Book Reviews

Curtis, Devon/Dzinesa, Gwinyayi (eds), *Peacebuilding, Power and Politics in Africa.* Johannesburg: Wits University Press 2013, 353 pp.

This volume is a collaborative project between the Centre of African Studies at the University of Cambridge and the Centre for Conflict Resolution in Cape Town and fittingly brings together scholars from both the global north and south to scrutinise the role of international and national actors in peacebuilding in Africa.

The core contention of the volume is that peace is a contested concept. In the introduction, Curtis argues that peacebuilding is not a linear process and its challenges cannot simply be resolved through better sequencing or by building better state institutions. Instead, the authors bring to attention the many complex issues that influence peacebuilding in the African context, paying particular attention to the role hierarchies of power and knowledge play.

Although competition for resources in a peacebuilding process has often been discussed in the literature, the competition for *meaning* that this volume addresses adds a new dimension to the discussion. In the introduction, Curtis describes the contested nature of the terms peace and peacebuilding. In Hutchful's discussion on security sector reform he asks what security means in a local context. Omach, in a discussion of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration asks who we include in the term 'combatant' when in some cases whole communities, including women and children, participate in a conflict, making the line between combatant and civilian very thin. Zaum questions what 'legitimacy' really means to local actors when it comes to statebuilding.

These contestations of meaning are echoed in the case studies towards the end of the volume, where, for example, Srinivasan, in a discussion of Sudan, echoes Keen's opening chapter on the problems inherent in the "institution of the negotiating table". Ero echoes Zaum with regard to the problems related to equating peacebuilding with statebuilding, looking at the cases of Sierra Leone and Liberia. Dzinesa describes some of Omach's arguments in his analysis of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) in Southern Africa. This gives

the volume a sense of coherence that can be difficult to achieve in edited volumes, allowing for the arguments that the book opens with to be fleshed out through relevant, in-depth examples.

From well-known institutions such as the African Union (AU) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) to lesser known ones such as the Pan African Ministers Conference for Public and Civil Service, the role these play in peacebuilding is examined. Again and again, contributions to the volume criticise peacebuilding institutions and frameworks for assuming that peacebuilding is a linear process with a fixed set of procedures. Further, they criticise external actors for imposing particular peacebuilding assumptions (for example those related to liberal democracy) and approaches on the African context, and criticise African peacebuilding institutions (particularly the African Development Bank) for adopting these assumptions unquestioningly.

At times, the level of detailed description about these institutions and their roles in peacebuilding can become tedious. But perhaps this volume provides a necessary reference point for the who, what, where, when and how of peacebuilding institutions on the continent. The additional critical Africanist lens employed by mostly African scholars offers an important and necessary perspective that has not been so readily available in the literature thus far.

Many of the criticisms run along the well-known line of interventions not being sufficiently context sensitive, not sufficiently addressing underlying structural causes and the lack of cooperation and coordination between different actors. But some of the criticisms are painfully pertinent and call for urgent consideration. Negotiation processes are accused of rewarding violence by inviting only to the table those who have the greatest military force and pose the greatest threat, the ICC is accused of having a counter-productive role in peacebuilding partly due to the erroneous assumption that there is 'no peace without justice' and current policy frameworks are accused of not addressing how to manage the transition from post-conflict reconstruction to economic development, to the detriment of the peacebuilding process.

This collection of articles is not blindly critical, though, but gives detailed insight into specific strengths and opportunities, pitfalls and errors of both local and international actors. Although the book scrutinises the problems inherent in peacebuilding processes in helpful detail, and asks some very important questions, answers to these questions remain vague. Some suggestions authors make is that more attention needs

to be given to informal and local institutions. Local, traditional, customary and community-based approaches, actors and interventions need to be integrated into international peacebuilding initiatives. But few of the contributions of this volume discuss what those informal and local institutions look like or take the time to describe traditional or community-based approaches.

The most tangible and interesting suggestion comes from Omach who suggests that instead of reintegrating individual 'combatants', reintegration programs should focus on 'community livelihoods', strengthening the ability of whole communities to function sustainably. Lemarchand, although not offering substantial solutions, does allow the reader a powerful sense of the suffering of those affected by violence, something that is rarely included in an analysis of conflict or post-conflict interventions. This empathetic stance seems important when emphasising the position of local actors.

Another concern is that, apart from in Hutchful's discussion of security sector governance, not a single other chapter addresses gender. Discussions abound in the literature around the significant role women play in peacebuilding, as well as the necessity for conscious inclusion of gender in peacebuilding policy frameworks, institutions and processes. Yet none of the contributions to this volume, bar one, explicitly mentions gender. It is a real pity considering that this book is about hierarchies of power and knowledge, and the meanings that local actors, who in most cases have the least power in peacebuilding processes, hold. Where possibly could the contention of meaning with regards to peace and peacebuilding due to hierarchies of power and knowledge be more significant than in the area of gender?

Despite these concerns, the volume makes an important and timely contribution in presenting such a careful and critical analysis of the assumptions that underlie peacebuilding efforts and the roles of institutions that facilitate peacebuilding without attempting glib answers to very complex problems. An interesting follow-up project would be a volume that describes the local actors, informal institutions and community-based approaches that the authors name as being crucial in ensuring a more effective peacebuilding intervention.

Cori Wielenga
Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria