REVIEW ESSAYS

China's Role in Africa: A Growing Phenomenon

Elizabeth Sperbee

China into Africa: Trade, Aid and Influence
Robert I. Rotberg (ed.)
(Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 317 pages.

Since the mid-1990s, China has rapidly expanded its engagement with African states. Study of Sino-African relations has subsequently begun to burgeon. In *China into Africa: Trade, Aid and Influence*, Robert Rotberg's multinational slate of authors introduce key issues in this literature from a variety of perspectives. The result is a volume worth reading cover to cover. A sometimes redundant, sometimes contradictory assemblage, *China into Africa* nevertheless provides a fascinating introduction not only to a variety of issues at stake in Sino-African relations, but also, necessarily, to the issues at stake in the study of those relations.

China's commercial ties to Africa date back to the 9th century. Its more recent history in the region includes support for African anti-colonial movements and subsequent development assistance. Yet, as World Bank economist Harry Broadman notes in his contribution to *China Into Africa*, "it is the current scale and pace of China's trade and investment flows with Africa that are unprecedented." Indeed, between 2001 and 2007, Sino-African trade mushroomed from $8.92 billion to a reported $73 billion. China scholar Elizabeth Economy observed in testimony before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs that this pace has left "both sides—not to mention the rest of the world …struggling to understand the new rules of engagement."[1]

The stakes are high. From access to markets and natural resources—including potentially significant new oil reserves—to refutations of Western models of sovereignty, good governance and human rights, China's recent relations with many African states emblemize its nontraditional approach to development in an evolving international system. China's general policy of "non-interference" in the

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internal affairs of African states stands in sharp contrast to Western-led traditions, including conditional development aid and the use of sanctions to shape governance. Drawing on principles articulated at the Bandung Conference in 1955, Beijing's steadfast assertion of the inviolability of African state sovereignty has facilitated its ties with leaders of African states. Its position is further enhanced by China's insistence that its citizens live at local living standards while working in Africa, as well as its vast array of diplomatic and scholarly exchange initiatives. Accordingly, Li Anshan asserts in *China into Africa* that "the equality in Chinese-African relations is a model for international relations," where "equality means respect for sovereignty, mutual benefit, and coordination."

Such a rosy view of Sino-African state relations is tempered, however, by serious concerns over human rights, environmental stewardship, and, as former South African President Thabo Mbeke has insinuated, neocolonialism. On these and related questions, contributions to *China into Africa* by Stephanie Rupp, Stephen Brown, Chandra Lekha Sriram and Li Anshan provide useful if provocative insight. Although Rupp, Brown and Sriram are not unconcerned by China's current practices, Rupp argues that current Sino-African relations are best characterized not as neocolonial, but rather as a form of post-colonial interdependency, "however economically unbalanced." In their complementary chapter examining China's potential legal culpability for human rights abuses in Africa, Brown and Sriram usefully distinguish between legal and moral blame. While China's complicity in human rights violations may be morally repugnant, the authors argue that China bears little definitive legal responsibility for them, with the possible exception of arms sales to the Sudanese government. Finally, from a different vantage point, the volume's Chinese contributor, Li Anshan, addresses human rights critiques by defending non-interference in stark terms. Specifically, Anshan likens the Darfur crisis to the U.S. Civil War: a bloody episode necessary for the building of the state. Although many readers of this journal may reject Anshan's view that humanitarian intervention is unjust because it undermines state sovereignty, the exposure of such extreme difference underlying Chinese and Western scholarly opinion is, in fact, the greatest strength of Rotberg's volume.

On questions of economic development, it is worth noting that *China into Africa* went to press before the current economic crisis deepened during the fall of 2008. Yet its economic analyses remain material, if incomplete. As epitomized by Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi's travels to Uganda, Rwanda, Malawi and South Africa in January 2009, for instance, Beijing views Sino-African economic cooperation as an essential strategy for coping with the international financial crisis.[2] Further, unlike the EU and United States, where economic stimulus plans must undergo months of deliberation and are constrained by significant national

debt, China enacted a stimulus plan early.[3] The Chinese plan centers on the development of its own inland provinces. Long-term consequences of this domestic development are likely to include expanded Chinese markets for tradable goods, including African exports, as well as the perpetuation of China's hunger for natural resources to feed its economy. This is true in spite of the challenges to Chinese growth, many of which in fact predate the global crisis.[4]

China into Africa thus provides a valuable introduction to a variety of complex issues and contested concepts. Contributors to the volume rightly call for future research into local social relations between Africans and Chinese immigrants on the continent, and the value and nature of Chinese aid and trade in Africa. Future research should also consider the possibility of African collective action to influence negotiations with China over balance of trade issues, increased local employment on Chinese initiatives and support for human rights, which the African Union charter affirms. There is little doubt that the fruits of such research will be all the more worthwhile if they are used to produce greater debate and understanding among a diverse group of international scholars and their readership. Rotberg's volume is exemplary precisely because it takes readers a step beyond a broad introduction and agenda setting to what may be considered a preliminary round of that much-needed debate.

