

Review

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The Roots of African Conflicts: The Causes and Costs and The Resolution of African Conflicts: The Management of Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction. Alfred Nhema and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (eds.) 2008. Addis Ababa: OSSREA, Oxford: James Currey, Athens: Ohio University Press and Pretoria: UNISA Press.

Understanding the nature and roots of African conflicts and building institutional frameworks designed to manage conflict have pre-occupied research and regional organizations in Africa for the past two decades. The African Union and regional economic communities have developed security architectures that include early warning capability, conflict resolution mechanisms, peace-keeping and peace-building institutions. Some successes in managing conflicts on the continent have been recorded, most notably, in Angola, Lesotho, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, other seemingly intractable conflicts remain, for example, in Somalia, Sudan and Burundi. Although there is a plethora of analysis on the sources of conflict and prescriptions for their resolution, many gaps in our analyses and recommendations remain.

The two-volume collection edited by Alfred Nhema and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza is therefore a welcomed contribution to the debates on this topic. The chapters in these volumes were presented at an OSSREA conference on “African Conflicts: Management, Resolution, Post-Conflict Recovery and Development” in December 2004, in Addis Ababa. The 22 chapters cover a wide range of topics, such as, the causes, costs and nature of civil wars, an analysis of the conduct of rebel movements, reflections on the African woman combatant, legislative responses to terrorism, food security policies, role of sub-regional schemes in conflict prevention, the continental early warning system, the International Criminal Court, local government and the management of conflict, elections and conflict case studies on Uganda, Somalia and Mozambique.

In his erudite introduction, Zeleza dispenses with the dichotomy between “old wars” and “new wars,” asserting that there is “no evidence that warfare

has changed fundamentally in terms of types of participants, and patterns in the prosecution of wars, and their purposes". His request is for more depth and complexity in our analysis of the causes and consequences of war, convincingly arguing that our studies need to be informed by political economy and a cultural ecology of war. By this he means an approach that emphasizes and examines how political, economic, social and cultural factors cause and sustain war and conflict, incorporates the interplay between the historical and contemporary processes, highlights the connections between local, regional and global systems and the role played by various national and international actors, and how material forces, popular discourses, institutional conditions and symbolic constructs, structure and reproduce conflicts. Alfred Nhema's introductory chapter, in the second volume, notes the realisation that Africa will have to increasingly rely on itself to provide long-term solutions to its own problems.

The volumes, especially the collection dealing with the roots of African conflicts, interrogate some of the linkages referred to above, providing new insights and contesting prevailing assumptions about African conflicts and processes of democratization. For example, Henderson's chapter, using regression analyses, disputes the linkage between semi-democracies and conflict. Mkandawire rejects rational choice explanations and shows that the predatory behaviour of rebel movements can be located in their urban origins, roving nature and the rentier characteristics of the state. White disputes Fanon's thesis on the emancipatory effects of violence, especially for women. And Scheidegger illustrates the need for greater nuance in the depiction of the linkages between social capital and democratization in segmented societies like South Africa. However, all fall short in their incorporation of gender as a central variable in the construction of new knowledge of African conflicts and recommendations for more creative and sustainable conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction processes and institutions.

Zeleza, cognizant of this gap in the texts, makes a valiant introductory effort to apply a gendered lens to conflict. There is also an excellent paper by Aaronette White on the African woman combatant, but apart from this, the volumes are astonishingly gender blind. The authors appear oblivious to the immense amount of scholarly work and policy analysis produced on gender relations during war and its aftermath, the effects of war on women, the participation of women in peace processes and the consequences of the absence of a gendered perspective to demilitarization, demobilization and

reintegration (DDR) and general security sector governance, as well as the adoption of UN Resolution 1325 (which does not receive a single mention). For what is projected as well researched conference papers, this is utterly inexcusable.

Zezeza, citing Goldstein, reiterates, “gender shapes war and war shapes gender.” Women and the girl child have been the victims of war in myriads of ways ranging from being displaced and impoverished to being abducted as sex slaves, maimed and killed. The very people sent in to protect them, UN and AU peacekeepers, have also sexually abused them. But, women have also exerted agency: as combatants, playing support functions in liberation/rebel armies, as active supporters of the rebels cause, mobilizing to bring an end to the conflict and organizing for their own liberation to be attained through peace processes. Though we must not overemphasize the empowering attributes of war for women, many have pointed to the space it provides for changed gender relations. Examples include the emergence of female-headed households, and the mushrooming of women’s organisations, many of which were formed initially to provide humanitarian assistance during conflict, but were reconstituted as organizational vehicles through which women mobilize for political representation and for a gendered peace. Moreover, the relationship between men during war, Zezeza mentions, is gendered. He writes: “war and militaries are critical mechanisms for the production and performance of masculinities”.

