Book reviews

Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration, **Alpaslan Özerdem & Sukanya Podder (eds) (2011), Hampshire/New York, Palgrave Macmillan. (325 pp)**

In this five-part volume, Özerdem & Podder examine the social processes behind recruitment, training, and indoctrination of child soldiers as determinants of reintegration outcome. Using a brief history of some limited successes seen in current DDR (disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration) programmes, the authors advocate for an increase in analysis of age, class, ethnicity, and gender to improve programme design, and thus lead to more effective outcomes. Arguing that both '*civilian*' and '*soldier*' identities must be equally learned and '*unlearned*', the authors are critical of assumptions behind DDR programmes. They focus on two concepts in particular: *agency* (the capacity of individuals to make their own choices) and *social navigation* (a term used to describe how people move in uncertain, insecure, and rapidly changing social environments).

Eleven countries are discussed in this volume: Afghanistan, Angola, Colombia, Guatemala, Liberia, Mozambique, Nepal, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Uganda. While each chapter presents county-specific findings, the editors draw comparisons between political and societal forces to pinpoint areas where DDR design may be flawed. The volume begins by reviewing forces behind recruitment, and then follows by looking at how DDR takes up membership, combat, and demobilisation processes. The authors also highlight how these may differ across contexts, and end by mapping political and societal forces, as directly correlated to DDR outcomes.

The content of the book is most relevant for those directly involved in policy reconstruction, or DDR programme design, but also those with academic or professional interests in conflict studies, education, law, mental health, and political or social sciences will also find this volume of value. While analyses are presented with a fair amount of theoretical detail, study findings are certainly accessible, and apply to lay audiences seeking insight about civil and post conflict realities. Key discussions focus around four main themes:

1. *Childhood* Ideas about '*childhood*' (and by extension, the responsibilities of children) differ across cultures. The authors build on arguments holding DDR to capitalist/western points of view. For example, in his chapter on Afghanistan, Steven Zyck (p. 163) refers to the '*culturally and contextually situated line between childhood and adulthood*' as a social process that mediates priorities. However, Sukyana Podder, in her chapter reflects that '*the present model of childhood in the global policy discourse is flawed, is not universal and only one version of childhood. It needs revision, it needs to be critical of itself*' (p. 152).

2. *Identity* Child soldiers are mobilised to support political ideas and campaigns. However, once demobilised, they are excluded from political power. Reintegration often implies compliance to societal norms that may amount to

giving up participatory, political, or social rights. Jaremey McMullin, in his compelling chapter on Angola, remarks that young people are forgotten '*except when politicians need to mobilise for war or for electoral campaigns. It is rare that young people are mobilised in pursuit of other ideals such as peace*' (p. 259). He emphasises that reintegration is an interactive process, which is individual and communal, but also societal, involving '*the recreation and reordering of social, economic, and political relationships that govern family, community, and national life*' (ibid).

3. *Victimhood* Rights based discourses on child soldiers often focus on coercive states of helplessness in order to justify, or support, humanitarian intervention. However, child soldiers may also be '*functional*', '*adventurous*', and even '*aggressive*' participants, whose reasons and motivations are equally fundamental to DDR. While retention and compliance are indeed '*ghastly and [horrifically] symbolic*' (see Halton: 270, and Gates: 39), the authors argue that participation '*is always a choice. For some it is an optimal choice, for others it is a tactical tool of survival ... Victim narratives strengthen sentiments of powerlessness and marginality. Child soldier's active narratives, on the other hand, have an empowering potential and are thus important to build upon*' (Podder: 151, and Utas: 224, respectively). It may be that participation is an enactment of resistance, where the background of war offers few other choices.

4. *Survival* On return, post conflict, a youth often has little or no social network. She/he also has few vocational skills, a shamed identity, and lost access to power. Neil Boothby writes of former soldiers in Mozambique who have expressed that lost economic opportunities have been as divisive to generations as actual death; and Stephen Zyck writes of the high costs in emotional currency, such as depression, social withdrawal, and stigmatisation, that can be seen at DDR camps in Afghanistan. Many authors suggest that DDR programmes, by planning access only to those children who fought, not only re-segregates soldiers from their intended communities, but also frustrates community members who could benefit from DDR support. In the altered social spaces following political conflict, what mechanisms and opportunities exist to sustain social influence, connectedness, and continuity of inter-generational relations?

