evidence brought to bear are more detailed and compelling than most existing accounts. Autesserre emphasizes grassroots rivalries over land, resources, and political power that motivated widespread violence. When international actors interpreted continued fighting as the consequence of national and regional tensions alone, they vastly underestimated the complex local conflicts. Intervening in these conflicts was also seen as outside the legitimate mandate of the UN. Hence, the dominant peacebuilding culture precluded action on local conflicts, ultimately stifling the international efforts to end the killings. We cannot know to what extent the specifics of the trouble with the Congo mirror troubles elsewhere, but the mere scale of the Congo conflict makes the lessons important in their own right. Furthermore, as peacebuilding culture is international, the findings are likely to be important for reorienting future interventions to increase success rates. Hence, it should be standard reading for those interested in international peacebuilding in the DRC, Africa, and elsewhere, for both researchers and policymakers.

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Bergsmo, Morten, ed. (2012) *Thematic Prosecution of International Sex Crimes*. Beijing: Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher. 452 pp. ISBN 9788293081319.

In March 2012, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued its first trial judgement, which not only legitimized the existence of the ICC as a judicial body, but also confirmed the 'very idea of thematic prosecution' (p. 2). This anthology, the first of its kind, serves as a forum for critical discussion about the suitability of thematic prosecution (prioritizing certain types of crimes over others). *Thematic Prosecution of International Sex Crimes* outlines the philosophical and moral justifications for thematizing the investigation and prosecution of sex crimes, and to a certain extent, crimes against children. The question the anthology confronts is 'whether the sexual offences can be properly isolated or taken out from the broader criminal conduct' (p. 305), compelling the authors to evaluate the utility of thematizing investigations. After laying the theoretical foundation, the anthology sketches prosecutorial approaches, addressing varying criminalities at local, national, and international jurisdictions, and dissecting the complexities of the multifarious nature of victimization. Due to the challenges that international courts face – limited jurisdiction, scarce resources and personnel, and external influences – Kai Ambos argues that criminal justice processes are always selective (p. 293). However, as Christopher Mahony's criticism suggests, international courts may be 'more about prosecuting victor's justice and administering' regime change, rather than elevating the status of previously disregarded global norms, undermining the very purpose of thematic prosecution (p. 81). The challenge going forward will be to contextualize crimes of sexual violence within broader systems of inequality and violence, while realizing that 'sexual violence crimes may have been just one aspect of the larger gendered nature or outcomes of a particular episode in a conflict or mass violation' (Valerie Oosterveld, p. 192).

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