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The War Zone as Social Space: Social Research in Conflict Zones

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Introduction¹

After the Cold War ended, and particularly in the wake of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, conflict prevention became an area of focus for analysts, policymakers, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Concurrently, research on post-conflict interventions by international actors – variously known as peace implementation, peacekeeping, or peacebuilding – also progressed in both quantity and quality. Ironically, perhaps, this work on the “before” and “after” phases of conflict has led to the recognition by analysts and policymakers alike that the distinction between pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict is often overstated. As seen in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the late 1990s, and in Iraq and Afghanistan today, it may be difficult to say with any certainty whether a conflict is in fact over, even once a political compromise or process is agreed. Conflict zones are sites of both change and continuity. At the same time, the chronic nature of many post-Cold War conflicts highlights how depressingly normal a situation of conflict may become for the affected population.

Conflicts themselves are seldom the subject of empirical research seeking to understand how certain structures, networks, strategies, behavioural patterns, and modalities of violence are created, exploited, manipulated, and replicated. Understanding the dynamics, flashpoints, and structures of conflict may help prevent its eventual recurrence; while understanding the adaptations and strategies employed by those caught in conflict would be of use to humanitarian and policy interventions during and after the war. However, conducting empirical research into conflict is a challenging and potentially dangerous task. Thus, much of what we know about contemporary conflicts is anecdotal and descriptive – the stories of participants and survivors, as told to journalists, aid workers, and researchers – or concerned with macro-level analyses of the political, economic, and strategic aspects of war.

The premise of this Review Paper is that empirical research into conflict is relevant to both policy and practice. The findings of such research can be useful for conflict prevention or resolution initiatives to de-militarise politics, address grievances, and mitigate the vested interests or long-term social pathologies that help replicate

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violent conflict. They can assist policymakers and practitioners in formulating and implementing coherent, effective, and potentially crosscutting strategies to tackle the micro-level impacts of conflict. As was seen in Rwanda in 1994, knowing that a conflict is about to erupt is not the same as knowing what that conflict is about or what to do about it. The goal of this Review is twofold: to map the existing research, identifying findings that are directly relevant to the policy and practice of conflict prevention and resolution; and clarify areas of interest for future research agendas. To do this, this Review focuses on three components that have emerged as relevant in the recent scholarly and grey literature on armed conflict: armed groups, elite networks, and households. It focuses primarily on chronic, internal conflicts.

The Review takes as its starting point that conflict zones are social space. The meaning and implications of this will be explained in first section. The following sections focus in turn on armed groups, elite networks, and households. The final section focuses on outstanding areas and issues for research, particularly emphasising research that will flesh out the links, commonalities, and intersecting and diverging interests between armed groups, elite networks, and households in conflict zones. Thus, this review does not intend to cover everything we know (or think we know) about armed groups, households, networks in conflict zones, but will focus on the broader trends in research in these areas, what that research has sought to uncover, what analytical links have been found, and what needs more attention.

Studying Conflict

Violent conflict is often represented and understood as an exceptional phenomenon. This is of course merited, given what comes with war: large-scale death, destruction, refugee flows, political instability, humanitarian crises, and long-lasting socio-economic impacts. Yet the exceptionalism associated with violent conflict obscures two important points. The first is that, in chronic conflict zones, conflict is not exceptional. It might instead be called the “new normal”. The second, related point is that individuals and groups affected by (or participating in) conflicts continually adapt to the changing circumstances and demands of the “new normal”, often in quite resilient and remarkable ways. In other words, the customary view of conflict zones exclusively as sites of destruction, chaos, and ruin captures only one side of the story, albeit an important one. It is perhaps more accurate to say that conflict zones are simultaneously sites of continuity, destruction, adaptation, and innovation. This is captured by the conceptualisation of conflict zones as social space (Bøås, Jennings, Ruge and Taylor 2004; Bøås and Jennings 2005; Bøås and Dunn 2007; Pedersen 2006).

Conceptualising conflict zones as social space implies that research into conflict phenomena should deploy a micro-level, empirically based analysis. It requires researchers to look for the connections, commonalities, and dissimilarities among the various elements active in a conflict zone – such as the relationships within and between armed groups, elite networks, and households and individuals – rather than focusing on individual components seen in isolation. It emphasises the full complexity and inter-relatedness of conflict zones, thus enabling both better research and more effective policy responses.

To take but one example: elite networks profitably link global arms, financial, and commodity markets to local production and consumption, but it is a mistake to assume that they are comprised of, or controlled by, foreign opportunists. Rather, these networks are often embedded in their community and built on existing formal and informal authority structures. Understanding cultural practices, authority structures, and traditional networks is therefore important for understanding how elite networks come into being, and how their interests may operate to sustain the conflict (Lunde and Taylor, with Huser 2003; Taylor 2005-2006). Moreover, the livelihoods of households in conflict zones often depend, at least to some degree, on the success of elite networks in transporting goods and capital into and out of the

area (see for example Dietrich 2000). Armed groups also tend to establish relationships with, or constitute their own, networks to market the exploitable resources under their control and ensure access to arms and other materiel (Lunde and Taylor, with Huser 2003). Thus, this example illustrates both the inter-connectedness of different components in conflict zones, and some of the range of interests they attempt to further.

Understanding conflict zones as social space also restores agency to those involved in or affected by conflict. As seen in the example above, different actors have varying interests in conflict zones, including simple survival; the furthering of political and social agendas; status; and profit. The fact that these are not mutually exclusive shows the importance, for research and policy, of examining the interests, motives, and strategies of those acting within conflict zones. This is impossible without assuming agency. From an analytical perspective, assuming agency does not degrade the importance of fear, coercion, or outright force, all of which are prevalent in conflict zones. It simply asserts that the presence of these factors does not excise an individual's ability to act in a manner consistent with their best interests as understood at the time.² Agency is conceptualised differently by analysts according to the circumstances in which the actors concerned are enmeshed (De Boeck and Honwana 2005:10). With particular reference to young (male and female) actors in conflict zones, Honwana's notion of tactical agency – which “is devised to cope with the concrete, immediate conditions of their lives in order to maximize the circumstances created by their military and violent environment (Honwana 2005:49)” – perhaps best captures how “they are victims, but they also became more than just victims (Honwana 2005:48)”.

To facilitate a more cohesive view of conflict zones, therefore, it is useful to identify where people, interests, and events reinforce each other, overlap, are contested, and diverge. The material in this Review aims to assist in this process, by giving an overview of what we know about various facets of conflict zones, and illustrating the analytical links and common areas of inquiry between them.

² The issue of agency is particularly contested in relation to two groups: women (especially in the context of sexual exploitation and violence) and children. However well intentioned, it is specious for analysts or activists to depict women as lacking agency. With children, it is valid to question the extent to which they can consent to or control all of their actions. However, this does not preclude agency – just a different kind of agency, such as an “agency of the weak (Honwana 2005:50)” or an agency of victimcy (Utas 2003; 2005).

Armed Groups

The term “armed groups” is used here to describe nonstate, armed movements fighting the government of its or another state, and comprising anything from disciplined, military-style organisations, to armed wings of essentially political or religious movements, to “little more than predatory gangs (Clapham 1998:1)”.³ Work on armed groups focuses to a large degree on Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.⁴ Classic work in this area includes political science and anthropological literature on rural rebellions, social banditry, and warlike societies (Wolf 1969; Scott 1985; Hobsbawm 1959, 1969; Blok 1972; Lan 1985; Kelly 1985; Barth 1998). In this section, however, I will provide a brief overview of arguably the most dominant recent strand of policy-relevant research on armed groups – the greed versus grievance debate – before discussing an influential attempt to typologise African armed groups. I argue that the greed-grievance debate has been useful in moving forward the research agenda on armed groups, but this argumentation alone is not sufficient to explain the structure, organisation, level of embeddedness, and success or failure of armed groups. Before turning to greed and grievance, however, a brief discussion is required on the impact of geopolitics on our understanding of armed groups.

The way in which armed groups are perceived and understood by analysts and policymakers – if not by those involved in and impacted by them – has always been affected by geopolitics. In Africa, for example, armed groups active in the decades following World War II were generally considered to be agents of the liberation struggles against colonialism. Indeed, clear distinctions were drawn, both analytically and at an African diplomatic level, between “legitimate” groups partaking in liberation wars, and “illegitimate” forces challenging the post-independence govern-

³ In this paper, the legitimacy of the government that the armed group is fighting does not make a terminological difference; in other words, contested terminology like “freedom fighters” is not used. That armed groups fighting against an occupation power or illegitimate government may be perceived differently than other armed groups is not contested, as seen in the example of groups involved in liberation wars in Africa (or currently in Palestine). However, whether or not a particular armed group’s agenda and opponents are legitimate does not change the fact that it is an armed group. Choosing to call it otherwise is a political rather than analytical exercise.

⁴ In the Latin American context, the literature on state militaries’ participation in politics is also extensive. See Lowenthal (1974). Analysis of armed groups in Latin America predominantly overlaps with issues of land reform and rural violence.

ments (Clapham 1998:4). This distinction is evident in the Organisation of African Unity's (OAU) 1977 Convention for the Elimination of Mercenaries in Africa, which prohibits the use of mercenaries against OAU governments and recognised movements of national liberation, but allows their use by OAU governments against other kinds of armed groups (Jennings 2006a:28).

