

let's move on" in relation to some of the very comprehensive sketches and data around the activism, overall each chapter builds on the conceptualisation of women's activism in Africa as more than a narrative of victims. These are women who speak from within, women who have raised the power of the collective and they are women, like Zainub Bangura (p 229) who is committed to peace and prosperity for all Africans. It brings forth the resilience, clarity, organisation and intelligence of these women. It showcases their determination, their astute understandings of their needs and challenges and it forces the reader to recognise that there still are immense constraints on women that marginalise them from economic and political institutions. But the ability to be innovative in thought and action, the deftness with which new generation female activists engage with the social media and a growing sense of international solidarity all signifies hope. Hope for a positive change. This is a very inspiring and necessary read at a time when women's voices are regularly muffled.

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**Berwouts, Kris, *Congo's Violent Peace, Conflict and Struggle Since the Great African War*. London: Zed Books 2017, xxi and 193pp.**

Kris Berwouts is a seasoned observer and independent analyst of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), especially with respect to the ongoing crisis in the east of the country, having worked full-time on Central Africa for almost 20 years. He started off in the non-governmental organisation (NGO)-world and later partnered with different international actors in the DRC such as the Department for International Development (DfID), the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the European Union (EU). He has written extensively on the Great Lakes Region and, in this latest publication looks at the situation, again, from a different angle. Its 167 pages are packed with facts and figures, information and analysis while several detailed maps guide the reader through the intricate world of the Great Lakes Region. It is well-written, logical and coherent, and easy to read. One immediately feels that Berwouts has absorbed the subject he writes about.

For me, former Belgian Ambassador to Burundi and Belgium's Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region, this is mainly a book which makes you think. It draws the attention to several aspects of the crisis in the Region, it reminds you of certain facts and figures but, most importantly, it opens your mind for a broader perspective of crisis analysis. In the Acknowledgements, the author explains how he has been fed by conversation, brainstorming and a large spectrum of interviews. In the Introduction, he specifies that it is the aim of this book to identify root causes and layers of conflict, and the interaction between them, analysing how they shed light on violence. He hopes to contribute to a more subtle approach to conflict resolution, namely from a bottom-up perspective.

This is a most useful approach, especially for the DRC, which may easily be the richest country in Africa. It has all the potential to further Africa's economic and social progress, be it through green energy, food production mineral extraction and industrial output. However, the DRC doesn't live up to expectations. On the contrary, as Berwouts describes so well towards the end of his book, the rays of hope and light which appeared on the horizon after the defeat of the rebel movement M23 in 2013/2014 quickly disappeared again in the morass of lack of capacity, lack of political will and addiction to power which keeps the elite rich and the ordinary Congolese poor.

Several chapters describe historic developments, such as the transfer from Mobutu to Kabila, the two African wars on Congolese soil (1996-1997 and 1998-2002) and the peace processes of Lusaka and Sun City. Some refresh our knowledge of names, dates, places and figures. They are very useful. More important, however, are the chapters devoted to the root causes and the background issues of conflict. When I was Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, I often wondered how little recognition is given in peace processes to the underlying causes of conflict, on the one hand, and to the need for a vision for post-conflict reconstruction and development, on the other.

Berwouts responds to that preoccupation, in part with respect to root causes, in part with respect to issues that hover in the background of a conflict situation. Berwouts draws the attention to four issues. The first one is land, identity and nationality, especially in the eastern part of the DRC. Secondly, comes the viability of a war-economy. Third, is the role which has been played by Rwanda in the past decades, keeping conflict smoldering in Congo. And, fourth, is the role of the politics of war.

The first issue is of prime importance and far too often overlooked. In the eastern DRC, especially the two Kivu-provinces, have for

centuries, before and after colonisation, known different immigration waves from the east, mainly from Rwanda and Burundi, and are populated to a large extent by cross-border ethnic population groups. In such a situation, land — and, in this case, fertile land — becomes a point of tension and a root cause for conflict, especially when customary law and statutory law become mixed-up and when nationality becomes the play-ball of politics. Not enough attention is given to this and it should be further researched and analysed. Apart from Berwouts' excellent job, also David Van Reybrouck, in his book *Congo — The Epic History of a People* (reviewed in Vol 37, No 2 of this journal) extensively elaborated on the land issue.

The second issue is certainly also crucial, namely the hesitation to return to normality and the appeal and benefits, for some, of a war economy, keeping conflict attractive and alive, especially when mineral resources are there to grab. Congo's is a story of a tragic balance between abundance and great misery, as Berwouts puts it. The income from illegal mining keeps the conflict attractive and alive. Berwouts, however, refuses to see the massive plunder as the main cause of the Congolese wars because that would prevent us from seizing the full complexity of this conflict, to be read together with land, identity and nationality.

Third, is the candid analysis of the destabilising role which has been played by Rwanda, causing two African wars on Congolese soil in six years, out of security concerns after the disappearance of génocidaires in the Congolese forest in 1994, on the one hand, out of a need to finance the dream of economic recovery, on the other. This issue is, of course, well-known, but Berwouts sheds fresh light on it as he uses the necessary nuance and subtlety when analysing the different angles and phases of Rwanda's involvement.

The last issue, namely the use of politics and the abuse of conflict by the elite to stay in power, is equally well-handled. Power-politics is nothing new and everyone knows that politicians are prepared to go very far. Berwouts describes, for example, very well, how issues such as the re-drawing of the provincial boundaries, even though required by the Constitution, is manipulated in such a manner as to making the organisation of elections difficult, if not impossible. A second issue is, how politicians, through failed security sector reform, let an opportunity for peace and calm disappear and slip again into the usual latent conflict.

From a South African point of view, Berwouts could have given more credit to Pretoria for the perseverance with which a peace agreement had been forged in 2002 at Sun City. But he mentions South Af-

rica's role in the Force Intervention Brigade which keeps a certain check on things in the eastern DRC.

I recommend *Congo's Violent Peace* as a reminder of what really happened during the last two decades in the DRC and because the author draws the attention to the importance of root causes and background issues of a conflict, to understand conflict better and to make us, external actors, better mediators to help end it.

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