

Erik Kennes and Miles Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes and War in Central Africa: fighting their way home*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press (hb US\$85 – 978 0 253 02130 4; pb US\$35 – 978 0 253 02139 7). 2016, xvi + 289 pp.

In a region marked by numerous different conflicts and wars since colonialism's ignoble advent and retreat – suffice to mention the Rwandan genocide, the Angolan civil war or 'Africa's World War' – a wealth of actors, trajectories and transversal dynamics remain deeply understudied, and thus underrepresented in scholarly literature. *The Katangese Gendarmes and War in Central Africa* by Erik Kennes and Miles Larmer takes on one of the lesser known yet pivotal actors in these wars. This hitherto formidable fighting force has a unique history: it has been deeply embedded in and shaped by early Congolese nationalist and regionalist struggles since 1960. From that time onwards, it engaged in half a dozen different major conflicts in the region over half a century.

Drawing on two decades of intermittent research, the authors have compiled an extraordinary wealth of primary sources, ranging from personal memoirs and archival gems to individual interviews with bygone protagonists in numerous places in Angola, Congo, Portugal, Belgium and elsewhere. Kennes and Larmer's monumental analysis of the *Gendarmes Katangais*, otherwise known as *Tigres*, is a meticulous attempt to trace a key belligerent of subsequent though not consecutive wars. Rooted in a movement that was primarily ethno-nationalist in its struggle on behalf of an independent Katanga (both during its brief secession in the 1960 and in the later 'Shaba Wars'), the *Gendarmes* have, however, found themselves in conflicts as diverse as the Angolan civil war between FNLA, MPLA and UNITA and the 'Liberation War' that removed Mobutu from power in Zaire. They have found themselves deployed by patrons ranging from Tshombé and Laurent-Désiré Kabila to colonial Portugal and the MPLA. Yet, and against all odds, the phenomenon, character and trajectory of the *Gendarmes* can barely be understood without taking into account their own agency and approach to navigating the shifting formations of power and politics in the region, as the authors masterfully carve out here.

The Katangese Gendarmes is divided chronologically. In the first introductory chapter, the authors dig into the foundational dynamics of the group – focusing on the determining element of (imagined) Katangan statehood and how it evolved from precolonial political realities and colonial experiences. The second and third chapters retrace the infamous Katangan secession and – perhaps the first of its kind, in light of later ones – the failed demobilization and reintegration of the *Tigres*. Chapters 4 and 5 take on their provisional exodus from Zaire, becoming subsequently an instrument of Portuguese colonial forces and then a key ally in Agostinho Neto's anti-colonial struggle. In Chapter 6, the authors illustrate how the *Gendarmes* – by then a fighting force sitting on the edge of Zaire and Angola in terms of its political stance and socialization – became involved again in their homelands during the two Shaba Wars of the 1970s. Finally, Chapters 7 and 8 analyse the *Tigres'* slow decline, which resulted in many of them living through a short battlefield revival as the Rwandan-sponsored AFDL rebellion toppled Mobutu in 1997. In closing, the authors outline the disintegration of the *Gendarmes*, including their partial co-optation within Kabilist rule. The book closes by hinting at how their ideological, secessionist-nationalist foundations, as well as their cleft and heterogeneous collective identity, continue to inform Katangan politics, in particular the current north–south divide and recent secessionist armed mobilization.

The book is soberly written, clearly formulated and sports a fine-grained analysis of forgotten details brought back to light thanks to Kennes' and Larmer's

exhaustive investigations over their twenty years or so of research. Beyond its chapters, near to fifty pages of substantial endnotes speak to how thoroughly the authors have worked through the materials they have assembled over time and the impressive effort to locate the *Gendarmes* within the fundamentally different conflicts and wars in which they have been involved – all of which feature in entire books of their own. Perhaps, on the other hand, this is also the only weakness: without thorough prior knowledge, the reader is at risk of getting lost in the way in which more than fifty years of complex history and context are woven into one, actor-centred narrative stream.

In that sense, *The Katangese Gendarmes* is a welcome, timely and necessary addition to the body of studies dedicated to war and conflict in Central Africa and an exemplary effort in historical conflict studies underpinned by a rigorous conceptual background on statehood, nationalism and conflict in postcolonial Africa. Moreover, like Jason Stearns' *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters* and Philip Roessler and Harry Verhoeven's *Why Comrades Go to War*, Kennes and Larmer's book offers unparalleled testimony of key stakeholders in the entire region's recent political history. For anyone interested in such issues, and students of Angola and the Congo in particular, this book should have a prominent place in libraries and on syllabi and bookshelves.

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Christopher Clapham, *The Horn of Africa: state formation and decay*. London: C. Hurst and Company (pb £17.99 – 978 1 8490 4828 6). 2017, x + 224 pp.

This is a much-desired and elegantly written book by Christopher Clapham, who has been an avid observer of political developments in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa for several decades. On the whole, the book deals with two things. The first is the construction of an analytical framework that explains the exceptionality of state formation processes in the Horn of Africa. The second is the examination of recent trajectories of state formation processes in the region.

The discussion of trajectories of state formation is rich with fascinating insights and details. The attempt to provide an analytical framework is, however, problematic for at least two reasons. First, the extension of Ethiopian exceptionalism and *non-colonial dynamics* of state formation to the whole region is not convincing. Second, the author gives geography a larger role than it warrants. The three geographical conceptions – 'highland core', 'lowland periphery' and 'highland periphery' – are drawn from *Ethiopia: the last two frontiers*, John Markakis's 2011 book on Ethiopia, and are used to expound the analytical framework. But these conceptions not only tend to be static but also have limitations in explaining internal tensions within each of the three zones.

Because of the rupture that occurred in the Ethiopian and Somali states in 1991, that year was rightly taken as a watershed for recent state formation processes. Reconstituting states after 1991 was more easily achieved in Ethiopia and Eritrea, which are still dominated by groups hailing from the 'highland core', whereas state building in Somalia (excepting Somaliland) has proved to be a non-starter.

In spite of the differences that prevailed between the leaderships of Ethiopia and Eritrea, both countries ventured into building illiberal states. However, in Eritrea