At the same time, armed groups were also seen through the lens of the Cold War, primarily as proxies for one of the two superpowers. This approach made sense in the era of great power politics, containment, and the domino theory, and reflected the reality that most armed groups were – and remain – dependent on some degree of international assistance to equip and support themselves. As an analytical perspective, however, it risks groups' grievances being de-localised and instrumentalised.⁵ Such instrumentalisation could in turn contribute to later policy failure. The example of the U.S.-sponsored *mujahideen* in Afghanistan – many of whom later joined the Taliban or al-Qaeda – demonstrates the peril of overlooking the agendas of purportedly useful armed groups.

Presently the geopolitical current most relevant to the study and understanding of armed groups is the “global war on terror”. Even at the time of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, many armed groups were also considered to be terrorist organisations, including the three main armed groups in Colombia (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), and the National Liberation Army (ELN)); several armed groups active in the Middle East, including Hamas and Hizballah; two groups active in Europe (Real IRA and ETA); the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK); and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the group commonly credited with perfecting and popularising the use of suicide bombers.⁶ In the aftermath of the 2001 attacks, the use of anti-terrorism rhetoric by governments fighting armed groups has become yet more prevalent. This is seemingly a means to discredit the groups and undermine their support, while simultaneously bolstering the legitimacy of the governments' anti-insurgency campaigns. It may also be designed to appeal to U.S. sensitivities and support in waging these campaigns. In other cases, meanwhile, armed groups have themselves started or increased their use of terrorist tactics during this period. For example, militants in Chechnya and Iraq have made attacks against civilian targets a core tactic.⁷

⁵ Keen (2000) makes the same point with respect to the internal dynamics of conflict.

⁶ This refers to the U.S.'s 2001 list of foreign terrorist organisations, which named 28 organisations. The same list in 2005 had 42 organisations. The 2001 list is available at: <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rpt/fto/2001/5258.htm> (accessed 10 Oct. 2006); the 2005 list is available at: <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/fs/37191.htm> (accessed 10 Oct. 2006).

⁷ Chechen militants began using suicide bombers in 2000, but the use of terrorist tactics escalated after

Again, situating armed groups in the context of the war on terror is not problematic per se, so long as it does not lead down the path to oversimplification and miscomprehension of the grievances, agendas, structure, and sources of support of armed groups (see also Taylor 2005-2006).

Why they fight

A fundamental starting point for analysing the motivation, organisation, pathologies, and success or failure of armed groups is simply: why do they fight? As noted above, attempts to answer this question may reflect current geopolitical concerns. However, such macro-level reasons for the causes of conflicts are usually insufficient to explain the emergence of particular armed groups in specific contexts, thus reiterating the importance of grounded empirical research. Although ascertaining armed groups' motives does not alone provide answers as to how groups operate and behave, the focus on "why they fight" is useful when it is grounded in a broader analysis that locates armed groups in the relevant context and encompasses related issues, such as means of recruitment; group strategy and tactics; leadership style; embeddedness; the extent to which the group is locally and internationally supported; group ties to networks and other allies; professed goals; and outcomes. In turn, such an analysis would improve the effectiveness of national and international policy attempts to find effective and lasting political solutions to the conflict.

In recent years, the research agenda on causes of conflict has been dominated by the greed versus grievance debate. The term "greed and grievance" comes from an edited volume of that name published in 2000 (Berdal and Malone 2000).⁸ The premise of the collection is that "the precise role of economically motivated actions and processes in generating and sustaining contemporary civil conflicts (Berdal and Malone 2000:1)" has been under-studied, despite the fact that, as the editors argue, "economic considerations often shape the calculations and behaviour of the parties to a conflict, giving rise to a particular *war economy* and a distinctive dynamic of conflict (Berdal and Malone 2000:2, emphasis in original)". Recalling elements of Reno's (1998) argument from West and Central Africa, they contend that the profit motive

2001. Since then, several high-profile terrorist attacks have been conducted against Russian targets, including the October 2002 hostage-taking at the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow and the September 2004 school siege in Beslan, Russia.

⁸ As seen below, the "greed and grievance" debate is particularly associated with Paul Collier and his World Bank colleagues. Collier's chapter in *Greed and Grievance* builds on a paper he published with Anke Hoeffler in 1998 ("On Economic Causes of Civil War"), and precedes their related 2001 paper, "Greed and Grievance in Civil Wars".

can be an important, if not primary, factor determining the advent, continuation, and “institutionalization (2)” of violent conflict; and that, where conflict facilitates profit, the pursuit of economic interests supplements – and may even supplant – the traditional aim of war, namely defeating the enemy. Economic considerations also influence how violence is used in conflict. Attacks against military targets and infrastructure are thus accompanied (or replaced) by attacks intended to appropriate and exert control over resource-rich areas, trade routes, and aid distribution. Writing in the volume, Keen (2000) also highlights the mutability of the agendas of parties to civil war, thus underlining the dynamism of conflict zones. He notes:

A growing proportion of civil wars appear to have started with the aim of taking over or retaining the reins of the state or of breaking away in a secessionist revolt and appear to have subsequently mutated (often very quickly) into wars where immediate agendas assume an increasingly important role. These immediate agendas (notably economic agendas) may significantly prolong civil wars . . . (Keen 2000:24-25).

Importantly, these economic agendas are essentially parasitic and predatory in nature. To all but the profiteers, they are deconstructive rather than constructive.

“Greed and grievance” is now often used as shorthand for any argumentation dealing with the economic dimensions of causes of conflict.⁹ The greed side of the equation is most strongly associated with the work of World Bank economists Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler. In the paper “Greed and Grievance in Civil Wars” (2001), which built on Collier’s (2000) chapter in *Greed and Grievance*, Collier and Hoeffler posit two types of causes of conflict: atypical grievances, such as severe inequality, political disenfranchisement, and ethnic or religious divides; and atypical opportunity to build a rebel organisation, such as ready access to finance (through a diaspora population, neighbouring governments, or the ability to exploit and market natural resources) or advantageous demographic and geographical features of the country (such as a highly dispersed population, and forests and mountains that act as safe havens for rebels).¹⁰ They find that opportunity has explanatory power while grievance, for the most part, does not. Among the opportunity factors, furthermore,

⁹ A closely related debate to greed versus grievance is the sociological debate between resource mobilisation versus deprivation explanations of collective action (where resource mobilisation would occupy much of the space occupied by greed, and deprivation would relate to grievance). See Khawaja (1994) for an application of this debate in the West Bank.

¹⁰ Ballentine and Sherman (2003) note that Collier and Hoeffler’s (2001) focus on “opportunity” for rebellion is a weaker formulation than the hypothesis Collier put forward in *Greed and Grievance* (2000). In the latter, Collier makes a more direct argument in favour of the greed thesis, while in the former Collier and Hoeffler use “opportunity” to describe the variables proxying for greed.

they particularly emphasise the importance of availability of finance from natural resources or diasporas: hence, greed. While not entirely dismissive of grievances, they conclude that, “the grievances that motivate rebels may be substantially disconnected from the larger social concerns of inequality, political rights, and ethnic or religious identity (Collier and Hoeffler 2001:17)”. This dramatically narrows the range of grievances that could be presumed to motivate an armed rebellion. They therefore posit essentially a “single-factor explanation (Bøås and Dunn 2007)”. Policy responses focused on grievances may feel satisfying, but will be ineffective unless opportunity and greed can be restrained.

Collier and Hoeffler’s conclusion remains sharply contested. At issue is not so much the notion that combatants may have economic agendas, or that individuals, groups, and regimes may be motivated to some degree by financial considerations in starting or sustaining conflict. These ideas are now generally accepted. Rather, critics argue – in response to Collier’s work specifically – that, first, the determination of what amounts to grievance and what to greed is unclear and somewhat arbitrary; and second, that greed and grievance are not, and cannot be, separable and dichotomous entities (see e.g. Ballentine and Sherman 2003). For example, one of the variables that Collier and Hoeffler assign to greed – the existence in a country of large numbers of un- or under-educated young men – could just as easily be considered an indication of the extent of social and political disenfranchisement in that country: that is, as a grievance.¹¹ Indeed, the proportion of unemployed youth is used in the Millennium Development Goals as a measure of political disenfranchisement.¹² The inability to divvy up greed and grievance in an uncontested way thus casts doubt upon the conclusion that greed has explanatory power where grievance does not. The applicability of the greed-grievance paradigm has also been questioned by non-Africanists (Bray, Lunde and Murshed 2003; Regan 2003).

