

Bruce Baker. *Security in Post-Conflict Africa: The Role of Nonstate Policing*. New York: CRC Press, 2010. 222pp. ISBN 13-978-1-4200-9193-9

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If there ever was a book written about security in Africa that offers prospects for hope on such a grim subject, then it is this one. This clearly-written and well-organized book sheds light on the previously unexplored area of security in post-conflict Africa and entry in the role of nonstate policing. This book *Security in Post-Conflict Africa: the Role of Nonstate Policing*, demonstrates that donors and governments are increasingly acknowledging that the post-conflict state in Africa lacks the capacity to provide an efficient and an equitable policing, to coordinate security agencies and to ensure human rights compliance. In this context, the need becomes ever more apparent for partnerships with those actually providing policing services on the ground, which are invariably nonstate actors. Yet, donors and states are nervous about the sustainability, reliability, human rights adherence and accountability of nonstate actors. They are also unsure how to support and collaborate with a sector so diverse, complex and mutable. Even when it is recognised that these are the dominant actors in the security sector and the preferred providers of everyday policing by most Africans in most circumstances, it is unclear to policy makers how support for such a group would be programmable. According to Baker “the focus of this book is on the protection of people’s lives and property, the resolution of their disputes, and the maintenance of the social order” (p.2) in Africa. Yet, it is a crucial element because it is foundational to human security. Without it, access to other key services and rights will be restricted. For this reason, personal security is a central concern of poor people (p.2).

The initial chapter is particularly strong in its clear articulation and introduction to various defining and foundational security concepts and terminology. Baker’s also focuses on people’s experience of security in post-conflict Africa; of what works and does not work for them; of what they value and do not value in their local context. It is concerned with how security is provided for them. It assumes that they are the best judge of the security they want and of how well that security is provided by the different providers (p.10). Baker proceeds to provide a comprehensive account of the identity of these nonstate actors in post-conflict Africa, what services they offer, how well they do it, what levels of local support and legitimacy they enjoy, and what are their accountability mechanisms. In doing so, it challenges many of the negative stereotypes. Based on nine years field work in eight post-conflict countries, it honestly addresses the hazards of working with such actors and the potential. It also suggests ways in which programmes can be developed to enhance nonstate provision and to establish partnerships with the state police for the benefit of the citizens. It advocates a multi-layered approach that is supporting not just the state, but commercial and community-based policing groups as well. The urgent need is for a security model where the emphasis rests on the quality and efficacy of the services received by the end user regardless of who delivers that service. This book takes us in this direction. It is hoped that through this series, it will be possible to accelerate the process of building knowledge about policing and help bridge the gap between the two worlds-the world of police research and police practice. This is an invitation to police scholars and practitioners across the world to come and join in this venture.

Moreover, this book grew out of research projects undertaken by the author in Africa since 2000. Baker remembered a day in Grahamstown, South Africa, when state-centric mind finally digested the fact, that policing are not just done by the police. Faced with car guard cooperatives, armed response private security, street committees, vigilantes, and community paid-for additional police patrols, he had to rethink how security was provided for the average African and whether it mattered that the state was such a small player. He spent the next nine years travelling around Africa asking to know who people looked asking to for protection from crime and, when crime occurred, to whom they looked for response. The voices of those in cities and the countryside were almost universal: primarily they did not look to the state for either protection or response but to a whole range of nonstate actors. Initially, he was surprised by the choice on offer for most Africans most of the time and how they negotiated their security in different settings and circumstances according to their norms, experience, and financial abilities. Eventually, however, he had to face the policy implications of multichoice policing. Why was the reality of actual provision so removed from the world as seen by those engaged in security policy and reform? Why was nonstate policing judged by standards that, if applied to the state police, might lead to the withdrawal of donor funding? Baker comes to bring his research findings up against current policy and to adopt a multilayered approach of support for policing providers, although not without meeting considerable skepticism. Nine years ago, it was hard to gain a hearing, but now there are many voices calling for an approach to security provision in post-conflict Africa that are determined by the realities on the ground in terms of available and sustainable resources rather than by imitations of Western methods. Yet even those, like me, who call for a re-evaluation of the delivery of security to Africans, do not pretend that they have all the answers. The awful tragedy of conflict welded to structural economic poverty is a combination none would want to start from as a foundation for building security.

This book therefore is only a beginning of the long process needed to rethink policing. It tries above all to put before the reader the perspective of Africans themselves how they perceive their security needs and how they evaluate those who offer security to them. To understand what is happening on the ground seems a good place to begin before plans to “do people good” are announced by ministers of state. This account, as it unfolds, challenges several prevailing conceptions about policing, the state police, nonstate actors, vigilantes, customary practices, community policing, private/public distinctions, and state building. The most effective challenge is always that which is empirically based; it is hoped that this book provides some evidence for its claims, even if the limitations of my research allow no definitive statements.

Security in Post-Conflict Africa: The Role of Nonstate Policing is broad and comprehensive in its scope, not only temporally but also substantively, examining both historical efforts to make and sustain peace, and the relevant literature analysing and envisaging security. The book is structured chronologically, spanning millennia from prehistory to the ‘presents of peace’, devoting all of its chapters to security in post-conflict Africa. While the broad scope of the book underscores Baker’s contribution to the field, it also limits its readability. Readers find themselves engaged by sections with which they have some previous familiarity or understanding, but overwhelmed by detail. One senses the book would be better appreciated after multiple reads. Nonetheless, Baker has done an admirable job of synthesising a broad field of practice and literature within a coherent framework.

Baker provides a comprehensive survey of the situation of security in post-conflict Africa, providing a valuable reference point for students, scholars and general readers of peace and security studies. Its breadth and detail makes it a strong

contender for resource room bookshelves, but perhaps it will have less appeal for practitioners and those interested in a more popular security overview. In addition to its breadth and detail, other merits of the book include accuracy, objectivity, detailed literature review and a wealth of interesting facts about peace and security. However, the detail is overwhelming in parts and the writing style, at times accomplished, can also be unnecessarily complex. Although not touted as an analytical work, the analysis undertaken is insightful and one feels more analysis would have resulted in a more interesting work. Unfortunately, the density of *Security in Post-Conflict Africa* detail may make it inaccessible for many readers. In his book, he can be admired for canvassing such a vast amount of material in one volume.

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