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Book Note

Marysse, Stefaan and Filip Reyntjens, eds. 2005. *The Political Economy of the Great Lakes Region in Africa: The Pitfalls of Enforced Democracy and Globalization*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. xvi + 243pp. ISBN 1-4039-4950-6 (hb). Price: £65.00 (hb).

Reviewed by Bjørn Møller [14 May 2007]

This is a compilation of articles that have previously appeared in *Annuaire des Grands Lacs d'Afrique* (published by the Center for the Study of the Great Lakes Region of Africa, University of Antwerpen) and journals such as *African Affairs*. Even though all articles have been updated, the fact that they are essentially reprints ought to have been made clear on the front or back cover rather than hidden away in the introduction. Moreover, Filip Reyntjens article has been previously published, with only minor revisions, in several publications and under different titles (e.g., in G.M. Khadiagala, ed., 2006, *Security Dynamics in Africa's Great Lakes Region*, also reviewed on the EPSJ web site). For a book costing 65 pounds Sterling, readers are surely entitled to new material.

Written by renowned scholars in the field, the book is nevertheless worth reading. Unfortunately, quite a few of the contributions seem unbalanced, especially that by Reyntjens. While he may be right that the government of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and President Paul Kagame are becoming increasingly authoritarian, and that the banning of ethnic labels may conceal *de facto* Tutsi dominance, some of his allegations against the RPF seem unfounded and certainly undocumented – e.g., that the RPF conducted large-scale massacres against Hutu civilians during the genocide, based on the elusive “Gersony Report” that has never been published. A similar bias is found in the chapter by René Lemarchand, who compares the Rwandan genocide with the Holocaust. While he is surely correct in explaining the 1994 genocide as partly spurred by fear among the ordinary Hutu population of what might happen should the (Tutsi) RPF win the civil war, he comes close to putting the main blame on the RPF which is definitely unfair. A similar (anti-Tutsi) bias is found in the chapter on the Kivu and Ituri provinces of the Congo in which the author, Stanislas Mararo, unconvincingly argues that “the NRA and RPF were drawn in by a determination to prevent democratic reform” (p. 200).

The more economics-oriented chapters are generally better. In their chapter on Rwanda, An Ansoms and Stefaan Marysse show how post-genocide Rwanda has benefitted from higher-than-average levels of aid, leading to economic growth, but also to greater inequality. Even more alarming is the problem of land scarcity, resulting in declining agricultural production per capita and rural poverty. In another chapter, Marysse shows how the wars in the DR Congo were, at least partly, caused by a collapse of the economy in the early 1990, especially in the formal sector, leading to a crisis for neopatrimonial rule and thus to state collapse. The chapter proceeds to explore the two consecutive civil wars-*cum*-foreign intervention, both of which were accompanied by ruthless exploitation of Congo's rich mineral resources, *inter alia* by Rwanda and Uganda. Drawing on the three U.N. reports on this topic, the author is critical of their emphasis on illegal exploitation, arguing that “all actors have used similar procedures to finance the war in Central Africa, so that any definition of illegal exports and exploitation hinging on the notion of ‘legitimacy’ is problematic” (p. 136). This theme is elaborated upon in a lengthy analysis of the mining sector of the DRC by Erik Kennes, who rejects simplistic conspiracy theory explanations of the role of mineral resources in fueling war. He convincingly argues that the big mining companies suffer from the war economy from which mainly smaller companies and the military and political elites have really benefitted.

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