

Nest, Michael. 2006. *THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF WAR AND PEACE*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 162 pp. \$15.95 (paper).

As I write this review, the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo await the run-off election between President Kabila and Vice-President Bemba with what seems a mixture of fear, resignation, and hope. Already, tensions

after the announcement of the first-round results have led to armed clashes between supporters of the two camps—clashes that, though quickly contained by peacekeeping forces, signal that the elections may have been the easy part of the transition from a century of exploitation, foreign manipulation, and local connivance. Whether or not this transition will lead to peace, recovery, and reconstruction is the more difficult question.

Michael Nest's volume, written in collaboration with François Grignon and Emizet Kisangani, provides useful guideposts to keep in mind when pondering this question, and offers clear advice to policymakers, both Congolese and foreign. Sandwiched between an introduction and a conclusion, the book's four substantial chapters provide an in-depth account and analysis of the competing economic interests at work in the DRC. In two chapters, Nest provides a solid background to the Congo war of 1998–2003 and its economic aspects. Grignon analyzes the economic agendas at work in the peace process, and Kisangani explains the likely legacies of such agendas during the reconstruction efforts hoped for after the second round.

Nest stresses that there is no evidence that the parties to the Congo war entered into that conflict motivated solely by desires for economic gains. The other contributors reinforce this perspective, and list the political and strategic objectives pursued by foreign and Congolese parties to the conflict; however, they produce clear evidence that once engaged, economic objectives quickly rose to an equal level of concern for all parties. Whether motivated by a need for military materiel, a desire for personal gain, or an obligation to important friends, all parties to the conflict engaged in the wholesale exploitation of the DRC's natural resources. The Congo war may be unique in that the extent of the exploitation was documented by a special United Nations panel of experts and several NGOs.

The impact of this economic dimension is much harder to grasp, and it is here that the book is most valuable. Grignon stresses that the economic interests that have emerged during the war have not been acknowledged by the parties involved in the peace process, and therefore they have not been addressed. Similarly, the hypocrisy of Western powers that had no problem naming Congolese perpetrators while insisting that their corporations be excised from relevant reports contributed to the lack of attention to the economic dimension. Finally, the absence of Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe from the Inter-Congolese Dialog (ICD), left significant economic concerns off the agenda. Would the process have been more successful had these interests been acknowledged and included in the negotiations? Grignon is doubtful, but stresses that the negotiations to settle the situation in the eastern DRC must include the economic dimension, if only to untangle overlapping property rights and contracts assigned and negotiated by locally shifting parties.

Kisangani's chapter focuses on the economic legacies of the war. The undermining of customary authorities by armed forces of various groupings has reconfigured the patterns of land allocation and conflict resolution, and, most importantly, it has militarized and significantly reconfigured the

informal sector. Ordinary Congolese have therefore found their ability to make a living severely curtailed. Kisangani does not find the reconstruction efforts headed by international financial institutions promising, with their focus on macroeconomic discipline and their disregard for local authorities and needs. Similarly, he criticizes the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement, and reintegration programs under U.N. auspices for failing to take local needs and opinion into consideration. He concludes that the strengthening of legitimate customary authorities provides a key strategy for increasing the number of protagonists who seem to be gaining from the peace process.

In his conclusion, Nest argues that policy choices must include a multilayered approach along national and regional and local trajectories. The web of grievances and memories that make up the politics of the eastern DRC clearly warrant such approaches, particularly since some actors in the region were not even represented at the ICD.

The volume represents an important contribution to the analysis of Congo war. Its approach to the role of economic interests at play in the war and its aftermath is a useful alternative to the exclusive focus on economic interests, favored by some NGOs, and the lack of attention to these issues in the peace negotiations. Most importantly, the authors do not forget that the real issue at stake in the eastern DRC is not the question of access to resources, but the question of who is entitled to contest such access. The proposed focus on local decisionmaking, a federal institutional structure, and the resuscitation of what has remained of legitimate customary authority represent an important step toward a decentralized political economy that allows for the diffusion of particular economic interests in a broader web of social relations.

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