Moreover, Collier’s work runs the risk of conflating armed groups’ tactics, such as resource capture and exploitation, with their cause. In other words, ahistorical explanations generated by analysis based on potentially problematic proxies may not appear as robust when contextualised and examined against events and actors on the ground. This is particularly so when the analysis in question considers only one party to the conflict, as does Collier’s and Hoeffler’s. This is to some degree a function of the research question: Collier would presumably argue that he focuses only on armed groups because they are the ones beginning conflicts. Yet whether lines of responsibility or precipitating events in conflict can be attributed so unmistakably is a valid question. Moreover, focusing only on the behaviour and motivations of armed groups obscures the fact that, in most conflict-affected states, the regime

¹¹ The circumstances normally described as constituting a “failed state” pose a similar problem; see below.

¹² See: <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/default.aspx> (accessed 12 Nov. 2006).

(and perhaps to a lesser extent, the state bureaucracy¹³) also has economic imperatives and patterns of predation that may facilitate or extend conflict. The political, economic, and enabling roles of elite networks and transnational corporate interests are also practically and analytically compelling. Attributing “greed” only to armed groups thus distorts the dynamics of conflict zones, while obscuring the systemic and structural problems typically associated with states in conflict.

Critics of “greed vs. grievance” also take issue with the “loaded normative connotations (Ballentine and Sherman 2003:5)” of the terms. In particular, the phrase “greed” tars all participants in war economies with the same brush, whether they be armed group commanders in a position to make strategic decisions, or innocent civilians that depend on illicit economies for their own survival (Ballentine and Sherman 2003; Taylor 2002). This normative aspect is especially interesting in the context of Collier’s and Hoeffler’s implicit conclusion that members of armed groups are either duped, duplicitous, or outright liars (see also Reno 2003). Combatants who believe they are actually fighting to right the wrongs visited upon them are duped; those putting forth grievances as a cover for greed, whether to placate fellow fighters or attract international support, are worse. Furthermore, conceiving of members of armed groups as little more than bandits also has policy impact, in that it “significantly narrows the number of possible policy interventions: you can negotiate with armed rebels with a political agenda, but bandits are to be crushed by force (Bøås and Dunn 2007:15-16)”.

Significantly, the greed-grievance debate misses what is for many the most compelling reason to fight: their own and their family’s immediate physical security. In a recent survey of Liberian ex-combatants in Monrovia, Bøås and Hatløy (2006b) found that the majority of respondents claim to have fought in order to secure their own and others’ safety. Although some combatants may have experienced greater access to food and material goods once they became fighters, few claimed to have joined a group or groups for that reason. Instead, the overriding factor in their decision to join an armed group was the simple calculation that joining the armed group threatening their village or neighbourhood would improve their own safety, and enable them to extend some degree of protection to their families and neighbours.¹⁴ In referring to child and youth soldiers, Honwana (2005:32-33) describes such calculations as “tactical agency”, which (as noted above) enables them

13 See especially Reno (1998, 2003) on the ways in which regime and bureaucratic interests may be opposed.

14 The author heard the same explanation for joining an armed group many times during related qualitative interviews with ex-combatants in Monrovia in 2005. See Jennings (2007). Similar findings also emerged in the experience of community development approaches to disarmament, related in Taylor and Pike (2000).

to “maximize the concrete, immediate circumstances of the military environment in which they have to operate. They are not in a position of power, they may not be fully conscious of the ultimate goals of their actions, and may not expect any long-term gains or benefits from it – which would, in de Certeau’s [1984] terms, make their actions ‘strategic’ (32-33)”. The greed argument in particular is ill suited to account for decisions made out of tactical rather than strategic agency.

In Liberia, furthermore, the strongly enforced system of “kicking up” spoils to one’s commander illustrates that the economic agendas (and means of enforcement) of commanders and rank-and-file soldiers are not identical (Jennings 2007). This illustrates the problem of an undifferentiated analysis of causes of conflict. Even within the same movement, the motivations of commanders and leaders may substantively differ from those of foot soldiers – a situation particularly germane in conflicts featuring reliance on forced or coerced recruitment. In such circumstances, it follows that recruits and commanders will have different reasons for participating in the conflict. This is in turn relevant for post-conflict programmes aimed at reintegrating ex-combatants, namely disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) (Jennings 2006b, 2007; Weinstein 2002; Spear 2006b). Arguably, to Collier and Hoeffler, this line of critique may again reflect a misreading of the research question: specifically, the difference between, “why is there a fight” versus “why do individuals fight”. Collier would likely purport to deal with the former, whereas individual motivations would belong to the latter category. Yet in discussing the collective action problems attributed to potential grievance-based rebellions, Collier does consider both aspects of the problem, making this distinction unsatisfactory.

Incidentally, this distinction between “why is there a fight” and “why they fight” is also blurred in the failed state strand of argumentation for causes of conflict. In its most basic form, the “failed state” argument attributes civil conflict to the collapse of state institutions and internal legal order, and the concomitant inability to control territory and borders and provide services and security to the citizenry. Such a circumstance could conceivably occupy either side of the greed-grievance debate. Non-functioning institutions could constitute an opportunity factor by enabling (or at least not hindering) predation; this may be used to explain “why there is a fight”. Yet grievances also arise from the threat to human security and flourishing posed by a recessed state: thus, “why they fight”. Notwithstanding its relation to the greed-grievance paradigm, however, the failed state argument itself is analytically problematic, predicated as it is on a faulty understanding of the dynamics of state recession, and a flawed assumption about state constitution and functioning (Bøås and Jennings 2005). As Bøås and Jennings (2005:386) note, “The question for researchers and policymakers is not which states are failed states, but rather for whom is the state failing, and how? By asking questions about the people and communities the state is failing, we open up an analytical perspective that can inform us

about the dynamics at work that undermine both social and economic development and state and human security”.

Although the greed versus grievance debate remains contested, perhaps intractably so, it has nevertheless proved important in pushing forward the research agenda on armed groups and civil war. The argumentation around greed and grievance has usefully highlighted various economic dimensions of, and interests in, conflict, thus providing an analytical link between armed groups and elite networks and households in conflict zones. This linkage between the local armed actors and international market actors is also emphasised in the “new wars” literature growing out of Mary Kaldor’s (1999) work. Moreover, the greed-grievance debate has re-asserted the centrality of empirical research in conceptualising and understanding the central issue of why fighters fight. As noted above, however, the usefulness of “why they fight” as a tool for understanding comes when this inquiry is combined with grounded research into other aspects of armed groups. Some of these aspects are mentioned above; more are outlined in the next section.

Finally, greed and grievance aside, it is notable that other prominent explanations of “why they fight” have recently focused on youth (particularly male youth) and conflict: “lumpen” youth (see for example Abdullah 1998, 2005); urban male youth bias (Mwakandawire 2002); and youth marginalisation and agency (Utas 2003). In African cases, researchers problematise male youth involvement in armed groups; in other contexts, a similar pathologising process is occurring with respect to male youth recruitment into terrorist organisations, organised crime, or urban gangs. In these analyses, mostly coming out of the political science and anthropological literature, the marginalisation and dissatisfaction of young males either leads them down the path of violent resistance as a viable alternative to their current situation, and/or predisposes them to manipulation and exploitation by warlords and corrupt elites. Yet while the role of youth culture and violence is important, these phenomena should not be divorced from the larger context of the historical particularities and systemic problems of states afflicted by armed conflict (see for example Bøås and Dunn 2007; Reno 1998; Ellis 1999; Richards 2005; Bøås and Jennings 2005).

Classifying armed groups: An influential attempt from Africa

Besides its potential analytical and policy value, the issue of “why they fight” has been used as a means of classifying armed groups, in combination with other variables. Classification is an attempt to improve analysis and policy by differentiating and problematising substantively distinct aspects of an overarching phenomenon. One of the most influential attempts at classifying nonstate armed groups is Clapham’s (1998) edited volume, *African Guerrillas*.

Clapham¹⁵ identifies four broad categories of African insurgencies, corresponding to different types of armed groups: liberation insurgencies (such as in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa); separatist or secessionist insurgencies (as represented by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) or the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF)); reform insurgencies (as seen in Museveni’s National Resistance Army (NRA) against the Obote and Okello regimes in Uganda); and warlord insurgencies (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia). The latter is described as “cases where the insurgency is directed towards a change of leadership which does not entail the creation of a state any different from that which it seeks to overthrow, and which may involve the creation of a personal territorial fiefdom separate from existing state structures and boundaries (7)”. Clapham further argues that differences in insurgency type are associated with differences in outcome. “State-consolidating” insurgencies are those that “have been organized effectively, and have proved capable at least of taking over and operating existing state structures, and in some cases even of reconstructing states which have virtually collapsed (8)”. Such insurgencies are associated with Clapham’s first three groups. Conversely, “state-subverting” insurgencies are themselves instruments of state collapse. These are typical of warlord insurgencies.

Finally, Clapham identifies some explanatory variables involved in determining whether a particular armed group is closer to the state-consolidating or state-subverting ends of the spectrum. These include: the internal structure of the movement, such as the quality and skill of leadership and the extent of organisational discipline; the embeddedness of the armed group, encompassing its relation to “host societies (11)” and the degree of common interest between armed groups and local populations; the character and strength of the regime being fought against; the tradition of statehood in the country (where countries with long traditions of statehood tend to produce disciplined and effective armed groups, while groups in countries without such a tradition tend to be undisciplined and fragmented); and the type and degree of international aid and support the armed group receives. A prototypical

¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all references to Clapham below are to Clapham (1998).

state-consolidating armed group will be disciplined and cohesive, with an educated leadership that can mobilise domestic and international support without depending on a cult of personality. It will develop in a country with a longer tradition of statehood, and will likely not depend on forced recruitment.

