

Somali context. But the author does not allow rigid conceptual frameworks to straightjacket his analysis of the Somali experience, which is alive with empirical insight and nuance: a particular strength is how the author emphasizes the collection and synthesis of divergent Somali views on key issues. Moreover, Abdi Elmi does not stop at deconstruction, but is always on the search for 'context-appropriate political structures' (p. 5), emphasizing the resources for building peace that lie within the Somali culture, Islamic faith, and education, which are often overlooked by international actors.

The sources of the Somali conflict, clan issues, and the role of external actors have been dealt with by other authors as well, although Abdi Elmi's peace-building perspective is a relatively fresh one. The book's main contribution, therefore, is the analysis of Somali variants of political Islam, an invaluable contribution to the currently thin and security-oriented English language literature; and in the analysis of education as a factor affecting conflict and peace building, which is underexplored in the Somali context.

In such a concise but wide-ranging volume, it is perhaps inevitable that there are omissions or rather thin substantiation of claims in places. Occasionally conclusions reached seem a bit glib and are rather bluntly presented: for example, on p. 72 we read that 'Islamist rule [is] basically inevitable in Somalia', having just heard the major challenges posed by both clan issues and the hostility of external actors, as well as the fissures within various Islamist movements, and not really having heard how these might be overcome.

One omission undermines the volume in a more fundamental way. The book focuses largely on the southern Somali situation, but is interested in national-level reconciliation, with the pre-collapse state as the framework of reference. The author fails to address adequately the reality of relatively stable, indigenous regional and secessionist governments in Puntland and Somaliland respectively. The existence of these distinct political structures – why and how they work in these places, what if anything can be learned of relevance to the south, how their existence shapes potential and strategies for national-level reconciliation – is unfortunately largely omitted from discussion in this otherwise well-written and topical book.

The book is an effortless read: the author guides the reader through a carefully structured and well-signposted analysis. In this sense, it is a good introductory reader on contemporary Somali political affairs. Beyond this it, will also be of particular interest to those specializing in conflict resolution and peace building, collapsed states, 'Islamism', and peace education.

*School of Oriental and African Studies*

ANNA LINDLEY

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**Child Soldiers: Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front** by Myriam Denov. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xii + 234 pp. €22.00 (paperback). ISBN 978 0 52169 321 9.

This book deals with the topic of child soldiers, a phenomenon that has been known about for a long time and widely discussed in contexts all over the world, but has a particular significance for African studies. Myriam Denov focuses on the lives and realities of a group of child soldiers in Sierra Leone, both boys and girls, and traces what happened to these children both during and following the

eleven-year civil war. The book provides a broad overview on child soldiering as a global phenomenon, an introduction to the civil war in Sierra Leone, and an account of the author's research approach. In addition it analyses the 'becoming', 'being', and 'unmaking' of child soldiers. Thus, by using quotations from a rich data set, the author represents the voices of young men and women and introduces the reader to their everyday lives during and after the civil war. Denov argues that Sierra Leone was already a violent setting before the official outbreak of war, and that this culture of violence is key to understanding the making of these child soldiers, for whom violence simply became a daily routine. Nevertheless, they also responded individually to this culture of violence and were not simply passive recipients. Accordingly, the author also discusses the different pathways the former child soldiers have taken back to a civilian life.

Denov brings her book to a close with a valuable chapter on the 'new battlefields' in the aftermath of the Sierra Leonean civil war. In line with the 'no peace, no war' argument the author concludes that it is important to recognize that the journey out of violence did not have a clear ending, despite the formal establishment of peace.

*Child Soldiers* is a detailed sourcebook for both scholars and practitioners who deal with violence, children, and civil war. The former will find an empirically rich contribution to an ongoing debate; the latter get further critical information regarding children's experiences with, and the gendered dimension of, demobilization programmes. An additional chapter discussing the book's conceptual approach to agency and structure, and embedding its data in the broader scientific debate on youth and violence, would have been desirable. In particular there is no critical discussion of the conceptual bedrock of the book, Anthony Giddens's structuration theory. The author does not consider recent contributions on quite similar topics, which reflect the specific circumstances of war-torn societies in more detail. Moreover, the author uses the terms 'children' or 'youth' more or less interchangeably, instead of discussing these social concepts as distinct and fluid phases in more detail. Such a discussion could have become an important contribution to the growing body of literature on youth, in particular because the period of data collection for *Child Soldiers* was quite extended, starting in 2003 and ending in 2008. A chance may have been missed to nuance the process through which the study participants negotiated change in their social framework and their relation to the violent past.

The strength of the book lies in the richness and volume of the quotations from former child soldiers that are incorporated into the text. The author has collected this data set with a research team of both Sierra Leoneans and Canadians, and in collaboration with former child soldiers who also worked as researchers. They have worked together over a long period of time and travelled to different parts of the country. This time-consuming style of research is justified because Myriam Denov successfully delivers on her objective of giving voice to the (often) voiceless and thereby provides the reader with the multi-faceted and paradoxical realities of Sierra Leonean former child soldiers.

*University of Basel*

MICHELLE ENGELER

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