

**Siko, John and Victor, Jonah. 2020. *African Security: An Introduction*. London, New York: I.B. Tauris, Bloomsbury Publishing. 280 pp. ISBN 978-1-7867-3643-7 (eBook).**

Writing a review about a book that aims to reach students rather than researchers is a rare task for a scholar. However, as a lecturer, I consider the book *African Security: An Introduction* by John Siko and Jonah Victor of the same value as the research classics in the field. When lecturing on the topic of Security or International Relations in Africa it is a challenge to find a reader-friendly book that gives beginners to African Security Studies a helping hand. Undergraduate students often struggle to understand complicated and interrelated issues such as ethnicity, religion, neo-patrimonialism, geographic idiosyncrasies, corruption or the role of the army in issues of African security. The book under review offers precisely such a much-needed text and even in an accessible style. The authors speak directly to the reader from the first pages of the book and they do not fail to deliver an accessible guide for less familiar readers of African Studies and Security.

In thirteen chapters and two interludes, they discuss a substantial number of issues from various perspectives in order to understand the topic of security in Africa. Although scholars of African Security might feel that in some parts there is a lack of nuance and that some topics would deserve deeper attention, the book does provide a great starting point. In the first four chapters of the volume, the authors introduce their specific approach and then cover the necessary socio-historical background to the field, starting with pre-colonial history through independence to the modern era. The reader learns about the impact of European colonial domination and the anti-colonial struggle. Siko and Victor also emphasise that some pre-colonial conflicts or nation-building attempts, such as the ones under Shaka Zulu in South Africa or Usman dan Fodio in what is today Nigeria, carry great contemporary significance. However, they also warn against oversimplifying these historical experiences.

The first interlude focuses on the discussion of terminologies such as race, ethnicity, tribe and clan. Admitting that all these terms, and mainly “tribe,” are a challenge to most Africanists (pp. 53–57), they feel it is necessary, in the case of Africa, to introduce readers to these terms. However, to me the question is whether this subject should not come earlier as the authors already work with these terms in the previous four chapters. It could be placed into info-boxes which the authors use for a brief discussion of some specific cases.

Nevertheless, I understand that this might lead to an even more superficial discussion of these complicated terms.

In the second quarter of the book, the authors focus on actors and social forces and explain the nature of armed forces, religious violence, crime and law. These three chapters (5–7) provide much detail about socio-political dynamics among the most important players in the African security arena today. As the authors aptly show, the army is, in Africa, very often a decisive force in everyday socio-political life. They write: “African military capabilities are diminutive in a global perspective, but often determinative in shaping security outcomes on the African continent” (p. 60). It is important for every analyst and student of African security to keep this in mind. The army in Africa is the symbol and “almost always one of the first state institutions” (p. 61). However, Siko and Victor also offer a critical perspective of the problematic positioning of the army in most African states by referring to corruption and human right abuses. These are important perspectives as these issues influence possibilities the military has in dealing with conflicts or religious extremists in Africa.

Chapter 6 focuses on the link between religion, extremism, and violence and one of the sub-chapters is dedicated to inter-religious conflicts which deserves highlighting. Siko and Victor emphasise, just as they do in respect of the issue of ethnicity, that “religion has not been the primary issue of contention” (p. 80) even though it is tempting to oversimplify it. Discussing three brief case studies, they show how a multitude of different factors can lead to conflict and point out the inherent roles that religion plays.

In terms of the issue of crime in Africa, the authors focus on the problems related to drugs, human and arms trafficking, and homicide. Siko and Victor first of all convincingly explain why our knowledge about crime in Africa is limited from the statistical point of view due to lack of resources the police faces in Africa. After that, they turn to organised crime and the challenges this poses to African security. This chapter is of utmost importance because, as Siko and Victor state: “Crime probably will continue to be overshadowed by armed conflict and violent extremism on Africa’s security landscape. Yet, for most Africans personal and property crime are the threats that most immediately shape their perception of their own security” (p. 97). Siko and Victor aptly show that security is not primarily a question of peace and war but also of the challenges of criminality, which is more immediate to the daily life of African people.

In chapters 8 to 11, Siko and Victor focus on events and dynamics rather than on specific actors involved. They discuss the anticipation of and dealing with military coups, election violence, economic crises and general conflicts. These chapters shift the focus to important questions, such as what triggers these events, how do they escalate and how do they come to an end? As a continent, Africa has experienced several examples of coups such as recently in Mali, Sudan and Zimbabwe. The reader learns to understand the diverse roles played by the army in this respect and the complications it brings in solving political issues.

The authors also examine how the state of democracy and election dynamics play crucial roles in violence and they problematise transitions of power. Siko and Victor perfectly depict how an electoral crisis and violence appear and how they are managed in cases like Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya and Nigeria.

The economic situation finds attention in chapter 10. Economy, particularly poverty or the structure of the GDP, is always important for many scholars dealing with conflicts (cf. Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Hegre and Sambanis 2006). However, Siko and Victor aptly refer to pioneering works by Morten Jerven (i.e., 2013; see also 2013a; 2015; 2018) who unravelled the problems with statistics in/on Africa, and who continuously works on this issue. "Can the numbers be believed?" (p. 137), is a question Africanists must always highlight to students. The precision of our data sets and statistics on conflicts, economy or crime is problematic even though vital for the study of security.

The authors point out that "Conflicts do end" but it is important to know "how and why wars end in Africa" (p. 6). Therefore, they carefully take the reader through various ways in which conflicts end. They also give the reader important insights into the role of external interventions which historically have been important in conflicts. According to some scholars, for example, close relations with France are vital in deciding whether to start the conflict (cf. Collier, Hoeffler and Rohner 2009). Lastly, the authors do not forget to critically discuss the UN peacekeeping missions, which also play ambiguous roles in many African countries.

Chapter 12 deals with the role of external actors. While all main actors are mentioned, the discussion is inevitably weighted by the author's extensive experience with the US administration. For example, a deeper discussion

of the presence of China or the growing presence of India would have been very welcome in this chapter.

The final chapter focuses on future trends. Predictions are always tricky. However, the way in which Siko and Victor suggest possible future paths of African security is nuanced and well-informed. In the chapter that reminds us of SWOT<sup>1</sup> analysis, they focus on possible issues and opportunities for African states in the near future, like climate change, population growth, democracy or accountability. In case of trends such as climate change, population growth and resource scarcity, Siko and Victor are not over-deterministic. They also turn to the effects of mitigation of corruption, leadership changes and sustainability, therefore to some of the factors that are in the hands of societies and administrations.

Altogether the book provides a thorough overview of African security studies that most students will benefit from. The book covers the most important topics but from a pedagogical point of view two points could improve the relevancy and educational potential. First, it would be valuable if at the end of each chapter the authors provided some key points to remember. Second, since the book represents an introduction for students, it would be helpful to add a list of further readings at the end of each chapter. Interested readers could so deepen their knowledge from different angles. Obviously, students can open the endnotes to check what literature is used, however, the literature cited is selective and cannot cover the whole field. Therefore, it would be helpful to give students basic tips for the classics and the current literature.

To sum up, Siko and Victor's book offers a comprehensive starting point for students of African security studies and for general readers. It shows the complexity of the security situation in Africa and offers ways to analyse it. Furthermore, it fulfils the goal of the authors and offers an easy, reader-friendly and accessible guide for many students of African Studies, laics or anyone wishing to understand the basics about African security. Therefore, it constitutes a welcome addition to the many beginners' courses syllabuses in African Studies.

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1 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

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