This is a valuable volume that poses the difficult questions. It also provides empirical evidence of complex DDR programme realities. The authors' discussions further illustrates the brutal demands of rites of passage for young people manipulated in conflict environments. It is likely that the accounts from the youth themselves that are included will be difficult for the reader to encounter, even if familiar with child soldiers, conflict dynamics, or DDR interventions. For me, this encounter was most poignantly expressed in Wenche Hauge's reflections on DDR interventions in Guatemala: '*what if the alternative is worse than becoming a child soldier?*' (p. 99). However, the authors' collective findings bring up challenging portraits of transformation, and in these lie the potential for more hopeful outcomes.

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Contemporary Topics in Women's Mental Health: Global Perspectives in a changing society, **Prabha S. Chandra, Helen Herrman Jane E. Fisher Marianne Kastrup Unaiza Niaz, Marta Rondon & Ahmed Okasha (eds) (2009), Wiley-Blackwell/World Psychiatric Association (593 pp)**

This notable volume contains contributions from 12 countries, and across all continents. From the preface of the book, I learnt that it was a deliberate attempt to ensure representation of a wide range of countries and sociocultural factors in women's mental health. The sense of having something both culturally sensitive, and relevant to my own region, in my hands was strong. That anticipation proved to be right.

The book covers a rich variety of topics that are important to women and adolescent girls' mental health in the 21st century. '*Women and men differ in biology and life circumstances, so it is not surprising that their psychiatric morbidity and disease manifestations differ*', according to Kastrup & Niaz (p 463). Within its 28 chapters, this book explores topics related to women's mental health as diverse as examining '*biological causes, linked to endocrine control of the reproductive system*', but also contextual issues as the social and cultural realities of women. It starts with a focus on psychiatric disorders in women (seven chapters), and then continues on a more contemplative section (21 chapters), which covers themes like reproductive health, ethics in mental health care, service delivery, the impact of culture and globalisation on women's mental health, social policy and health promotion.

A special feature of this book is the extensive coverage of both '*classic*' themes, as well as contemporary, evolving knowledge, and evidence and challenges in the field.

The '*modern*' knowledge, accumulated in the field, provides an eye opening overview of diverse aspects of women's mental health, including the influences of cultural, familial and societal processes on health, health seeking behaviour, and health care systems.

The first seven chapters focus on mental problems that are common among women all over the world. Each of these chapters discuss a segment of psychiatric problems, such as (1) psychosis/bipolar disorder, (2) depression and anxiety, (3) somatisation and dissociation, (4) eating disorders, (5) suicidal tendencies, (6) alcohol and substance abuse, and (7) trauma. The chapter on somatisation and dissociation is outright brilliant. It provides a list of culture related syndromes, and various well structured information that emphasises psychosocial and cultural factors (i.e. culture as a risk factor for somatisation), and it provides a context for understanding these problems. Another thought provoking chapter is on suicidal tendencies among women. This chapter shows an epidemiological picture of suicide rates and male/female ratios, and shows that the countries with highest female suicide rates are found in Asia, as well as in Eastern Europe. The so-called '*Gender Paradox*' is explored, along with female suicidal behaviour. The chapter on trauma in women is well referenced. It provides the basic understanding of female response to traumatic events, risk factors and varied mental health problems relating to traumatic exposure. Regrettably, no intervention or treatment aspects are provided, though this is addressed later in a chapter on the impact of violence, disasters, migration and work. I also liked the chapter '*Voices of consumers*' very much. It presents women who have accepted and live with their mental disorders, and have changed their lives.

The second part covers a wide range of contemplative and reflective issues in women's mental health. Topics include the interface between reproductive health and psychiatry, and is described in three chapters that discuss the psychosocial impact of '*transitional points*' in women's lives, such pregnancy, childbirth, menopause and certain gynaecological conditions.. The chapter on ethics (12) exposes the need to include women in clinical trials and examine gender differences in all biomedical research, especially in drug development. The well elaborated chapters on the impact of violence, disasters, migration and work provide complementary information and insights, case studies, and descriptions of interventions, as well as work related problems, such as job burnout and work management issues. A chapter on globalisation and women's mental health offers cutting edge information on the concept, process and impact of globalisation and liberalisation of markets on women's health. It discusses some remarkable studies on the intersection of feminism in Islamic societies, for example in Iran and Azerbaijan. Other impacts of globalisation, such as technological developments that have been shown to actually add to mental health problems, are investigated.

