Peace and Conflict in Africa

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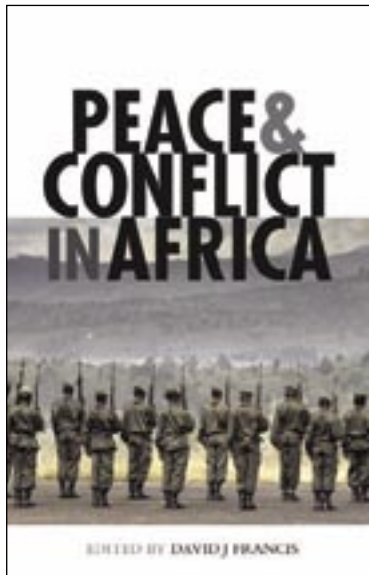
Peace and Conflict in Africa is in a league of its own, written by authors who are interested in Africa and have first hand experience in peace and conflict research on the continent. It threads together academic viewpoints, peace analysis, and indigenous (local) approaches to conflict resolution. The book makes a fantastic attempt to document and analyse the civil wars in Somalia and Congo, the rampant corruption and poverty in Sierra Leone, and the humanitarian crisis in Sudan.

The authors highlight the challenges to security caused by prevailing poverty, underdevelopment and the failure to meet the millennium goals, as well as the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This is further compounded by the debt crisis, continuous eruptions of civil wars, and political instability.

Editor David Francis sets the tone by outlining the context of peace and conflict in Africa, highlighting that peace and conflict go hand in hand, and that the two concepts are influenced by what is happening in a particular country at a certain time. The book also contests dominant theories of conflict and lays bare traditional approaches to peace-building and conflict resolution, such as the use of *ubuntu* for peace-making in the rural areas of southern Africa. While Tim Murithi's chapter contrasts indigenous and endogenous perspectives, Isaac Albert concentrates on African approaches through a philosophical lens. He educates the reader on how Africans use proverbs, songs, elders and traditional leaders' cultural systems together with folklore and religious beliefs to resolve conflicts.

There is evidence that indigenous peace and conflict solutions work at some levels, but these methods have been neglected. Liberal peace projects imposed by NGOs, governments and international organisations neglect traditional methods and push for a model of democracy intended to shift societies from violence to peace and to promote sustainable economic growth. The authors suggest that a liberal peace project will only have impact in Africa if it is inclusive, empowering and brings in indigenous methods to manage conflicts and build peace.

In Rwanda and South Africa, for example, both traditional and modern reconciliatory approaches have been used to find a link between democratisation and the challenges for peace and conflict. It also illustrates how global pressure on countries to practice democracy can aggravate undemocratic policies and conflict, for example in Zimbabwe and Eritrea. The book concludes by recommending that African leaders should not scapegoat the West for their problems, but should look for pragmatic long-term solutions to conflict in their countries.

Peace and Conflict in Africa is a groundbreaking work that offers a thorough understanding of conflict resolution strategies and interventions in Africa. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in African history and peace studies. The book will be invaluable to African leaders who wish to take pragmatic steps to change the lives of their people.