

the line between ethical and unethical choices so blurred in Nigeria? Is Nigerian organized crime *sui generis*? Some readers might be disappointed that Ellis elects not to provide direct answers. Instead, he revisits the recurring themes of leadership and legitimacy, and underscores the cumulatively corrosive effect of Nigeria's perverse "theology" of impunity and greed. By so doing, Ellis masterfully unmask the multi-headed hydra that is organized crime in Nigeria. His historical analysis should be viewed as a backdrop, not a prescription. He challenges the reader to connect the dots and try to figure out how this phenomenon could be better understood and curtailed. It is only by so doing that we can rewrite the narrative and take meaningful steps to curb Nigerian organized crime at community, state, federal and global levels. PRISM

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¹ Stephen Ellis, *This Present Darkness: A History of Nigerian Organized Crime* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 15.

² Stephen Ellis, 34.

³ Stephen Ellis, 63.

⁴ Stephen Ellis, 120.

⁵ Stephen Ellis, 223.

Security in Africa: A Critical Approach to Western Indicators of Threat

By Claire Metelits
Rowman & Littlefield, 2016
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REVIEWED BY HILARY MATFESS

Claire Metelits in *Security in Africa: A Critical Approach to Western Indicators of Threat* illustrates clearly and concisely that the most commonly used threat indicators provide a narrow, flawed view of threats in sub-Saharan Africa. Metelits' work should not be as groundbreaking as it is: consider that on a recent survey conducted by AfroBarometer—a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys in more than 35 countries in Africa—the police were perceived as the most corrupt institution throughout sub-Saharan Africa, where survey data from Gallup suggests that police are among the most trusted institutions in the United States—even when trust levels are at a 22-year low.¹ However, Metelits' book is one of the few venues that fully appreciates the

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ramifications of this disconnect between citizens and states throughout the region. Metelits demonstrates how western, and particularly American, state-centric security indicators are ill-suited to understanding power structures and governance on the continent. *Security in Africa* unpacks what it means for a country to be “stable” and “secure,” or “impoverished” and “ungoverned;” she also delves into the significance of who is given the authority to characterize regions as such.

Though the book is primarily focused on sub-Saharan Africa, Metelits also engages with security studies as a field generally in the first chapter of the book. Her discussion of the evolution of the field from nuclear deterrence to counterinsurgency provides valuable insights as to how we have arrived at our current security institutions. This intellectual history of security studies as a field is truncated, filling just one chapter, but illuminating as to how we have arrived at such ineffective metrics. Western security metrics and institutions emerged from Westphalian states whose greatest threats, historically, have come from other states. Metelits extends American political scientist Jeffrey Herbst’s prior work on the contrast between state formation in Western Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, applying it to a discussion of security and authority.² Metelits astutely notes that, although states are tasked with providing stability, other units of analysis (including regions, networks, and localities) are often the better unit for understanding modern crises in Africa.

Metelits’ work addresses four areas in which the Western approach to security fails acutely when applied to sub-Saharan Africa: the “securitization of space;” the

“securitization of instability;” the “securitization of Muslim populations;” and the conceptualization of poverty as a threat in the region. The book clearly articulates the fear of so-called “ungoverned spaces” in sub-Saharan Africa and illustrates that what appears to be “ungoverned” because of state-centric, Western metrics is merely alternatively governed. A focus on state control of spaces, replicating the sort of sovereignty exercised in the United States and Western Europe, precludes a more nuanced analysis of the balance of power in “ungoverned spaces.” Metelits raises an interesting point in her discussion of the securitization of space—“destabilizing actors” foreign to the area face the same difficulties as the state, foreign governments, and the international aid community. The very “ungoverned/ungovernable” nature of these locations may be an inoculation against the sorts of violent groups that the state fears.

Metelits’ discussion of “stability” raises the question of which actors benefit from “stabilization” operations. These operations, with their emphasis on procedures (in particular, elections) and institutions consistently prioritize formality over effectiveness or authenticity. This tension between stability and representative politics has been on display in a number of African elections and electoral preparations throughout this past year.³ Metelits’ analysis gives credence to the activists who assert that the international community’s refrain “elections should be peaceful and credible” does not take into account the possible contradictions between these two conditions. Further, the book discusses the risks of ignoring informal conflict mitigation and governance mechanisms, which results in overlooking

demonstrably effective mechanisms because they do not fit into a state-centric mold.