Interestingly, however, the issue of embeddedness can be double-edged. Although “insurgent organizations must ... be created on the ground, to an appreciably greater extent than any other form of African political organization, and it is plausible to assume that they must be constructed in large part from the social materials that they find there (11)”, it has also been the case that successful state-consolidating armed groups must transcend their local social base in order to create a national identity that will form a platform for eventual governance. The EPLF in Eritrea and Museveni’s NRA are cases in point (13-14). The logical extension is that failure to do so will compromise any governing project should the armed group eventually succeed in taking over the state.

Clapham’s typology is important in part because it was the first attempt to comparatively analyse African insurgencies. The typology, buttressed by the many case studies, provides useful insights into why different armed groups developed and organised as they did. It is also a valuable framework for understanding the differences in outcomes between various groups and insurgencies.

However, as Bøås and Dunn (2007) argue, “typologies based on traditional Anglo-American thinking about the political causes of conflict (37)” no longer seem to adequately describe contemporary armed groups in Africa, which now primarily fall into only one of Clapham’s four categories: warlord insurgencies. They contend that ideologically motivated movements – more typical of liberation, separatist, and reformist insurgencies – have receded; and moreover, that the extent to which these movements were actually ideologically driven is perhaps overstated. They also note that the current “war on terror” does not exactly replicate Cold War dynamics, in that the war on terror primarily benefits state actors – providing access to resources and materiel to African governments but not African armed groups. In this sense, the Cold War was more even-handed.

Bøås and Dunn argue instead that contemporary African armed groups can most productively be understood, not through a typologising approach, but through a holistic approach encompassing “questions regarding the composition of African states and their respective polities (20)” and “an awareness of the combination of material and ideational factors and their embeddedness in history (72)”. To facilitate this, they highlight certain aspects of African states, conflicts, and armed groups that are relevant in understanding these movements. These include: the crises of the post-colonial neopatrimonial state; crises of modernity; regional and social marginalisation; the behaviour, status, and career trajectory of leaders of armed group; the regionalisation of African conflict; and issues around autochthony, land, and

belonging (Bøås and Dunn 2007:38–72). Taken together, these factors facilitate a more cohesive and coherent analysis of armed groups. This may in turn enable policymakers, donors, and aid providers to craft more effective responses to assist the affected population: for example, by designing aid interventions (and organising security) so as to minimise opportunities for predation, and crafting post-conflict programming (such as DDR) to be responsive to the actual needs and challenges of the former combatants, both male and female.

Thus far much of the discussion has concerned African conflicts and groups. Analytically, there is little percolation between continents in terms of the literature on armed groups. Regional specialists are typically wary of generalising their arguments outside their areas of interest. This is analytically sound, but also somewhat limiting.¹⁶ Thus, the African literature overlooks or underestimates factors common to armed conflicts elsewhere (such as the highly contested issue of land reform in Latin America), and vice versa. There is also much less emphasis in the African context on the social contract that may develop between an armed group (or the political wing of an armed group) and the local population. The social contract model – in which the armed group essentially takes over for the state in areas under its control, providing services that the state can or will not – is seen in the Middle East, chiefly among Hizballah, and has also featured in Colombia, Sri Lanka, parts of India, and elsewhere. This is an aspect of embeddedness that does not seem to have replicated itself in the African context, with the famous exception of the EPLF. Moreover, as mentioned above, it is arguable the extent to which the greed and grievance debate is applicable in areas outside of Africa, even where lootable resources are at hand.

There are also different legacies of colonialism and state and elite formation in, for example, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East than in Africa. This may be part of the reason why warlord insurgencies are less prevalent in those regions than throughout Africa, and similarly why the aforementioned “failed state” strand of argument may be especially problematic in these cases. Many recent Asian conflicts – such as in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Philippines – are localised and secessionist in nature: those fighting the central authority want their own state or, at a minimum, greater autonomy and control over resources within a federalised system.¹⁷ Yet despite the ongoing nature of these conflicts, the inaugural “Failed States Index” (compiled by Foreign Policy magazine and the Fund for Peace in 2005) considered

¹⁶ Conversely, research that treats all regions and conflicts as equal tends to miss important dynamics and factors driving or sustaining conflicts at local levels. This is another standard criticism of Collier’s work.

¹⁷ Nepal, where a peace accord was recently signed (Pokharel and Sengupta 2006) is an exception. The original goal of the Maoist rebels in Nepal was not secession or autonomy, but to take over the state and turn it into a communist regime.

that Indonesia and the Philippines were only “borderline” cases – as opposed to “critical” or “in danger”, the two most serious categories.¹⁸ Sri Lanka did not figure at all. In fact, the Sri Lankan state has over the past generation made impressive strides in service delivery, especially in the areas of health and education (Oxfam 2006). Even including the north and east of the country, almost all children attend school, and the maternal mortality rate is extremely low (Oxfam 2006). This is a reminder that generalisations about causes of conflicts, although potentially useful, should also be critically examined.

¹⁸ See: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3098 (accessed 7 Nov. 2006).

Elite Networks

As with armed groups, much of the policy and analytical work on elite networks has focused on the important role of resource exploitation. An elite network is not a single actor per se, but a group encompassing actors, relationships, transactions, and resource flows. This presents a rhetorical challenge. For the sake of brevity and clarity, this paper uses the terminology of “elite networks” or “networked actors” to describe the various relationships, actors, transactions, and resource flows that comprise any particular network. This should not, however, be read as arguing that elite networks are necessarily centralised, hierarchical, or singular actors.

Elite networks – alongside, as, or in conjunction with regime actors, state military forces, nonstate armed groups, and corporations – often play key transporting and brokering roles in the commodity chain of natural resources coming from conflict zones or otherwise poor and insecure states. They provide a link between local production and global markets in arms, drugs, diamonds, timber, finance, and people. Those in elite networks may also staff political institutions; Bayart, Ellis and Hibou (1999) characterise this overlap as *la politique du ventre*, or “the politics of the belly” (see also Bayart [1989] engl. 1993). However, they also note that the “relationship between economic accumulation and tenure of political power (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999:8)” does not preclude the conduct of illicit activities by networked actors outside formal power structures. Transnational illicit economic activities by both groups are seemingly accelerating:

The relationship between accumulation and power is henceforth situated in a context of internationalization and of the growth of organized crime on a probably unprecedented scale. The world system is subject to a simultaneous process of globalization and loss of precise territorial definition, which ... is most surely leading to the development of transnational relations between societies. Criminal activities are greatly affected by this evolution, and quite often they thrive in this environment. Criminal operators, who can on occasion be formidably well organized at a national level and in some cases exercise clear influence at the heart of the state, or even use the state as their main power-base ... are capable of co-operation with one another and even on occasion of launching true joint ventures. At the same time, criminal activity often serves as a vehicle for both

cultural representations and goods of foreign origin, and in this respect plays a full role in the process of globalization (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999:9).

Obviously not all elites are implicated in elite networks. This section focuses on those elites involved in networked connections with other domestic and international, public and private actors, where licit or illicit trade is an explicit function of those networks.

Unlike with armed groups, there is little debate on what drives the existence of elite networks. The profit motive is assumed (see for example Naím 2005). In the grey literature on elite networks, the focus is instead investigative: tracking commodity chains in order to uncover how “conflict commodities” (or otherwise illicit commodities) make their way into the licit market; where the money paid for these commodities ends up; and the ways in which this capital may help fuel or sustain conflict. The grey literature also highlights the impact of large-scale illicit trade on human rights, governance, global security, and the environment. Global Witness, Partnership Africa Canada, Fafo, and the UN’s Panels of Experts,¹⁹ among others, have done important work in this area.²⁰ In the analytical literature, meanwhile, particular attention is paid to the way in which elite networks comprise, replicate, or contest the patronage networks crucial to the functioning of neopatrimonial states, and the implications that this has for governance, state institutions, economic development, and regime behaviour.²¹ A great deal has also been written on the socioeconomic and political roles assumed by elite networks in formerly communist states after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In this section, I will provide a concise overview of our current knowledge base on elite networks. Some areas of overlap with the armed groups discussion are unavoidable; these will be drawn out further in the separate section (below) on the future research agenda. My primary contention is that – despite groundbreaking and important work by some NGOs and researchers on this issue – the role, struc-

¹⁹ On topics related to the illegal exploitation of natural resources, United Nations Panels of Experts have been convened on Angola, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Liberia. See for example: <http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/drcongo.htm> (accessed 31 October 2006).

²⁰ Reports from Global Witness, Partnership Africa Canada, and Fafo are freely available on their websites: respectively, www.globalwitness.org and <http://www.pacweb.org/e/>, and Fafo’s Economies of Conflict webpage: <http://www.faf.no/nsp/econ.htm>.