In the prologue, written by Mazrui, increased women’s representation is recommended as part of the ensemble of conflict resolution mechanisms necessary on the continent. However, he seems unaware of the adoption by the African Union and many sub-regional organizations of a 30 per cent, more recently increased to parity, representation for women in decision-making structures. He thus, quite paternalistically, appeals for women to be given greater voice in the legislative process and executive branch, suggesting an allocation initially of 10 per cent. Mazrui also calls for a changed military culture, through the inclusion of more women into the defence forces. Experiences of women in the armed forces indicate that their mere presence does not lead to transformed military cultures and that women are often relegated to perform stereotypically support functions with combat readiness, even in the markedly changed nature of combat, being the operative excuse for their role and functions within these institutions.

Ahmed, reviewing the prospects for reconciliation and unity in the Sudan,

points to the changed social relations within the IDP camps and its potential to produce new forms of leadership in the Sudan. The diversity of ethnic groups in these camps gradually leads to a softening of the ethnic boundaries and groups begin to express a higher degree of tolerance and desire for peace-full co-existence, i.e., IDP's have a different set of values, relations and expectations and the absence of traditional leaders in these camps creates the space for new leaders to emerge. Although he notes that among the major changes is that of gender relations, he fails to explore this further. There is also no follow up of what actually happens once people return to their homes: if Sudan did not present itself as a test case for this at the time of writing, in 2004, there were ample other case studies that could have been used as reference points. It is an interesting point for further analysis. Can we, for example, attribute the large representation of women in decision-making in Rwanda to the changed social relations that transpired in the IDP camps and/or in exile? Rwandan women often attribute their success to an enlightened leadership, but where and how did this enlightenment materialize and why did it not manifest in other countries with large displaced populations?

Mkandawire's chapter particularly lends itself to a gendered analysis of the actors and actions of rebel movements. Unfortunately, this is not forthcoming and he cannot claim ignorance of gender as an alibi. His thesis, on the behaviour of rebel movements, rests on their urban nature and the type of states they are formed in, namely rentier (characterized by a wider urban/rural gap than merchant states). These rebel movements are not able to find common cause with the peasantry, they are primarily roving and their choice for temporary location is governed more by security concerns. This then accounts for their plundering nature. However, plundering can take many forms. The fact that sexual violence is so central to their methods certainly cannot be reduced to an urban crisis and has to be explained through gendered power relations, the performance of masculinity and the militarized nature of our societies (succinctly captured by White's chapter). Apuuli's chapter details some of the gendered war crimes committed by these rebel movements (rape, forced marriage, forced pregnancy, sexual slavery, etc).

The chapters on conflict resolution mechanisms and peace-building processes have no gendered content. The need to include women in peace processes to ensure that their interests are represented, or an account of the role they have played in peace processes, both formal and informal, is entirely absent. The only redeeming chapter in the two volumes, White on the African

woman combatant, deserves further comment in this review.

White employs Fanon's thesis on the transformative aspects of violence for the colonized, which she negates, as an entry point to explain why, despite their participation in the revolution, women's liberation is not attained in the post-war period. Drawing on the work of a number of African women scholars who have engaged this topic, she asserts that Fanon underestimated the extreme distortion of gender relations during the colonial period, the patriarchal nature of nationalism and militarism and consequently, African men's resistance to transforming entrenched neo-colonized and militarized mentalities: this is encapsulated in the phrase 'androcentricization of inferiority.' She highlights that war/revolutionary struggles are as much about the recognition of the masculine identities of African men and that this limits the efforts of women to achieve gender equity "before, during, and after such wars". Women's agency, for White, is severely curtailed both by the desire of men to impose and perpetuate patriarchy and by the patriarchal characteristics that are intrinsic to the form of liberation, namely war/armed struggle. Furthermore, this growth of a "militarized, neo-colonised masculine mentality makes it difficult to nurture a human rights culture".

This framework is useful in considering the disproportionate violence inflicted on women during and after war, and for understanding why women combatants/participants are reluctant to present themselves for DDR or lay equal claim to the spoils of office: while men become heroes through war, women are shrouded in shame. In some instances women are able to achieve greater representation after the war, but in most cases they are "put back in their place." It would have been useful to discern when women are able to gain greater voice – what are the key variables that lead to a distinction in the gendered nature of representation or willingness (even if only in legislation) to create gender equity in post-war states? Although I agree with White's overall thesis, I am sceptical of her particularization to African men – the explanation should hold for all other post-colonial contexts too. Moreover, if we are to accept the linkage between militarized neo-colonised masculine identities and the limits of a human rights culture, are we not merely back to colonialism as the distinguishing variable – for how else would we explain other societies in which patriarchy and militarism prevail but which are able to sustain a human rights culture, for example, Sweden? Is White also not, unwittingly, swinging the pendulum back to a positioning of women as mere victims in war and its aftermath?

For those who work in the peace and security sector, these volumes are a must read. For readers working in other sectors, it is informative and will also provide a strong indication of the lack of cross-disciplinary approaches within the peace and security field. If we, in the peace and security sector, heed Zeleza's appeal for complexity and interdisciplinarity, it would take us a long way towards producing more informed research and policy recommendations on peace, security and development in Africa.