Metelits' most interesting contributions come in her discussion of the securitization of demographic characteristics—most notably Muslim communities and the poor. Securitizing Muslim populations, counterintuitively, means de-politicizing them. Consider how designating a movement as being a terrorist group often erases its political, local roots. The nuanced conditions from which these groups arise, their recruitment strategies and levels of local support, and the ways in which “radical” sects’ scriptural interpretations differ from “mainstream” doctrine is hardly broached in Western capitals. Too often the association of a Muslim sect with extremism fails to identify the particular school of thought within the sect or mention that radicalization is a rare occurrence.

Metelits observes that the threat narrative constructed around Muslim communities has been leveraged by autocratic governments eager to squelch dissent and used to justify expanded military presence. I have written previously with the Center for Complex Operations (CCO) at the National Defense University on how counterterrorism measures are often legislative lipstick on the pig of a repressive government to include in Ethiopia, where thousands have falsely been jailed under the country’s Anti-Terrorism Law. Allowing the counterterrorism narrative to mask domestic political oppression undermines American priorities related to democratization and the promotion of human rights.

Similarly, the linking of poverty and underdevelopment to issues of security has the potential to radically alter the ways in which the United States engages in

development work. The persistent refrain that poverty is linked to violent extremism is part of the threat narrative that skews American understanding of conflict. Certainly poverty is a facilitating condition, but it is neither sufficient nor necessary for radicalization. Consider the work done by anthropologist Scott Atran that suggests that many suicide bombers in the Middle East are from middle class families—in addition to the simple fact that the vast majority of the global poor are neither radical nor violent.⁴ Making poverty a security threat further blurs the line between development work, humanitarianism, and military intervention. This is not the whole-of-government approach that many have advocated—it is a dangerous muddling of mandates.

Metelits’ book has a number of policy implications, though many remain underdeveloped. It is important to identify that the state-to-state relationships cultivated at present are sub-optimal; however, alternative methods of engagement are not discussed. Also underdeveloped are those interesting policy questions that emerge—in what ways, and why, have certain foreign actors been more effective at integrating into local networks than others?

Although African governments are often predatory and problematic security partners, it is unclear if that means that reform efforts should be intensified, abandoned, or handled at the unit level. As PRISM and the CCO have so frequently asserted, the Westphalian state system may be imperfect, but it is the best system devised yet. Metelits discusses how this framework is not the best for understanding governance in sub-Saharan African states, but alternative frameworks are difficult to envision. Similarly, Metelits discusses the

creation and dissemination of off-base threat narratives, but does not necessarily outline a way to repudiate these claims. Ultimately, Metelits' book provides an incisive first step towards a more effective, holistic, and nuanced understanding of security in sub-Saharan Africa. PRISM

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¹ AfroBarometer. Online Data Analysis Tool, accessed January 2017, < <http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/analyse-online>>. Gallup. Confidence in Institutions, 2016, <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx>>.

² Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton University Press, 2000). The book's argument is summarized by the publisher as "theories of international relations, assumed to be universally applicable, have failed to explain the creation of states in Africa. There, the interaction of power and space is dramatically different from what occurred in Europe. In *States and Power in Africa*, Jeffrey Herbst places the African state-building process in a truly comparative perspective. Herbst's bold contention—that the conditions now facing African state-builders existed long before European penetration of the continent—is sure to provoke controversy, for it runs counter to the prevailing assumption that colonialism changed everything."

³ There was concern in some Africanist policy circles that the 2016 elections in Ghana were characterized by an emphasis on 'peaceful,' rather than free and fair. Similarly, the preparations for the 2017 elections in Kenya seem to prioritize preventing electoral violence, rather than ensuring free polls.

⁴ Scott Atran, "Who Becomes A Terrorist Today?" *Perspectives on Terrorism*. 2.5 (2008).

The Great Surge: The Ascent of the Developing World

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REVIEWED BY LAWRENCE GARBER

In 1990, with the Cold War having just concluded, I delighted in reviewing analyses written during the previous decade, which confidently assumed that the bipolar world order was a permanent description of the global landscape. 2016 may represent another threshold year. The Brexit vote and Donald Trump's election require re-examination of critical assumptions that gained traction between the end of the Cold War and 2015 regarding the inevitability of economic and political progress in the developing world, including Africa.

Steve Radelet's *The Great Surge: the Ascent of the Developing World*, published at the end of 2015, provides an example of a book that deserves a serious reread in the context of the post-2016 reality. Indeed, 2015 can already be seen as a high point for consequential development diplomacy. Three major conferences demonstrated the international community's appreciation of specific

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