²¹ According to Médard (1982), neopatrimonialism best describes “the logic of political and administrative behaviour in Africa (185)”. It comprises the “privatization of the public (Médard 1982:181)”, which has two consequences: “the first is that political power, instead of having the impersonal and abstract character of legal-rational domination, specific to the modern state, is on the contrary personal power”, while the second is that “politics becomes a kind of business, as it is political resources which give access to economic resources: politics is reduced to economics and recovers the depersonalized character inherent in the market (Médard 1982:181)”.

ture, characteristics, alliances, and operating procedures of elite networks remain understudied relative to their economic, political, security, and social importance. This is particularly so in relation to the role that elite networks play in “failing” or “failed” states (Bøås and Jennings 2005). In general, analysis of “failed states” tends to underplay the extent to which unarmed, non-regime private interests contribute to the collapse of institutional authority and functioning that characterises these countries (Bøås and Jennings 2005; Taylor 2005).

As with the other actors in conflict, the relative dearth of attention to the phenomenon of elite networks is likely due to the difficulty of studying them. Penetrating the business dealings of such networks is not just tricky; it can be physically dangerous. Elite networks tend to be opaque, closed groups reliant (to a greater or lesser degree) on pre-existing connections and bonds of trust, fortified by shorter-term alliances of mutual convenience and benefit. Indeed, while the aforementioned profit motive of elite networks should not be underestimated, it should also not obscure the fact that elite networks often arise out of existing power structures and relations. They are not generally a new or imposed phenomenon. Elite networks may therefore be more longstanding and durable than a simple focus on economic opportunism might imply. Durability may turn into rigidity. Yet it may also breed adaptability: if a network has strong roots and a relatively high degree of internal trust and cohesion, it may adapt quickly to changes in circumstances that might break down more tenuous partnerships or arrangements. Networks that can adapt are likely to be more successful; and indeed, elite networks have shown themselves to be adaptable to changes in both the market and security environments (Naím 2005). This fungibility adds to the complexity of collecting data on and mapping these networks.

Briefly, some of the relevant issues and research questions concerning elite networks include: the socioeconomic and political impact of elite networks vis-à-vis the regime and state institutions; the extent of a network’s embeddedness in the producing society (including whether the network builds and depends on ethnic or familial ties, traditional authority structures, or other sources); the organisational form and structure of networks; how networks cross borders; networks’ roles and interests in conflict; the importance of diasporas; networks’ relationships to regime and non-regime actors, including domestic rivals, corporate interests, and armed groups; and how networks change over time (e.g. when conflict ends). Importantly, the existence of a link between elite networks and resource extraction and exploitation is not itself determinative of the structure, motives, relationship to domestic constituencies, and modes of operation of elite networks (see also Taylor and Jennings 2005). This echoes what was argued above: that establishing a resource link to conflict is a starting, not end, point for attempts to understand armed groups.

One way to begin examining elite networks is by working backward from the trade or resource that is of primary concern. Global Witness and Partnership Africa Canada, for example, began with a focus on specific commodities.²² By tracking the commodity chain of diamonds originating in West Africa, they were able to map the involvement of and connections between companies, governments, armed groups, and non-regime networks active in the trade in so-called conflict (or otherwise illicit) diamonds (see e.g. Global Witness 1998, 2003, 2004; Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton 2000; Gberie 2001; Dietrich 2002; Partnership Africa Canada 2005). The same has been true for other objects of illicit trade, including trafficking in human beings: researchers, advocates, and law enforcement agencies tend to approach these problems with a resource- rather than network-focus. From this point of departure, in-depth empirical work has revealed many of the particular alliances, operating procedures, and levels of embeddedness of these networks (see e.g. Lunde and Taylor, with Huser 2003; Taylor 2002; Smillie 2002; Global Witness 2002; Winer 2002; Spear 2006a). Indeed, it seems intuitive that different types of resources – with varying value, lootability, ease of production and transport, and marketability – will result in differently structured elite networks.

However, Naím (2005) argues that, by treating each illicit resource trade as an analytically distinct phenomenon, researchers are overstating the differences between existing networks and trades. He asserts that, for example, a network marketing diamonds and a network marketing women have more in common than what separates them. Naím contends that, while there are obviously variations in the individual attributes of networks, the key point is that:

... players in the network who are most closely bound to a particular product are almost all concentrated in supply or distribution. The flexibility and real power now lie in between. Illicit trade is no longer a collection of arcane and dangerous specialities. Instead, it's something much closer to a full-fledged exchange in which legal, illegal, and gray-area goods can be endlessly substituted and combined, and agents (traders, service providers, financiers) are at once more autonomous and better connected—a marketplace that keeps growing more efficient (2005:229).

Naím thus criticises the prevalent segmentation of research and response to illicit trade and networks, arguing that this obscures the most important aspects of today's networks: their decentralisation, adaptability, and single-minded pursuit of profit. Policymakers must therefore stop “parsing the illicit trades into separate product lines (240)” – in so doing spreading the effort of combating them among different

²² Global Witness's earliest reports (from 1995) focused on the Cambodian timber trade; its first report on the diamond trade (from Angola) was released in December 1998. See <http://globalwitness.org/reports/>.

government agencies and international organisations – and instead “start thinking of illicit traders as economic agents who have developed functional specialities, not product niches (240)”. Governments interested in tackling illicit trade and networks must therefore design their own integrated approach to the problem. They must also focus on illicit trade as an economic rather than moral or normative phenomenon and target it accordingly; and ditch the outdated, Mafia-derived view of illicit economic activity as a highly centralised, top-down enterprise.

Naím is correct in highlighting the way in which global political and economic transformations in the 1990s changed the landscape and opportunities for illicit trade and elite networks. As alluded to by Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou above, the collapse of communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the easing of borders, deregulation and expansion of free trade, and the technological advances that enabled globalisation have all wrought significant changes in the scope, scale, and operation of illicit trade networks. Over the past one-and-a-half decades, access to global commodity and financial markets has been broadened, transport for goods and people has gotten cheaper, and dirty money has become easier to hide (Winer 2002).²³ The political, economic, and security impacts have been felt by publics in both supply- and demand-countries.

However, Naím seems to go too far in the direction of delocating, decontextualising, and fragmenting networks. This may be attributable to the fact that he does not focus specifically on elite networks. Elite networks operating in conflict zones are likely to be more embedded in the affected society than the freelancers Naím is primarily concerned with. Thus, his analysis arguably elides an important aspect of the way elite networks are constituted, situated, and operative.

For example, in contrast to Naím’s analysis, Reno (2003) describes how elite networks²⁴ rooted in Sierra Leone’s diamond mining areas had divergent relationships vis-à-vis the centre (Siaka Stevens’s All Peoples Congress regime), and how this in turn affected the particular structure of the respective diamond trades; the chiefs’ relationships to their own constituencies; and eventually, the extent to which networks were able to exert social control over the use of force in their areas. From the time he took office, Stevens sought to exert control over the diamond trade, employing tactics that “forced chiefs in mining areas to make a choice. They could side with

²³ Since the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, the U.S. government and allies have attempted to re-energise efforts to combat money laundering and terrorist financing, especially through the mechanism of the inter-governmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Founded in 1989, FATF has been an innovative and rather effective body, especially through the use of its “black-listing” authority. It nevertheless remains that “governments – whose jurisdictions begin and end at their own borders – may be poorly placed to exercise effective oversight of private sector financial institutions whose activities may extend through many dozens of jurisdictions (Winer 2002:39)”.

²⁴ Reno uses the term “political networks” or “violent political networks”. Unless specifically noted, all citations to Reno in this section are to Reno (2003).

Stevens, but at the expense of their direct control over IDM [illicit diamond mining] and at the cost of suppressing opposition party activity (Reno 2003:52).²⁵

As it happened, however, an important difference in the types of diamond deposits throughout the area resulted in significantly different relationships between the regime and the local elite networks. This is not unusual: Fafo's Economies of Conflict project found that the nature of the production process, specifically the extent to which it is militarised, affects access to the resource and mediates the relationships integral to brokering, marketing, and profiting from the commodity (Taylor 2002). In the Sierra Leonean case, chiefs in upriver areas where the diamonds are more deeply buried – thus requiring the involvement of outside firms and sizable capital investment – ended up allying themselves more closely to Stevens and his Freetown allies, in order to ensure themselves access to the joint venture mining operations that went through Stevens. However, this came at the cost of their own standing and authority in their community, as the chiefs were perceived as favouring the interests of Freetown-based interlopers over those of the locally active IDM gangs. Pressure came from the other side as well: Stevens and the APC increasingly sought to influence the selection of new chiefs, and at least one upriver chief was replaced by a Stevens crony with no local support base.

Conversely, chiefs in downriver areas, where diamonds were readily accessible through manual labour, did not face the same pressure to ally themselves closely with the centre, so long as they maintained some degree of loyalty to Stevens's regime. These chiefs' greater control of IDM in their areas corresponded with greater authority among their constituency. Reno writes:

Though downriver communities were well known as IDM sites, local chiefs were more successful in keeping political and social distance between themselves and the emerging APC "official" clandestine economy and political network.... [T]hey maintained greater control over local youth through influence over informal institutions such as an initiation society and patronage to local IDM operations. This ability of many local chiefs to preserve some political distance from Freetown politicians gave them less income, but enabled them to behave in a locally legitimate manner as local patrons for IDM gangs, since they did not have to tolerate as much interference from Freetown ventures that forced IDM gangs off their land (2003:54-55).

