African Studies Quarterly

No Peace, No War: An Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflicts. Paul Richards, ed. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005. 214 pp.

At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict. Roland Paris. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 290 pp.

No Peace, No War and *At War's End* probe the nature of armed hostilities while paying close attention to their social context and process. It should be noted that despite their different methodologies and perspectives, both tomes speak simultaneously to scholars and practitioners of peacebuilding, and to others interested in the challenges of managing civil violence. In spite of the similarity of topics and their general treatment of the issues at hand, this review discusses each book in turn in order to better accentuate their import and potential.

Paul Richards' edited volume is the product of a research project on the anthropology of violent conflict. A comparative analysis of the chapters in this collection illustrate that the intent of the investigation is the unpacking of the concepts of war and peace from the load of meanings deposited on them by security experts and international relations scholars. The point of departure for the contributors is debunking the dominant media perception that rogue states and terrorist networks are causes rather than symptoms of the volatility of international life. In its execution of this objective *No Peace, No War* adopts the conceptual tool-kit of anthropological research. Consequently, such a novel take on the issue of contemporary armed conflicts makes possible a number of important conjectures on the relationship between war and peace.

The collection challenges its readers to think about war (and also peace) as aspects of social processes and not merely as the outcomes of a set of causes. This proposition is particularly pertinent to the post-Cold War conflicts, the overwhelming majority of which occurred within and not between states. Richards' volume locates such wars within the social context that nurtures them. This allows conflict to be conceptualized as "something made through social action, and something that can be moderated through social action rather than viewing it as so exceptional as to require 'special' explanatory effort" (p. 3). The utility of this argument is advanced in eleven essays on societies vulnerable to or affected by war. The following section concentrates on the treatment of the "African" cases, as they are likely of greater interest to the readers of this journal.

In this context, one should admire Sten Hagberg's perspicacious treatment of the volatile inter-ethnic peace in Burkina Faso. In an investigation which seeks to explain the persistence of the uneasy peace in the country, Hagberg draws attention away from the part played by the central authorities and external actors and instead focuses on the role of local administrations. He points that it is the functioning of local bureaucracy (sustained by regular payments of salaries) more than anything else that keeps the lid on civil unrest in the country. Hagberg's analysis contributes to the emerging literature linking post-Cold War civil conflicts (not only in Africa) to the breakdown of local administrations and in particular "the subsequent corruption of local dispute-resolution procedures" (p.

55). This point dovetails with Sverker Finnström's treatment of the conflict in Northern Uganda. Finnström embarks on a socio-linguistic examination, which he terms "knowing by engagements" (p. 98) of the interactive cultural and political practice of interpretation and counter-interpretation of the conflict by the various protagonists. The processes of marginalization due to the malfunctioning of state-institutions are at the heart of Caspar Fithen's and Paul Richards' study of the conflict in Sierra Leone. The authors emphasize the "operational failure of traditional group solidarities" (p. 117). The dissolution of these traditional social relationships in the country leads them to suggest the emergence of competing affinities organized around cultures of violence. The analysis of this chapter, however, could have greatly benefited from a comparison with similar studies of the wars in former Yugoslavia, which link the levels of violence to the ruin of social hierarchies. The difficulty to rebuild social solidarities is reiterated by Mats Utas in his chapter on the reintegration of Liberia's child-soldiers. Utas, like Finnström, emphasizes the importance of knowing and engaging the social environment in the process of peacebuilding.

A similar argument is advanced by Bjorn Lindgren in his essay on political violence in Zimbabwe. The thrust of his thesis is that conflicts never really end, but continue to live in the memories of violence and the reality of dislocation. Therefore, Lindgren points that sustainable peace projects require attention to the social accommodation of these experiences. Yet, despite the enlightened approach of these essays all of them pale in comparison with the closing exploration by the late Bernhard Helander on the long and complex war in Somalia. During the 1990s the country has become a poignant symbol for both political scientists and representatives of international institutions. Helander suggests that the failure of the peacebuilding initiatives in the country is due to their objective to resuscitate the state institutions so that peace can flourish. As the provocative title of his essay "Who Needs a State" suggests, Helander revisits the practices of local stateless societies by considering the delivery of social services in Northeast Somalia. In this respect, he makes an important contribution not only to understanding the process and context of modern conflict, but also adds to the growing literature on post-Westphalian statehood.