NOTES

[1] U.S. Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, *China in Africa: Implications for U.S. Policy*, testimony by Elizabeth Economy, 110th Cong., 2nd sess., 4 June 2008.

[2] "Chinese FM stresses cooperation with Africa amid financial crisis," *The People's Daily,* 18 January 2009.

[3] Keith Bradsher, "China's Route Forward," *New York Times,* 22 January 2009.

[4] Elizabeth Economy, interview by Bernard Gwertzman, 8 December 2008, Council on Foreign Relations, http://www.cfr.org/publication/17987/chinas_economy_losing_steam_very_quickly.html.

Africa at the Turn of the Century: State Failure?

Peter van der Windt

When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late-Century Africa
Robert H. Bates
(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 216 pages.

Despite the optimism after independence and the end of the Cold War, violence and political disorder became widespread in Africa at the end of the 20th century. Why is this the case? This is the question that Robert Bates, a Harvard University professor and a prominent scholar of Africa, sets out to answer in *When Things Fell Apart*.

This concise book consists of four parts. In part one, Bates argues that governments can use coercion to either protect or prey upon their citizens. Whether a government chooses to be a guardian or a warlord depends on three factors: public revenues, the government's valuation of the future and the benefits from predation. According to Bates, events at the end of the 20th century negatively altered both governments' public revenues and their valuations of the future. First, predation became a more attractive option when the energy crisis of the 1980s led to a crisis in public revenues for many African governments. Second, the wave of democratization following the end of the Cold War threatened incumbent governments in Africa. Faced with potentially shorter political horizons, predation became a more attractive option for Africa's leaders. Finally, most African states have rich (and lootable) natural resources, making predation an attractive option.

In part two of *When Things Fell Apart*, Bates argues that the seeds of African political disorder were sown several decades ago. Soon after independence, Africa's political institutions became increasingly monopolized by military and single party regimes. Rather than distributing benefits widely, these authoritarian regimes operated on the logic of exclusion, resulting in political opportunism and economic inequality. Also, following independence many Africa governments implemented so-called control regimes: economic policies that generated benefits for political elites at the expense of the larger population. Finally, Bates emphasizes that demographic growth, territorial expansion and competing claims to land generated tremendous domestic tension in African states.

In part three, Bates discusses how the drift towards authoritarianism and subsequent implementation of control regimes influenced public revenues and governments' valuation of the future. These events also made African governments vulnerable to the two sharp external shocks at the end of the 20th century. When coupled with latent domestic tensions and abundant natural resources, these

factors led increasingly to both state predation and collapse.

When Things Fell Apart brings the state back to the center of discussion in the literature on political disorder. Bates convincingly argues that, if we want to understand the political disorder that became widespread in Africa at the end of the 20th century, we have to understand the factors that lead states to break down.

Despite Bates' strong arguments, the book suffers from a number of weaknesses. *When Things Fell Apart* is too short for the enormity of the task that Bates sets for himself. For example, the influence of the three key explanatory variables of political disorder—public revenues, the government's valuation of the future and the benefits of predation—are each discussed in only one page. A more elaborate discussion would have been valuable. For instance, part one of *When Things Fell Apart* argues that resources make it more likely for governments to prey, and therefore for states to collapse, because "these resources pose a constant temptation to those with military power." But in part three, Bates claims that "states whose economies have been richly endowed are no more likely to fail than are others." Clearly more work is needed to understand the underlying causal mechanisms of natural resources and state collapse.

When Things Fell Apart is an analysis based upon statistical evidence presented in the appendix, which is part four of the book. The dataset is large and spans forty-six African countries over twenty-six years. In a key regression, Bates regresses the probability of experiencing political disorder on public revenues, resources (a proxy measure for the benefits of predation) and a one- or no-party system (a proxy variable for the governments' valuation of the future). Political disorder itself is instrumented by a binary variable of the presence of an armed militia.

This analysis poses two problems. First, while finding a good instrument can be hard, the binary variable selected is questionable. For example, it fails to capture the difference between small and large militias—which arguably have different consequences for political disorder. Second, the statistical results show that it is difficult to reconcile the exposition with the data. For example, in the aforementioned regression, not all the independent variables of interest yield statistically significant relations. Another illustration of the tension between the main text and the statistical analysis in the appendix is the influence of the type of government on the imposition of control regimes. While in part two Bates states that "military governments were far more likely than civilian ones to adopt control regimes," the regressions in part four do not provide statistically robust support for this hypothesis.

When Things Fell Apart presents a pessimistic picture of the African continent. But has Africa truly fallen apart over the course of the last decades? Bates claims this to be the case by pointing to the number of African civil wars. Indeed, at the

end of the period under investigation, ten civil wars were raging in Africa, of which eight started at the end of the 20th century. However, these figures only include twenty of the fifty-three African states. In addition, the end of the period under investigation is 1995. Many of these wars have since ended; Liberia and Sierra Leone being prominent examples. It is up to future scholars to account for this new turn of events. ♔

Rethinking Exclusion, Ethnicity and Conflict in Central Africa

Radha Webley

The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa
René Lemarchand
(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 327 pages.