Downriver chiefs' retention of some form of social control over local youth proved important after the civil war erupted in 1991. Upriver, many of the discontented IDM gangs were susceptible to the claims and promises of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF): the RUF "confronted chiefs who relied upon Freetown to

²⁵ Bøås and Hatløy (2006a) take issue with the term "illicit diamond mining" to describe this activity during this period. They argue that the mining activity was informal, but not illicit.

stay in power at the expense of local people's clandestine access to diamonds (53)". Conversely, downriver chiefs were better able to mobilise youth in their areas into Civil Defence Force militias, which "mined diamonds while supplying order (61)". In other words, the networks that were more embedded in their communities were eventually able to parlay that authority into both wartime protection and profit. Where there were longstanding, undisrupted networks built on pre-existing formal and informal structures, local elites were able to leverage their authority to exert a significant degree of social control over the use of force during conflict. Contrarily, in areas where pre-existing networks were disrupted or replaced, this degree of social and political control was lacking.

This case illustrates several important points. Elite networks have different, sometimes opposing constituencies. Elite networks may exercise a range of functions, including not just economic but also social and political control. Different networks establish varying relationships to central authority. These relationships can be affected by multiple factors: the networks' embeddedness and interests; the lootability of the resources under networks' control; regime interests; and the interests and power of third parties, including corporations and armed groups. Profit is a motivating – but not necessarily determinative – factor in how elite networks operate. Downriver chiefs traded some profitability in order to maintain greater control over mining in their areas.

This is not to conclude that Naím's and Reno's arguments are mutually exclusive. A common link between the two is the simple fact that elite networks are not uniform. Furthermore, their differences go beyond which product(s) they happen to trade in. Elite networks' differential relationships towards the central authority – the extent to which networks augment or threaten regime power and socio-economic control – are particularly key factors when examining issues of governance, patronage, institutional collapse, and the exercise of authority in conflict zones.²⁶ Networks' differences may also reflect divides that resonate in society as a whole, such as that between rural and urban, or that between authority derived from longstanding or informal institutions versus authority derived from formal control over state structures. Meanwhile, networks' involvement with other domestic and international actors – including diaspora populations, extractive companies, and private military companies – can be crucial in determining access to resources, money, and materiel in times of both conflict and peace. The variation and complexity of the relationships that elite networks are implicated in likely correspond to differences in the way these networks are constituted, embedded, and structured.

²⁶ See also Council on Foreign Relations (2004) for the way in which elite networks in the Andean region of Latin America serve their own interests by contesting and challenging the exercise of power by formal state institutions.

Finally, it is worth re-iterating a point raised in the Naím quote cited above, where he states that the most profitable aspects of illicit trade lie not in production but in brokering and transporting. This is generally acknowledged among analysts (and many policymakers) working to combat the trade in illegal narcotics.²⁷ In Colombia and the Andean region, for example, the typical coca producer is a poor farmer who sells his crop to a middleman working for an armed group or a “baby cartel”. Once in the broker’s possession, the coca is processed and refined before being exported for sale, probably on American or European streets. The producer does not benefit from the vast profits generated by American and European drug habits; the brokers, transporters, and (to a lesser extent) end-dealers do. This is an important reason why the U.S.-funded aerial crop eradication programmes have not fostered sustained decreases in overall coca production in the Andes. Poor producers, lacking alternative livelihoods, have few other viable options than to grow coca: if their crop is sprayed and destroyed, they simply start over. Ever-adaptable brokers, meanwhile, respond to a dip in supply in one area by buying elsewhere. The structural status quo is thus maintained. This explains why patterns of coca production in the Andes are regularly shifting, while the net combined export of cocaine from the region remains steady (Council on Foreign Relations 2004). Unfortunately, American policymakers remain wedded to a broken supply-side strategy, to the detriment of the rural population of the Andean countries. Moreover, the progress of the current “war on drugs” in Afghanistan indicates that the lessons from Latin America have yet to be internalised by other policymakers.

The Oscar-nominated documentary film, *Darwin’s Nightmare*, similarly showed how those involved in production – in this case, poor fishermen catching Nile Perch from Lake Victoria in Tanzania – are excluded from the benefits of their labour.²⁸ The trade primarily benefits processors and brokers, at the expense of Lake Victoria’s human and natural environment.²⁹ *Darwin’s Nightmare* also illustrated the ways in which licit and illicit trade can be neatly combined. The large planes that fly out the fishy cargo – which primarily ends up on European restaurant tables – are not empty when they land on Victoria’s shores; instead, they are used to illegally import small arms and light weapons, which are then dispersed throughout the continent. Ingenuity, indeed.

²⁷ The same dynamic is obvious with respect to human trafficking for sexual exploitation: most victims of trafficking (“producers” in this example) are allowed to keep little, if any, of the money that customers pay for sexual services. Bøås and Hatløy (2006a) describe a similar situation with young diamond miners in Sierra Leone, although there production is more rooted in place than in the coca example.

²⁸ The film’s website is: <http://www.darwinsnightmare.com/darwin/html/startset.htm> (accessed 17 Oct. 2006).

²⁹ The fact that most of the people owning processing plants were of South Asian origin introduced another dimension into the structure and operation of the commodity chain.

Households

Of the three groups of agents covered in this Review, the one about which we know least is households. Indeed, any future empirical research agenda on armed conflict – such as that suggested below – must prioritise these most common of agents in conflict zones. The brevity of this section reflects the paucity of empirical research and data on households in conflict.

Work on households in conflict generally comes from anthropologists, epidemiologists, demographers, and – to a much lesser extent – political scientists and economists. Until recently, conflict zones were essentially out of bounds to anthropology (Richards 2005), although there is a growing anthropological literature on violence (see for example Stewart and Strathern 2002). This is increasingly changing, though it is nevertheless notable that much anthropological work from conflict areas specifically focuses on combatants (Richards 1996, 2005; Utas 2003, 2005; Fithen and Richards 2005; Honwana 2005). Work on migration and split households may also be relevant.

As opposed to anthropological work focusing on fighters, much of the survey work being done on households in conflict-affected areas is conducted for the purposes of assessing humanitarian needs and/ or impact. This work is crucial to effectively tailor policy and aid responses in crisis situations, and its relative neglect by both researchers and donors is highly problematic (Taylor and Pedersen 2007). The fact that much of the debate in this area still circulates on developing methodologies and indicators implies how much work remains to be done. Importantly, however, it is crucial to remember that assessing household needs is not the same as generating a knowledge base on households *per se*. For the sake of efficiency, rapid needs assessments are usually narrowly drawn. Larger surveys – such as the nationwide Iraq Living Conditions Survey (UNDP 2005), conducted in 2004 by Fafo and the Central Organisation for Statistics and Information Technology, Iraq (COSIT) – provide a much more detailed knowledge base on the situation of households, but are also time-consuming and significantly more difficult (and potentially dangerous) to complete.³⁰ An exception to the general lack of household-based work from conflict areas is the wealth of material from Palestine.

³⁰ Fieldwork for the IMIRA survey was conducted in the spring of 2004, under increasingly precarious security conditions. Both Iraqi COSIT and Fafo employees participated in the fieldwork.

The fact that households are usually considered through an aid paradigm is limiting in another way. The aid paradigm tends to limit or outright excise agency. Rather than viewing households and individuals as agents of their own survival, they are transformed into passive recipients of outside assistance. Their interests, connection with the conflict and its participants, and coping strategies – those “purposeful ways of acting ... [that] help them survive and endure, if not overcome, the direct and secondary effects of conflict (Bøås, Jennings and Shaw 2006:74)” – are sidelined. This obscures an understanding of how households and individuals adapt to life in conflict zones. Yet empirical work has shown that adaptation is a necessary component of households’ physical and economic survival strategies in areas affected by conflict – especially where conflict has become the “new normal” (see e.g. Sletten and Pedersen 2003). It is therefore important for researchers and policymakers to develop a firmer grasp on how and where adaptation is occurring, and identify how and where coping strategies are particularly restricted.

Conceptualisation of adaptation and coping strategies is also limited by the fact that there remains surprisingly little work done on micro-economic effects of conflict, including how conflict affects the formal and informal economic structures and markets that households engage with and depend on in daily life.³¹ Capturing how livelihoods and economic situations change as conflicts develop requires empirical engagement over a reasonably sustained time period. For example, Sletten and Pedersen (2003) track how the second Palestinian *intifada* had differential economic effects on households in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and find that these differential outcomes were largely affected by households’ level of vulnerability before the conflict. Moreover, even some of the best-off in the survey – the “job-keepers”, those employed before the intifada broke out and who managed to retain their jobs and most of their income afterwards – had to deal with new challenges stemming from the conflict. These new challenges included inflation; less predictability in receiving salaries; salary reductions; and increased demands on salaried employees by family members injured or left unemployed by the conflict (Sletten and Pedersen 2003:19-20). This illustrates that conflict has various indirect economic effects, alongside the more direct effects caused by e.g. infrastructure destruction and border closure.³²

³¹ An exception is the Households in Conflict Network, which brings together “researchers interested in the micro-economic and econometric analysis of the relationship between violent conflict and household behaviour” (<http://www.hicn.org/>, accessed 7 Nov. 2006). However, the network, which was founded in 2005, is still rather small.

