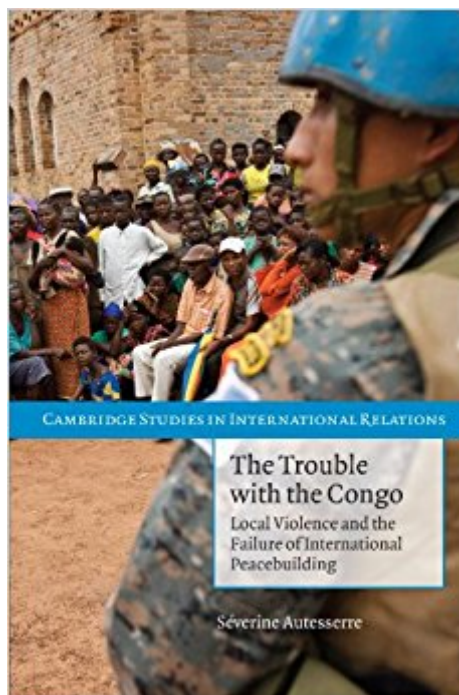


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The Trouble With The Congo: Local Violence And The Failure Of International Peacebuilding (Cambridge Studies In International Relations)



Synopsis

- Winner of the 2012 Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order- Winner of the 2011 Chadwick F. Alger Prize, International Studies Association

The Trouble with the Congo suggests a new explanation for international peacebuilding failures in civil wars. Drawing from more than 330 interviews and a year and a half of field research, it develops a case study of the international intervention during the Democratic Republic of the Congo's unsuccessful transition from war to peace and democracy (2003-2006). Grassroots rivalries over land, resources, and political power motivated widespread violence. However, a dominant peacebuilding culture shaped the intervention strategy in a way that precluded action on local conflicts, ultimately dooming the international efforts to end the deadliest conflict since World War II. Most international actors interpreted continued fighting as the consequence of national and regional tensions alone. UN staff and diplomats viewed intervention at the macro levels as their only legitimate responsibility. The dominant culture constructed local peacebuilding as such an unimportant, unfamiliar, and unmanageable task that neither shocking events nor resistance from select individuals could convince international actors to reevaluate their understanding of violence and intervention.

Book Information

Series: Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Book 115)

Paperback: 344 pages

Publisher: Cambridge University Press (June 14, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0521156017

ISBN-13: 978-0521156011

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #150,417 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #27 in [Books > History > Africa > Central Africa](#) #99 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > War & Peace](#) #109 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > African](#)

Customer Reviews

"Over a decade old, the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) is now the biggest multilateral peacekeeping effort ever, with close to 20,000 troops and civilian

personnel and an operating budget over a billion dollars. Cycles of extreme violence in the country have led to some criticism of the UN's efforts, and Autesserre's book provides a unique ethnography of the organization in the Congo, the outlook and values of its staff, and its operational logic...Autesserre's arguments are clearly stated and compelling..." - Foreign Affairs

"The Trouble with the Congo is a magnificent accomplishment and is must-reading for anyone interested in whether, why, and how the international community might be able to reduce the cases of violence around the world. Scholars will admire how Autesserre uses a combination of theoretical analysis and ethnography to show us how two different worlds collide, and how peacebuilders do not see the collision even on impact. My hope is that practitioners will take to heart the book's call for critical self-reflection and use its insights for more effective policy prescriptions. Wonderfully written, the book delivers a cool but passionate analysis, born from Autesserre's courage, commitment to Congolese, and sincere desire not to simply identify criticisms of peacebuilding but to suggest ways in which it can improve its craft to help the people on the ground." - Michael Barnett, University of Minnesota

"What happens when international peacebuilding is culturally focused at the national level, yet most conflict takes place at the local level? Using extensive, painstakingly collected evidence, Autesserre shows that the macro-micro mismatch is not only a methodological shortcoming but also a grave policy failure. By helping to frame a nasty concatenation of local conflicts as a 'postconflict situation,' this policy focus ended up exacerbating the war and its attendant human suffering. At once a gripping account of war and failed peace in the Congo and a strikingly lucid and original examination of the causes of peacebuilding failure in civil war, this book demonstrates why deep contextual knowledge remains an essential precondition of theoretical innovation." - Stathis N. Kalyvas, Yale University