The final chapters address social policy, health promotion and prevention approaches. This is of the utmost significance to decision makers and could positively influence mental health action plans and programmes. I was disappointed there is no section specifically addressing human rights issues relating to women. The topic is only briefly touched on at p. 418, with links between mental health and human rights. A fuller examination of this theme would have provided a useful tool for practitioners from developing countries that are advocating human rights, patients' rights and the right to health, including the mental health of women and girls.

In conclusion, the book is highly recommended to professionals (clinicians, researchers and policy makers) working towards improving the mental health of adolescent girls and women, all over the world.

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Stones left unturned: Law and Transitional Justice in Burundi. Stef Vandeginste. (2010), Antwerp: Intersentia. (452 pp)

Since Burundi's independence in 1962, repeating cycles of ethno/political violence have defined the history of this small, central African country. The bloodiest of these were the mass slaughter of around 200,000 Hutus by the Tutsi dominated army in 1972, and the large scale bloodshed that claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians following the assassination of President Ndadaye in 1993. After each cycle has ended, a variety of political actors have attempted to aid the population to come to terms with the aftermath of such overwhelming violence. The United Nations (UN) uses the term 'transitional justice' for these processes and mechanisms used in the aftermath of such violence '.. *to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation...*' (United Nations, 2004). This broad definition includes both judicial and non-judicial mechanisms.

The central question explored in *Stones left unturned: Law and Transitional Justice in Burundi*, by Stefan Vandeginste, is whether

these mechanisms have served justice or achieved any of the stated aims of truth, accountability, reparation or reconciliation? Vandeginste, a Flemish lawyer specialising in the African Great Lakes Area, concludes the results have been meagre at best. He argues that both the massive human rights violations, and the subsequent *'remedial actions'* to redress injustices of the past, have been used by political and military groups to grab, or maintain power. There has never been an independent justice system in the country. As Vandeginste points out, each and every action to reach justice has been perceived, by one group or another, as only adding to the injustice, and has therefore exacerbated tensions.

After the implementation of the 2002 Arusha peace agreements, ending the civil war that had been devastating the country since l993, things seemed to slowly get better. The new government, following democratic elections in 2005, took steps to separate the justice system from political power and make it more independent. However, as Vandeginste points out, any genuine process for transitional justice has been delayed by an endless consultation process with commissions and working groups. Vandeginste believes this was an intentional attempt to postpone a truly comprehensive system of transitional justice because, in fact, none of the political leaders honestly wanted it. He asserts that the hands of the leaders of all political groups are blood stained. Within the formal political discourse, the terms 'truth and accountability' have gradually been replaced by 'reconciliation and forgiveness'. The only actors who continue to call for 'truth and accountability' are nongovernmental organisations and international organisations, such as the UN. As such, Vandeginste is not very hopeful they will succeed.

This book is written, in the first place, for legal experts and academics interested in transitional justice. It is a remarkably detailed work that will serve as a standard reference-work in the legal field for the next few decades. It offers a thorough description of the disappointing reality of Burundi, but is far too specialised to be of general use to psychosocial workers. The question remains, however, what psychosocial workers could learn from such a cataloguing of legal attempts and failures. The sad truth is that over time, everything in Burundi, including the historical narrative of the past, has become polarised along ethno/political lines. In such a climate of continuing mistrust, even an initiative to make a symbolic gesture, such as the establishment of a national monument for *'all victims of violence'* was halted due to political bickering. I believe that the promoters of a true process for truth and reconciliation are perhaps to be found outside the formal structures of politics and the judiciary. As a mental health professional working in the area, I would have also hoped to learn what grassroots groups and local nongovernmental organisations are doing to fight this political trend of avoidance. I know there are many grassroots initiatives that take place outside the glare of formal political processes and judicial mechanisms, and I would have loved to read about them. However, that is not this book, that book is still to be written.

Reference

United Nations (2004). *Report of the Secretary-General on the Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies*. New York, United Nations (UN Doc. S/2004/6l6, 23 August 2004).

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