³² This distinction between direct and indirect economic effects of conflict mimics the distinction between direct and indirect health effects of conflict, or direct and indirect deaths by conflict. On the latter in particular, see Mack and Leidl (2004).

Using a coping strategies approach may also be productive in highlighting how conflict impacts gender roles in households, and the extent to which these impacts may be desirable or sustainable after the conflict ends. This, too, would entail a grounded understanding of gendered roles in households both before and during conflicts. Gender issues in relation to all three components will be revisited in the section on a future research agenda, below.

Finally, it is notable that, while little is known on households in conflict, even less empirical data are generally available for households or individuals in refugee and internally displaced camps, with some exceptions (see e.g. Kibreab 1995; 1996; 2001; 2002 on Eritrean refugees). This reiterates the distinction between work aiming to assess immediate humanitarian need and that aiming to obtain information on the household useful to both grounded analysis and future policy responses: health status of household members, educational status, access to services, mortality, migration history, employment history, access to weapons, conflict history, threat perceptions, camp experiences, etc. Indeed, Bøås and Hatløy's (2005) study profiling several aspects of the living conditions of internally displaced persons in Northern Uganda was one of very few attempts to systematically collect data in this region, despite the fact that the camps have been heavily populated since at least 1996.³³ Moreover, by gathering information on perceptions of security and future plans (specifically, the circumstances under which camp residents would begin returning home), Bøås and Hatløy's findings have significant implications for policymakers planning eventual return scenarios for the 1.3 million people displaced across Northern Uganda.

³³ Bøås and Hatløy's (2005) study was carried out under the auspices of the Office of the Prime Minister (Uganda), Department of Disaster Preparedness and Refugees. The lead donor agency on the study was UNDP, with additional funding support from the European Union Acholi Programme, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (Uganda office).

Conclusion: Where do we go from here – an agenda for future empirical research on armed conflict

This Review is predicated on the assumption that there is a link between quality research and effective policy and practice. The rationale is that policymakers and practitioners with access to good empirical research will be better informed, and therefore make and implement better decisions. The resulting policy and practice will be more appropriate to the local, national, and regional context of the affected area; will be better targeted to the needs and circumstances of the polity and society; and will minimise unintended consequences and be less likely to do harm.

The premise that research improves policy is itself a product of two assumptions. First, that policymakers and practitioners – faced with packed schedules, short decision times, and political imperatives in which they themselves may have little say – have the time to read, absorb, and act on the basis of research, including that which is not aimed at a policy audience. The second assumption is that research, which typically springs from a critical impulse, can in fact assist a process of constructive policymaking. The first assumption is a stretch – not due to any failing on the part of policymakers or practitioners, but simply because there are only so many hours in the day.³⁴ The second assumption is more sound. The material summarised above indicates that research has something to add to policy and practice relating to conflict and post-conflict zones. Some themes emerge:

- *Map the playing field.* Consider all the relevant actors – including those not covered here, such as national governments, military forces (under national, regional, and international flags), corporations, private security forces, other armed actors (“bandits” or criminal gangs), nongovernmental organisations, international organisations, and other humanitarian agents. While being agnostic about their

³⁴ Weiss and Collins (1997:15) cite a U.S. State Department official responsible for peacekeeping operations, remarking a few months before the crisis in the Great Lakes in late 1996: “I don’t have time to read. For example, see this top secret document here. I don’t know what it is; I haven’t looked at it yet. But I’ll probably read the table of contents, check it off, and then send it down the hall where some other guy will do the same. What is it anyway? Oh...‘Contingency Plans for Burundi’ [Weiss and Collins (1997) cited in Taylor (2000)]”.

merits, the point is to assess what they are doing and the impact of their activities and agency. How will the policy intervention change the environment, both positively and (potentially) negatively? Who will it benefit? Who will it threaten? What opportunities does it create? What responses can be anticipated, and how can they be dealt with?

- *Expect change.* One finding constant across all groups of actors surveyed above is their ability to adapt as circumstances change. This adaptation may be tactical or strategic; the latter is arguably more important for policymakers. Policy processes cannot adapt as quickly and easily as actors that must change in order to survive or thrive. But they will be more effective if policymakers aren't wedded to a single explanation or policy prescription.
- *Know whom you are empowering.* To some extent, policymakers don't have a choice in terms of whom they are engaging – heads of government, other regime officials, and local and international bureaucrats. In the field, however, and especially in and after conflict, the choice may be less clear-cut. This is why the mapping exercise is so important. The grey and analytical literature is riven with examples of cases of good intentions leading to bad outcomes, in part because practitioners didn't understand the social and power dynamics of the environment they were working in (see e.g. Jennings 2006b, 2007).
- *Remember you're political.* A related point to the one above. In a conflict and post-conflict zone, there is no impartiality. Any decision concerning resource allocation, assistance provision, or even who to talk to is inherently political. Policymakers and practitioners cannot satisfy everyone. But they should recognise the pros and cons of working with the group(s) they do, and how their favour plays into the dynamics of the conflict and the society in which they operate.
- *Think locally.* This is not to say that a policymaker or practitioner should think *like* a local in the affected area, which is an impossible task. It is rather to warn against the familiar fallacy of assuming that what worked in one place will have the same effect elsewhere. Similarly, it is tempting to assume that "our" understanding of political and social organisation – on issues such as good governance, state responsibility, civil-military relations, corporate behaviour, individual property rights, taxation of income, the rule of law and transitional justice, roles of women and children, corruption, etc – are generally accepted, lacking only in implementation. This universalism is misguided, and generates equally misguided policy responses.

- *Question assumptions.* Greed may be a motivating factor for armed group leaders and commanders – and their counterparts in the regime or other military presence – to keep fighting. Yet it is certainly not the only factor in starting or prolonging conflict. Policy interventions based only on a greed perspective run the risk of overstating the economic and ignoring the political and social – not a sustainable formula for conflict resolution and prevention. Moreover, to the extent that they impede or criminalise informal economies, they may also increase the vulnerability of households in the affected area. The same is true for ethnic drivers of conflict: policy interventions that make ethnicity the focal point (as in post-conflict Bosnia) may actually cement ethnic divisions and reduce accountability to minority populations (Chandler [1999] 2000), while negatively impacting the security situation of minority households. Similarly, not all “failed states” are in conflict, and not all conflicts are in “failed states”; nor do states “fail” in the same way or for the same reason, suggesting the need for differentiated policy responses.
- *Recognise limitations.* Particularly in a post-conflict environment with a large international presence, the enormity of the task and short time horizons may lead to ambition overtaking reality. There may also be a mismatch between the compromises accepted by peacemakers (in order for peace to be agreed) and the goals of the peacebuilders. In order to manage expectations and fulfil commitments, more modest aspirations, effectively implemented, may be appropriate in cases where other elements of the peace have limited the political space (Jennings 2006b).
- *Use data to plan, monitor, and evaluate.* Policy interventions, including large-scale interventions such as multi-dimensional peace operations, may be conducted in the absence of even the most basic data on the living conditions of the affected people, resulting in misguided policy responses (Taylor and Pedersen 2007). Donors should emphasise the need for, and importance of, data collection and analysis as a basis for planning. Data on security, access to services, the labour market, migration histories, and perception-related indicators can usefully complement other humanitarian indicators (on e.g. health, mortality, nutritional status and food security). The employment of comprehensive, relevant tools and methods for data collection and interpretation would also greatly assist the monitoring and evaluation of policy interventions.

Turning now to the proposed research agenda: while there are many avenues for future empirical research on armed conflict, the remainder of this concluding section will focus on suggestions for research aimed at fleshing out the links, commonalities, and intersecting and diverging interests between armed groups, elite networks, and

households in conflict zones. Currently the different actors in conflict zones tend to be studied rather narrowly. Examining each group in relation to others will provide a more cohesive understanding of conflict zones as social spaces.³⁵

There are many overlapping issues among armed groups, elite networks, and households that could prove useful in linking them analytically. Below, I will briefly outline some of the issues and questions common to the three components that are of interest for future research. The bent of this proposed agenda is towards generating findings useful to policy on conflict resolution and peacebuilding. It builds on the assumption that actors in conflict possess agency.

First, however, it bears repeating that one group in particular, households, remains grossly neglected in the empirical research on armed conflict. The suggested research agenda, if applied, would be a start in redressing this imbalance. However, it by no means covers the extent of work necessary to develop the analytical insights required to inform and guide policy in this area.