"The trouble with the Congo is a well-researched and provocative book, and its arguments are comprehensively supported with solid evidence. The bibliography will be a resource for scholars of Central Africa for decades. The questions Autesserre's arguments raise are based on logical arguments which provide grist for the theoretical mill and open up and point the way to new research agendas." - Michael Nest, African Security Review

"A much-needed contribution to the literature on the micro-dynamics of violence and peacebuilding, SÃfÂ©verine Autesserre's *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* is an outstanding work of political science. It is so meticulously researched and well reasoned - while based on solid evidence - that it is difficult to criticise the author's central claim that conflict continues in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) because it essentially never occurred to the international community that it needed to be concerned with local peacebuilding initiatives. - Laura E. Seay, African Security Review

"Autesserre's interpretation of events in Congo has wide academic appeal and direct policy implications. She recommends devising and implementing local peacebuilding efforts to accompany efforts being made at the national and regional levels.... Autesserre does an excellent job of convincing the reader that, in many ways, international peacebuilders lacked the basic skills, such as knowledge of local power dynamics, linguistic skills, etc, necessary to resolve conflicts at the local level." - Zachariah Mampilly, African Security Review "Autesserre's recommendations, which open up new avenues of thinking about bottomup peacebuilding strategies, contribute to the establishment of preconditions for a radical change not only in culture but also in action." - Geoffroy Matagne, African Security Review "Autesserre has powerfully turned our attention to the missing local piece/ peace of the complex challenge that is peacemaking/peacekeeping/peacebuilding, of the violent puzzle that is the eastern DRC, and of many other 'post-conflict' settings.... In this, her book makes a powerful contribution." - Stephen Jackson, African Security Review "The Trouble with the Congo is an important study that adds greatly to the growing literature on international peacebuilding in Africa and other areas of the world. This study is essential reading for anyone interested in modern Africa and the failure of international peacebuilding in the last two decades." - Sandra Trudgen Dawson, African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review "Autesserre offers a powerful analysis that contributes to an understanding of the significance of culture in peacekeeping operations, from both an institutional and a grassroots perspective.... Her book is an absolute must for anyone interested in the Congo wars." - Steven Schouten, International Affairs "The strong and convincing argument for local peace-building will secure the book to be a new fixture in the peace-building literature firmament." - John Karlsrud, Forum for Development Studies

The Trouble with the Congo suggests a new explanation for international peacebuilding failures in civil wars. Local rivalries motivated widespread violence during the Congolese transition from war to peace. However, a dominant peacebuilding culture shaped the intervention strategy in a way that precluded action on local conflicts, ultimately dooming the international efforts.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a huge country--the third largest by area in Africa--with almost unimaginable mineral wealth, an intelligent and hard working population and productive farmland with several growing seasons per year. Mobutu Sese Seko ruled the DRC/Zaire for 32 years in a brutal kleptocracy which kept the Congo an impoverished giant. While there had been revolts against his rule over the years it was not until the mid-1990s, following the genocide in neighboring Rwanda that warfare became a permanent part of the DRC especially in the provinces

