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Book Review

Ballentine, Karen and Heiko Nitzschke (eds.) 2005. *Profiting from Peace: Managing the Resource Dimension of Civil War*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. ix + 536 pp. ISBN: 1-58826-287-1 (paperback). Price £17.50.

by Bjørn Møller (29 November 2006)

This is probably the most comprehensive work to date about the resource dimension of intrastate wars. It follows up on two previous works, likewise published under the auspices of the International Peace Academy, namely *Greed and Grievance* (2000) and *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict* (2003). In contrast to its predecessors, however, the present volume focuses more on solutions than on problems. Written in a non-technical style, it is more easily accessible for the layman than the works by Paul Collier and associates with the same focus and a comparable scope.

The two editors provide a brief survey of the issues and competing theories about the “paradox of plenty.” Also known as the “resource curse,” the paradox states that countries well endowed with natural resources are especially prone to violent conflict which, in turn, produces poverty and misery for their unfortunate inhabitants as has been the case for countries such as Angola, the DR Congo, or Sierra Leone.

One of the more interesting chapters is that by Stephen Jackson on “protecting livelihoods in violent economies,” a term which is almost synonymous with “war economies” as used by David Keen and others. The author distinguishes among conflict entrepreneurs, conflict opportunists, and conflict dependents. Each needs to be addressed by different means. Conflict entrepreneurs comprises the elites, those whose status precedes the conflict and those created by the conflict itself such as warlords. They operate as predators, preying on the civilian population by looting and extortion. Conflict opportunists, in turn, are the middlemen, those whose pre-war livelihoods have often been destroyed by war and who are now looking for new economic niches such as cross-border smuggling. Usually operating on a fairly short time perspective as they cannot control the duration of war, they make “the best” of its vagaries. Most of the population in war-torn societies, however, belongs to the third category, conflict dependents. They rely on various coping strategies, not so much in order to enrich themselves as in order to survive, and usually with a very short time perspective. Paradoxically, one of the survival strategies they may resort to is to join the ranks of combatants, as “direct participation in armed violence can be a survival livelihood strategy” in its own right (p. 165). Moreover, the instability of violent economies means that people may move (or be moved) among the three categories, e.g., from that of opportunists to that of dependents.

In a violent economy, it can be the case that “fair is foul and foul is fair” (*Macbeth*, 1.1.11-12). Well-intended attempts by external actors may have perverse effects: “By formalizing the illegality of flows produced through economic violence, sanctions and control regimes may drive them, and the actors associated with them, further into the shadows of economic life,” so that the “incomplete and porous application of sanctions or other control regimes may serve only to

increase incentives for exploitation” (p. 168). Likewise, attempts at stemming conflict trade may deprive some of the dependents and opportunists of their livelihoods, thereby occasionally pushing them to resort to violence, thus contributing to a prolongation and intensification of the conflict.

Several chapters are devoted to the various actors involved in war economies, ranging from organized crime syndicates to perfectly legal actors such as international financial institutions and credit agencies. Indeed, even development agencies may inadvertently come to fuel a conflict, simply by offering lootable resources. As pointed out by James Boyce, however, they also have the opportunity of helping bring about peace by imposing “peace conditionalities.”

A number of chapters are devoted to the various initiatives for conflict management or conflict transformation that have emerged in recent years, usually originating in the international NGO community, but sometimes also enrolling states, international organizations, and business. This includes the Kimberley Process, which seeks certification of diamonds to allow consumers to distinguish between clean and “blood diamonds,” the “Publish What You Pay” campaign, intended to curtail corruption, and the various initiatives for corporate responsibility, including the United Nations’ Global Compact. What most of these have in common is their reliance on the proverbial political consumer and their almost jiu-jitsu-like strategies. Just as this oriental form of combat turns an opponent’s strength into weakness, these strategies skillfully play on the profit motive and the market mechanism to make companies realize that unrestrained profit-seeking does *not* maximize profits, whereas corporate responsibility may.

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