In these and many other ways, *No Peace, No War* provides a much-needed account of the role played by social processes in post-Cold War intra-state conflicts. It also invites readers to consider alternative ways for overcoming the dilemmas of state-failure and state-collapse. It is expected that some would object to the anthropological approach advanced by the volume; but even the detractors would have to admire the coherence and consistency with which it has been followed by the contributors. The collection would therefore appeal to the advanced student of international affairs and in particular to scholars exploring the issues of ethnic strife.

Dealing with the aftermath of violent conflicts is also the focus of Roland Paris' *At War's End*. His pragmatic objective is to suggest ways for making peacebuilding more effective. Paris considers this an essential requirement in countering the problems of civil conflict in the post-Cold War era. Unlike *No Peace, No War*, Paris' text utilizes the traditional conceptual tools of international relations theory and security studies. However, *At War's End*'s main finding would not surprise the contributors to Richards' volume. Paris proposes that peacebuilding is a "specific kind of social engineering, based on particular assumptions about how best to establish durable domestic peace" (p. 6). His claim then is that all major peacebuilding initiatives of the 1990s discounted this societal dimension in their work. Instead they focused on the twin-aspects of liberalization: democratization and marketization. The argument is that such peacebuilding practice is influenced by the ideas of the US President Woodrow Wilson.

Having conducted an ideational overview of the notion and practice of peacebuilding, Paris strikes at its foundation. He conjectures that instead of outright liberalization, the foremost objective of peacebuilding should be institutionalization – the construction of "effective political and economic institutions prior to implementing extensive liberalizing reforms" in order to "bolster the 'conflict dampening' qualities of societies" (p. 235). Such proposition might not seem exceptionally original, however due to Paris' approach and methodology it differs qualitatively from the neo-Gramscian critique traditionally leveled at humanitarian interventions. In order to assert his claim, Paris revisits the fourteen peacekeeping operations conducted between 1989 and 1999. Again owing to considerations of relevance, the following section reviews the discussion of peacebuilding initiatives in Africa.

At War's End sets off its evaluation of internationally-sponsored liberalization efforts with the cases of Angola and Rwanda. However, instead of recounting the failure of the peacebuilding endeavors in these countries, Paris embarks on a meticulous investigation of the actual reconstruction effort. His exploration provides circumstantial evidence that the liberalization initiatives may have actually worked against the establishment of stability. Likewise, in the comparative treatment of Cambodia and Liberia, Paris discerns a diversion of democratization process (at least) partially sustained by the peacebuilding effort. Liberia's case in particular corroborates his claim that "hasty liberalization efforts might actually work against the goal of establishing a stable and lasting peace in countries that are just emerging from civil wars" (p. 96). Paris draws a similar conclusion in his treatment of the conflict in Sierra Leone. Like the contributors to *No Peace, No War*, he emphasizes the importance of knowing and engaging the social context in the promotion of sustainable peace initiatives. Probably, the main challenge to his hypothesis is posed by the cases of Namibia and Mozambique, which by and large tend to be considered as success stories of peacebuilding. Yet, Paris queries whether the effort there was of the same nature as in the other post-Cold War intra-state wars. He argues, therefore, the conflicts in Namibia and Mozambique were "not 'civil' wars at all" (p.148). Indeed, the wars there were both instigated and sustained by external actors. Paris displays that when the outsiders abandoned the battlefields, there was "little 'demand' for continued fighting, thereby reducing the risks of rapid liberalization exacerbating tensions among formerly warring parties" (p. 135).

Such overview of the peacebuilding efforts during the 1990s convinces Paris in the sensibility of establishing a system of domestic institutions capable of managing the disruptive effects of democratization and marketization. Perhaps, the only flaw in this line of argument is the lack of criteria for gauging the capability of these institutions. This definitely is an issue to be tackled by further research and *At War's End* is undoubtedly going to inspire additional enquiries into its issues.

For scholars of post-Cold War affairs in the African continent both tomes offer a wealth of information and possible templates for examining the question of order. The virtue of both Richards' and Paris' volume is that they are not seeking to give defininitive answers and impose perspectives, but inform, provoke and challenge their readers to explore new avenues in the explanation and the understanding of the conflicts of the 1990s. In this respect, *No Peace, No War* and *At War's End* would be with us for quite a while both as an excellent reference source for scholars of conflict studies as well as a repository of knowledge for anyone interested in the process and the context of civil wars.

Emilian Kavalski
Loughborough University, UK