



Book Review

Funmi Olonisakin and Awino Okech (eds)

Women and Security Governance in Africa

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Eight authors discuss issues of gender and security in African settings throughout this book. The main argument is that a people-centred approach to security cannot be achieved without the inclusion of women's concerns in the agenda. In fact, this book suggests that the visibility (or not) of such concerns in security governance could be used as an indicator of the progress made by a particular state in achieving an inclusive security agenda. The attempt to evaluate the progress in security governance came opportunely ten years after the promulgation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in the year 2000, which is the first international instrument addressing the security concerns of women in situations of armed conflict and peace building.

Olonisakin and Okech identify as the main problem the gap between existing inclusive security policy instruments and the political reality in which women's voices are absent from governments' security agendas. Several assumptions are raised to explain the reasons why, despite efforts in adopting policy instruments that favour inclusiveness, the operationalization of those instruments has not been successful. Most of the assumptions are linked with structural factors in African societies that do not provide the conditions for the accommodation of women's concerns within the larger security discourses. This problem is addressed in three parts.

In part one, the book stresses inconsistencies between normative efforts and the reconstruction process on the ground. These inconsistencies are explained by four factors: (i) the colonial legacy that privileges a male-dominated African elite and excludes women's concerns from both the formal and informal state systems, including issues related with security; (ii) transitional justice as an institution that fails to incorporate the gender dimension in security and fails to expand the concept of state security beyond the state boundaries; (iii) the social and economic inequalities among women in a particular society and the fact that gendered security fails to recognize that not all women experience conflict in the same way; and, (iv) the rooted belief that security issues are male driven under the public/private dichotomy, which supports an oppressive status quo detrimental to women.

In part two, the authors provide a social setting for the conceptual framework analysed in part one, based on the study of the security agenda in three countries: Liberia, Sierra Leone and

Mozambique. In the case of Liberia, the author argues that although women's peace activism has contributed to the expansion of a political space for women, debates around security have as not neither transformed gender relations nor developed an inclusive security agenda that prioritizes women's issues. In fact, the author maintains that women are still under-represented in policy-making, and that the security agenda still fails to include women (and men), particularly from rural areas. In the case of Sierra Leone, the author elaborates on the progress of women's engagement in peacebuilding, but also stresses that despite the existence of advocacy groups, women's concerns regarding violence and insecurity are still not a priority in the agenda. For instance, the author indicates that the conceptualization of women as victims by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has had a marginal impact on the operationalization of a security agenda that includes women. The TRC has failed to raise questions concerning social justice and did not address structural patriarchal structures. Finally, in the case Mozambique, the author compiles narratives of women's experiences with violence and the various roles women played during the civil war. Despite of the realities on the ground, gender considerations were absent from peace agreements. In addition, the author highlights that in practice women's access to economic resources and education are limited by, and depend on, marriage and patrilineal inheritance.

The book ends by addressing the influence of regional institutions in security, particularly ECOWAS (Economic Community of West Africa States) and the African Union. The contributions focusing on both organizations present a general picture of the complex and multi-layered government bureaucracies in security and the declarative efforts to include women in the security agenda. Each chapter similarly concludes that structural patriarchal gendered roles limit women's engagement in peace and security, which explains the inconsistency between normative efforts and women's engagement on the ground.

One limitation of this book is the general use of the concept of security throughout the book. Although the position of the authors is consensual and clear in suggesting that the traditional conceptualization of security should be broadened beyond the boundaries of nation states to include non-state security actors such as women, the use of the concept of security, although offering diverse explanations, does not clearly differentiate between traditional and new definitions. In addition, while in the second part of the book some case studies elaborate on the identity of security institutions (state and non-state actors); it would have also been helpful to note, from the outset, to which security institutions and non-state informal security actors the authors are referring.

Overall, the book contributes to the ongoing debates concerning alternative approaches to security that emphasize the neglected role of non-state actors and traditionally excluded groups, such as women. This book itself represents the progress of security debates in African countries in comparison to twenty years before the publication of this book, when security governance debates did not include civil societies, non-state actors or women.