Christopher Cramer, Laura Hammond, and Johan Pottier (eds.) (2011), *Researching Violence in Africa: Ethical and Methodological Challenges*, ISBN 978-9-00420-312-9, Leiden: Brill, 192 pp.

This volume offers insights into the origin of violence in Africa and how it can be stopped. The various authors not only provide competent analyses but also lay out the prospects for future reconciliation. There is a small but growing reflexive literature on the realities of carrying out research in violent settings or conflict zones in Africa. This volume looks at how people have applied ethical considerations to methodological adaptation and innovation. Aside from being able to improve their own safety, the more researchers know about the society in which they are working, the better they are able to navigate through the minefield of sensitivities concerning representation.

The contribution by Miller and Scollon ("Cooperative Ethics as a New Model for Cultural Research on Peace and Security") points out that a collaborative approach to research that emphasizes local perceptions and concepts of peace, security and conflict is likely to provide more effective tools than top-down approaches favoured by policymakers and aid agencies. While this may seem something of an obvious point, it is not yet a common practice in applied research. Miller and Scollon also make a plea to practitioners conducting research on privileged local perspectives to reconsider employing over international formulaic concepts, particularly if the research aims to promote peace-building or conflict resolution (135). This may beg the question of what local concepts one should privilege. Given that we know that communities are never monolithic or static and that perspectives on conflict, security, history and justice are highly subject to contention and political manipulation, how best should the researcher work to ensure as balanced an analysis as possible? In the face of obvious tyranny and oppression, is it even necessary to work toward such a balanced view?

Akanji, for his part ("Researching Conflict in Africa: A Researcher's Account of Ife-Modakeke, South-Western Nigeria"), discusses how he refused to identify himself as belonging to either ethnic group involved in the conflict, insisting that he was a "Nigerian" despite the efforts of his informants to pigeonhole him into one ethnic affiliation or the other. On the other hand, Ukiwo ("Hidden Agendas in Conflict Research: Informants' Interests and Research Objectivity in the Niger Delta") chose to present himself as being Efik (one of the parties to the conflict in Warri, Nigeria) when he was researching Efik perspectives on the conflict so that he could be perceived as an "insider" and thus gain access to more in-depth information than would have been available had he been perceived as an outsider. When

working with other communities for whom insider knowledge was not privileged, however, Ukiwo presented himself as an outsider.

Mupotsa ("From Nation to Family: Researching Gender and Sexuality") contributes her experiences in semi-structured interviews in order to facilitate the broaching of sensitive issues of discourse, structural power relations, and gender. She takes up the question of how to deal with "our culture" in her investigation of representations and interpretations of "women's experience[s]" in Zimbabwe. She argues that the research made her abandon all thoughts of "unsituated objectivity" (96), opting instead for a full recognition of the fact that "the researched" as a heterogeneous body exert their own agency vis-à-vis researchers.

Hammond ("Four Layers of Silence: Counter-insurgency in North Eastern Ethiopia") discusses silence on the part of her Afar informants. She suggests that in trying to understand the whole story it is essential to listen to both what is said and what is not said. People were reluctant to discuss various aspects of the conflict for fear that they would be punished for expressing their views. While silences may be the result of explicit (and specific) threats, silent spaces may also emerge from prolonged periods of conflict, in which people feel so oppressed that they stop complaining about their treatment. Rather than resignation, silence in such cases can open up spaces of relative freedom, whereby people are left alone as long as they do not complain loudly. Wienia ("Silence and Authoritative Speech in Post-Violence Northern Ghana") seeks to dismantle the idea that there is a single set of facts that explain the accounts he investigates. His informants are convinced that he is aiming to uncover "the truth" (170). This can lead to the researcher developing the uncomfortable sense that the enterprise his informants thought they were contributing to may be, in fact, quite different from what they had expected, and that some of his informants might be disappointed with the product of the research.

Dona ("Researching Children and Violence in Evolving Socio-Political Contexts") examines the experiences of Rwandan youths, who claim that only the people who died are those whose experiences are deemed useful to the state-building enterprise and that only the dead are publicly acknowledged and commemorated (67). Alternative experiences are silenced through censorship, intimidation or denial. He chooses to make visible the subaltern not only by seeking out the voices that are rarely heard, but also by making explicit use of youth voices and experiences in the state-building process. Another way of dealing with silences, or reluctance to speak frankly about sensitive issues, is to triangulate as much as possible between different sources. Thus, Akanji discusses his use of "colonial files, memoranda, minutes of meetings, field reports, Commission of Inquiry reports, govern-

ment gazettes, magazines, newspapers and treaties" in addition to oral testimonies representing multiple perspectives (23-37), and Ukiwo uses multiple sources to develop historical reconstructions that reveal the vested interests of specific informants and a more impartial view of events relating to the conflict (140).

Many in this volume describe their attempts to develop strong relationships with their informants prior to asking sensitive questions so as to put people at ease and foster a relationship of trust. This is often facilitated by repeated visits to an area, particularly over a long period of time. Although, such protracted engagement is not always necessary. Trust may emerge from informants' independent observations that the information they have divulged to the researcher had been treated confidentially and responsibly, or that the researcher clearly has the interests of their community at heart (which may, of course, invalidate the idea that the researcher should strive for a position of neutrality). On the other hand, as Ukiwo points out, when informants ask the researcher whether they have interviewed a particular person, the researcher may end up in the uncomfortable position of having to choose between "telling a lie and risking disapproval" – Ukiwo chose the latter (150). Others have chosen the former in order to protect themselves or their informants. While researchers may sometimes choose a particular site or country because of the conflict there, it is also the case that a place they came to know in peacetime later on enters (or returns to) a state of conflict. Such is the case with Hutchinson's work on Sudan ("Uncertain Ethics: Researching Civil War in Sudan"), where conflict has gone through numerous tidal waves. When a researcher has a strong attachment – or even, arguably, a debt – to a community in terms of past collaboration, then determining the nature of the researcher's responsibility can be a difficult task. What is the nature of a researcher's responsibility to act as witness, to help those who are in physical danger or who have been victims of the conflict? What about the government or another party to the conflict that may have facilitated the researcher's work in order to promote its/his/her own version of the truth, and upon whom the researcher may rely for physical protection and access to essential information? Miller and Scollon engage in a charged debate about the benefits and risks associated with conducting research for militaries in conflict zones. This debate hinges, at least in part, around the question of whether the researcher can control the use of data and analysis so as to prevent any harm coming to their informants.

The volume does well in highlighting the complex nature of most of the conflicts on the African continent. It presents diverse methodological approaches and ideological assumptions and adds to our critical thinking. This is an excellent source for those with an interest in researching contem-

porary conflict and is especially valuable for students new to the field of peace and conflict studies. Although not all-inclusive, it contains enough of the more substantive and important aspects of peace and conflict studies to be recommended to anyone with an interest in conflict resolution and violence in Africa.

- Oluwaseun Bamidele