Conflict Resolution and Peace Education in Africa (review)

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**Ernest E. Uwazie, ed. *Conflict Resolution and Peace Education in Africa.*** Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2003. viii + 188 pp. Notes. Index. $60.00. Cloth.

Far too often, the American public laments conflict in Africa as some hopelessly incomprehensible convergence of poverty and ethnicity, beyond the reach of reason or constructive action or even understanding. Such hopelessness brings with it a collective shrug of the shoulders as it relieves the American polis of any responsibility to engage thoughtfully with the continent. This resignation also allows the notion to persist that Africa's peoples and social structures must be inherently violent and therefore unamenable to any nonviolent social and political change. Ernest E. Uwazie's collection of essays challenges these assumptions. The volume is a much-needed investigation into the complexities (but also graspable realities) of conflicts in Africa and an accompanying revelation of the specifically African approaches available for resolving the continent's conflicts peacefully.

The book's twelve chapters range broadly in style and focus. Nearly half of the chapters, like Uwazie's own "Conflict Resolution and Peace Education in Africa: An Introduction" and Kelechi Kalu's "An Elusive Quest? Structural Analysis of Conflicts and Peace in Africa," attempt to extract general elements out of the varied landscape of African conflict and to propose solutions that are meant to work, appropriately adapted, across the board. These essays perhaps take for granted the fact that there is something that can be called "African conflict," and therefore they lead the reader to take one step back and ask what the defining elements of African conflict actually are. A few possibilities appear again and again: colonialism's legacy of coercive structures and divisive politics; the interplay between poverty, disempowerment, resource control, and violence; and the cynical use of ethnicity on the part of corrupt, unimaginative, and power- and wealth-hungry leaders. Many of the authors look critically, as well they should, upon the unquestioned importation of Western forms of democracy, which in many cases simply act as vehicles for easily manipulated ethnic politics. Most are quick to emphasize, however, that ethnicity is rarely the *source* of conflict and rather the easiest identity to galvanize into protest over unfair allocation of economic or social resources.

Other chapters focus on specific case studies, and this is where the volume is at its most exciting and most nuanced, making up for some of the more sweeping generalizations present in other chapters. Susan Shepler's "Educated in War: The Rehabilitation of Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone" and Tracey Holland's "Teaching and Learning about Human Rights in Postconflict Angola" stand out as particularly insightful and inquisitive essays. The former problematizes the unquestioned panacea of education as a cure-all for the fighting youth at the center of Sierra Leone's violent conflict, and the latter strikes an illuminating balance between theory and personal observation through an exploration of the challenges inherent in asking individuals whose lives have been filled with violence to imagine—

and, in doing so, carve out—a space for human rights in their communities. The focus here is on empowerment and its connection to creating political processes and structures in which conflict can be worked through nonviolently.

Most chapters insist on the presence of indigenous forms of conflict resolution that were used across the continent before the more coercive processes of colonialism usurped them. An almost mythological picture of African conflict prior to colonialism emerges, one in which more weight is placed on community needs than on individual gain, all community members are expected to take responsibility for decision making, security is defined by the well-being of all, and justice is understood as the reestablishment of harmonious relationships. Although a bit sweeping and idealized, this portrait makes possible a reclamation of positive African foundations for transcending the often horrific modes of dealing with conflict on the continent today, modes that arguably exist because of a system of dependencies and coercive hierarchies inherited from European colonialism. The subtext is that any model that can present a nonviolent alternative for dealing with conflict, while at the same time disavowing the dependence on foreign-imported ideology that helped create the current patterns of violent conflict in the first place, is one that has a chance of truly empowering political communities in Africa.

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**P. L. E. Idahosa.** *The Populist Dimension to African Political Thought: Critical Essays in Reconstruction and Retrieval.* Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004. iv + 274 pp. Bibliography. Index. $24.95. Paper.

Aside from the fairly superficial work by Peter Boele van Hensbroek (*Political Discourses in African Thought*, Praeger, 1999), there is a glaring dearth of comprehensive texts on African political thought. Significant earlier works on the subject, such as William Friedland and Carl Rosberg Jr.'s *African Socialism* (Stanford University Press, 1964) or G. C. M. Mutiso and S. W. Rohio's *Readings in African Political Thought* (Heinemann, 1975), are outdated and out-of-print. The teacher of this subject has to resort to the tedious and cumbersome process of sifting through the seminal texts by key political thinkers and putting together his or her own collection of readings.

P. L .E. Idahosa's *The Populist Dimension of African Thought* is thus both welcome and timely. A development studies scholar who directs the African Studies Program at York University (Canada), Idahosa reexplores the political thought of three of the most prominent African thinkers/leaders of the early postcolonial era: Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, and Julius Nyerere. Their discourses are still relevant today and need to be taken seri-