of North and South Kivu which are just across the border from Rwanda and its restive neighbor, Burundi. Since 1997 the United Nations has had its largest and most expensive peacekeeping deployment in the eastern Congo. There have been well funded and well meaning attempts at nation building. Warfare continues almost unabated. Refugees and internally displaced people stuck in huge camps unable or afraid to return to their homelands number in the millions. Clearly things aren't working and "The Trouble with the Congo" goes a long way in telling why. Severine Autesserre's insights are amazing, particularly her discussion of how the peacebuilding community almost universally considered people in the Eastern DRC to be savages who are inherently murderous. This, by the way, is not a white or even western view of the Congolese. South Africans and many from neighboring countries felt that extensive and constant violence was the norm in the Congo. Another is how UN representatives convinced themselves that pitched battles between large groups of armed men in an area covered by a truce was still part of a post-conflict world and not even a violation of the truce. The most striking aspect of the book is her low key scholarly approach--although I realize that is both necessary and appropriate in academic work, I keep expecting to get to the section where she starts ripping into those people who were so responsible for "The Trouble with the Congo". Autesserre's very temperate perhaps even restrained presentation makes her conclusions all the more powerful. And her immersion in and mastery of the sources--it seems she has read everything and interviewed everyone--means her method is rock solid, or so it seems to this non-academic. Spending a couple of years in the DRC, sometimes as a humanitarian worker--her first trip to the area was for the Spanish chapter of Doctors without Borders--and sometimes as a researcher has given her access to the depth and breadth of contacts necessary to understand the situation on the ground. She established her intellectual framework through deep reading of both theoretical and journalistic accounts of how the peacebuilding process has failed and succeeded in Africa and elsewhere. The solutions toward which her work point at first seem so obvious as to not need saying: a combination of a top down approach that deals with national and regional issues combined with a bottom up approach that deals with local issues would work much better than doing only one or the other. But because that integrated plan of attack hasn't been tried in the Eastern Congo the war that is officially not a war continues. Autesserre's prose is both rigorous and technical enough so that the reader knows exactly what she means but also clear and accessible to the non-specialist--like me. I just beginning to learn a bit about the Congo and the African Great Lakes region and "The Trouble with the Congo" has been invaluable. I figure that reading about 20 books on such a huge subject will be a good start and I only wish they could all be as good as this one.

Severine Autesserre argues that violence in the Congo continues because of an international peacebuilding culture that prioritizes a macro-level approach of national stability in order to achieve peace, while disregarding the complex dynamics of local Congolese actors, struggles for land, a lack of economic opportunity, and ethnic tensions. She concludes that the Congo can achieve stability through a consideration of grassroots peacebuilding efforts. Where Autesserre succeeds is in her ability to put the complexities of the local dynamics and ethnic conflicts of the Congo and its relationship to Rwanda, coupled with the pressures of outside western powers, and the efforts of UN peacekeeping humanitarian missions in an easy to follow manner. She breaks down each aspect of the problem and fleshes it out, never letting you lose sight of the other factors that influence and are simultaneously influenced by each other. Some of the most profound moments in the book come from her interviews with top UN officials who speak directly contrary to the themes of her book, and spouting comments of Congolese innate barbarity that seem out of place coming from the mouths of peacebuilding agents. Autesserre leaves the reader with what she calls policy recommendations, but I think would be more aptly termed strategic recommendations. She does not suggest broad programs or step-by-step reforms, which would be contrary to her criticism of a broad-based agenda that can be replicated in all developing areas. She instead recommends international peacebuilding organizations to completely reevaluate their strategy of nationalized reforms, and alternately consider the role that local leaders and conflicts have in persisting instability. While some may see this as a deficiency in her work, I encourage naysayers to reflect on the failure of broad-based approaches attempting to solve the complex roots of intervened states. And while some programs may have had success in a region, that cannot be a guaranteed blueprint for peace in others. Autesserre understands this constraint, and instead recommends a change in the dominant peacebuilding thinking in order for specialists to conceive of appropriate tactics in the region they are attempting to assist. Autesserre's writing is devoid of the usual academic jargon, and instead utilizes simplistic language to articulate the intricate relationship between local and state actors, opposition and nationalist groups, and regional divides that have culminated in the Congo's instability. However, this writing style can be quite dry, and she has a tendency to hit you over the head with her explanations, repeating herself often. Nevertheless, the insight she provides on the faults of the MONUC and other peacekeeping missions in the Congo is too valuable to dismiss. Besides, with the prevailing misconceptions of the roots of the Congo's violence still in question after decades of studies, it is understandable why Autesserre takes such a repetitive approach to the book.

SÃfÂ©verine Autesserre's 'The Trouble with the Congo' is a brilliant book, it describes in detail the plan the UN used in the DRC and why she believes it failed, her arguments are strongly supported. I would recommend this to anyone who wants to gain insight into the ongoing conflict in the DRC.

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