Over the course of the past two decades, the Great Lakes Region of central Africa—encompassing the micro-states of Rwanda and Burundi, as well as the eastern portion of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the southwestern corner of Uganda—has seen some of the world's most devastating civil and inter-state wars. The toll of these conflicts is not only in the millions of civilian casualties and unprecedented numbers of refugees produced, but also in self-perpetuating cycles of violence and instability that continue to plague these countries' domestic politics and cross-border relations.

The scale of the situation defies simple explanation. The sheer number of combatant groups in the eastern Congo alone is enough to stump even the most practiced analyst. The ethnic geography of the region is similarly daunting. The history behind each conflict can be enough to occupy a scholar for a lifetime. It is thus no small task to analyze the causes and consequences of conflict in this troubled region. Yet that is exactly what René Lemarchand, scholar of central African politics, accomplishes in *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*.

Dynamics of Violence offers no grand analysis and no ultimate solution. In fact, refuting the utility of such definitive analyses stands out as one of the core themes of this volume. The very structure of the text—a collection of stand-alone essays on Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC—questions the value of applying a single macro-analysis to such a diverse set of questions and localities that this region presents. Nonetheless, *Dynamics of Violence* forcefully justifies the necessity of a holistic cross-border approach to conflict analysis in this region that grasps the volatile politics of these countries as a product of inextricably interwoven and jointly evolving identities, histories and political forces.

Such a comparative analysis, Lemarchand claims, is fundamental to understanding the dynamic and inter-connected rationales driving the region's many conflicts. In discussing the "reciprocal impact" of genocide and mass violence in Rwanda and Burundi, for example, he illustrates the historical linkages between the 1959 revolution in Rwanda and the 1972 mass slaughter of Hutu civilians in Burundi by a Tutsi-dominated army, and articulates the connections between the latter event and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Through a detailed case study analysis of these and other events, Lemarchand narrates a convincing tale of the

cross-border evolution of ethnicized politics. In this story, fear crosses borders as easily as refugees; Political exclusion emerges as the thread around which histories of violence are constructed and enacted.

The relationship between political exclusion, refugee flows and the evolution of ethnicity is in fact the "central pattern" in Lemarchand's etiology of conflict. Lemarchand observes: "[E]thnic polarization paves the way for political exclusion, exclusion eventually leading to insurrection, insurrection to repression, and repression to massive flows of refugees…which in turn become the vectors of further instability."

By insisting on incorporating multiple, interacting layers of causality in studying the origins of civil war, Lemarchand directly confronts theories that emphasize the analytical preeminence of a single variable. Speaking directly to Paul Collier's "greed over grievance" thesis, Lemarchand acknowledges that, yes, "greed" and economic opportunism may well help sustain a process of violence once begun, but argues that this variable fails to explain the initial origins of the conflicts discussed in this text. An exclusive focus on opportunism ignores the dual processes of economic and political exclusion that are critical to explaining these causal origins. Lemarchand contends that this element of exclusion is inextricably linked to any assessment of "financial viability" that a wartime opportunist might make, as well as to the social grievances and other socio-economic indicators that Collier so cursorily dismisses.

Instead of merely re-casting the analytical equation of conflict causation, Lemarchand engages critically with the question of ethnicity. He argues that the trope of ethnicity embodies a rationality whose logic any scholar must first understand before attempting to decipher its effects. Explaining the logic of ethnicity as it operates in each case is an important part of this book's contribution. Lemarchand challenges scholars to consider the role of political manipulation that characterizes not only the violence-mobilizing efforts of *génocidaires* but also captures the reconciliation-seeking objectives of such post-conflict heroes as Rwanda's Paul Kagame.

No treatment of conflict is complete without an attempt at theorizing possible solutions. *Dynamics of Violence*, however, demonstrates the near-impossibility of such theorizing in this particular region. Lemarchand is repeatedly stymied in his efforts to bring each narrative to a conclusion that does not merely predict the circular reproduction of conflict ad infinitum. He presents, for example, an exhaustive list of measures necessary to counter the fractious tendencies of Burundian politics. Yet how to craft a coherent state-building strategy remains elusive. The myriad difficulties of post-conflict recovery—from outstanding security issues to acute governance deficits—all require a functioning state for their effective reso-

lution. At the same time, however, these difficulties prevent the very process of state-building that is central to that resolution. Similar stumbling blocks appear in Lemarchand's analysis of the DRC's struggle toward peace and stability. This emerges clearly in his discussion of the seemingly unresolvable security dilemma that frames Rwanda's foreign policy in eastern Congo, and in his musings on the politically controlled process of memory-making that inhibits Rwanda's prospects for sustainable reconciliation. As for assessing the prospects for sustainable peace-building in this region, it remains unclear whether there is a way out of this circular labyrinth of conflict and fractured peace processes. ♔