Analytical links: armed groups, elite networks & households

Embeddedness

The issue of embeddedness is prevalent in analyses of armed groups. Reflecting the influence of Mao's observation that insurgents (guerrillas) should move through the people like a fish moves through water, it is the case that, "[a]ll of the literature on insurgent warfare places an enormous emphasis on the relationship between the insurgents and the people among whom they operate (Clapham 1998:11)". The notion of embeddedness attempts to describe the relationship between a movement or group and the community in which it either emerges, or claims to represent. The term "grassroots" is its peacetime political equivalent. The question of whether armed movements represent genuine political and socio-economic aspirations, rooted in their own experiences and communities, is of course an underlying issue in the greed versus grievance debate. Yet the degree of embeddedness may also be critical in attempting to understand how and why armed groups operate as they do (see e.g. Mkandawire 2002). In Sierra Leone, for example, the RUF's viciousness towards civilians was likely exacerbated, if not caused, by closed sect-like conditions of life

³⁵ This of course encompasses other actors in conflict zones not specifically covered by this Review, including other armed forces (of national, regional, or international origin); humanitarian actors; private security actors; and corporations.

in the group's camps, in which the "movement's sense of social dislocation peaked (Fithen and Richards 2005:127)". Of course, the finding that a particular movement is de-located from its surroundings prompts further questions, chiefly: where did the movement come from, how does it sustain itself in an alien environment, and what does it want? Answers to these questions are of clear utility for the effective design of conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategies, as well as specific programmatic responses, such as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes.

As seen above, however, the issue of embeddedness may be overlooked on the subject of elite networks. This may lead analysts and policymakers to underestimate the durability of these networks and some critical factors sustaining them, thus hampering effective law enforcement and policy responses. In most cases, elite networks lie at the heart of economic and political structures on all sides of certain conflicts, and understanding how they operate is necessary to comprehend the decisionmaking of the parties, and/or to assess the effectiveness of international responses to conflict (such as UN sanctions or conflict resolution initiatives).

Embeddedness is also un contemplated with respect to households: households are assumed to be embedded in their communities. Although a reasonable conjecture, this assumption obscures or simplifies some oft-contested issues, such as autochthony, identity, belonging, inter-communal relations, and relationship to central authority. It also reinforces the bias towards perceiving of households as passive agents in conflict areas, ignoring how households actively relate to other actors or groups of actors in conflict. However, it is particularly important for local, national, and international policymakers and practitioners active in the post-conflict period to confront the divisive issues relevant to households – such as resettlement, governance and legal reform, and land reform and titling – and to counter the bias towards treating people living in conflict zones as passive victims or recipients. In this way, practitioners may begin to engage with the social foundations, and political constituencies, of the actors involved with armed groups and elite networks.

Future research could usefully extend analysis on embeddedness to all actors in conflict zones, thus generating a more cohesive appreciation of how and why conflict zones look as they do. The first step is interrogating the basis for each actor's authority and claims. Are the claims – to authority, to representation, to control over production and trade, to belonging – generally perceived as legitimate or illegitimate? How does this perception vary according to audience? From what do these claims derive, for whom are they targeted, and for whom do they benefit (or purport to benefit)?

In the Niger Delta, for example, the demands for more equitable distribution of oil revenues by armed groups like the Movement for Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) are generally perceived of as legitimate by local communities. Indeed, there have been cases where MEND kidnaps oil company (or subcontract-

tor) employees and hands them over to a local community with company-specific grievances; the community uses the subsequent negotiation period to press their case against the company (Bøås 2006a, 2006b).³⁶ Conversely, the Nigerian state declaims the legitimacy of MEND's agenda, as do oil companies operating in the area (International Crisis Group 2006). That is to say, they don't just quarrel with the tactics, such as kidnapping, oil bunkering, etc: they reject the claims themselves. A pressing question now is how MEND (and smaller armed groups operating in the Delta) will react to a continued rejection of their claims by state authorities, especially as the state response escalates in terms of retribution directed at local communities (BBC 2006).

The issue of embeddedness thus provides a means of mapping the conflict zone according to the relationships therein and, on the basis of that map, developing a conflict resolution or management strategy that reflects reality, not just assumptions.

Other specific areas of interest related to embeddedness include:

- Does embeddedness make a difference in terms of actors' activities, operation and structure, effect on or in the community, and success? What are the implications of this for diplomatic, political, and strategic policy responses to these groups?
- How are groups embedded? – a mapping exercise.
- How does it impact on or govern the relationships – of mutual benefit, mutual suspicion, convenience, fear, support – among and between the various actors in conflict zones? Does it affect how the various components relate, both concretely and ideationally?
- Is embeddedness variable over time, especially as conflict becomes the “new normal”? What are the implications of this for earlier claims and perceived legitimacy? Are there tangible implications in terms of the way a group, network, or community is organised and active?
- How does the embeddedness (or lack thereof) of different groups affect policy or law enforcement responses? Are elite networks that replicate or grow out of existing structures substantively different from those that are more temporal, and how does this affect political responses to these phenomena?

³⁶ This was the case with the two Norwegian and two Ukrainian employees kidnapped off an oil company supply boat in August 2006. They were handed over to a local community that had specific grievances against Peak Petroleum, a Nigerian oil company that had rented the boat from which the employees were kidnapped. All four employees were later released unharmed.

- Are places where identity and belonging are contested before the conflict more vulnerable during war, and how can policymakers avoid exacerbating these vulnerabilities in the post-conflict period?
- How does embeddedness factor into support and participation levels for armed groups and elite networks? How does this impact on eventual attempts at disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants? How does it impact attempts to break up, control, or co-opt elite networks?

Adaptability and coping strategies

How do armed groups, elite networks, and households adapt and cope to the changing circumstances wrought by conflict – even when the conflict itself has become normalised? This is a key question for both analysts and policymakers, yet it remains relatively neglected. Developing a greater understanding of how armed groups adapt their strategy, tactics, and rhetoric would bolster political and strategic attempts at conflict resolution, and could usefully inform later peacebuilding efforts (such as security sector reform or economic reconstruction). Broadening the knowledge base on the ways in which elite networks successfully accommodate shifting security and market demands would be a critical tool in dismantling or controlling those networks. Understanding the coping strategies used by households, and how these strategies continually change, would help policymakers and practitioners determine how best to target their efforts and resources, and mitigate the unintended consequences of those efforts.

Adaptations are, by definition, phenomena that happen over time and, in each context, these adaptations will be different. Yet at present, practitioners have a limited understanding of how these adaptations might occur, and how the adaptations of different actors might interact. This basic knowledge would enable policymakers and practitioners to ask the right questions in order to better understand the adaptations of key actors or groups in their particular context. Specific questions include:

- What are the resources – financial, familial, and otherwise – drawn upon in coping strategies by the various actors in conflict, and how are these accessed?
- Does the way in which one group adapts under conflict impact on the behaviour, interests, and strategies available to other groups, and how?
- What factors seem to determine how armed groups, elite networks, and households cope? What accounts for differences in coping strategies and ability to adapt?

- To what extent do coping strategies build on existing ties, and to what extent do they depend on forging new relationships (including with other armed forces, humanitarian actors, the diaspora, international supporters, rivals, neighbours, and corporations including private military companies)? Who is implicated in these relationships, and what is the nature of them?
- How do coping strategies prompt changes in socially determined relationships and roles? Are these changes sustainable after conflict is over?
- What are the micro-economic effects of conflict? How are formal and informal economic structures impacted by ongoing conflict, and how does this play out at the household and community level? How are household economies affected by the loss of its members (to join an armed group, participate in illicit activities, or to injury or death)?
- How can assistance policy during and after conflicts be improved to bolster or assist household coping strategies, rather than replace or undermine them?
- What systems, mechanisms, or policies can be put in place to undercut the ability of elite networks (or other agents in illicit trade, including corporations) to circumvent existing regulation?

Policy interventions and processes in the post-conflict period

Just as armed groups, elite networks, and households must continually adapt their strategies and tactics during conflict, so they must adapt to the changed landscape once conflict ends. The end of conflict does not necessarily mean the end of armed groups. Armed groups (or at least their leaders) may get co-opted into the post-peace agreement political system. Conversely, they may transfer their experience into full-time criminality: the Kosovo Liberation Army is an example of an armed group that was always closely tied to (and funded by) organised crime syndicates, and that essentially reverted to form after the NATO intervention (Layne 1999). Of course, the post-conflict experiences of the rank-and-file combatants may bear little resemblance to those higher up, the latter of whom will likely be accommodated as spoilers. Meanwhile, elite networks represent a potent power source potentially ripe for attempts at co-optation, cooperation, control, or demolition by post-war authorities, international actors looking for new investment opportunities, and national and international regulatory and enforcement agencies. Households may also face changed circumstances after a conflict ends, particularly if the household was living in a refugee or IDP camp, or if its members were dispersed by conflict. On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that many households face the same

struggles – unemployment, loss of family members, displacement, physical and economic insecurity, violence – after conflicts as during them.

Particular areas of interest relating to post-conflict policy processes by national and international actors include:

- What are the life cycles of armed groups and elite networks? How do these vary across cases, and what are the key factors influencing the outcomes of armed groups and elite networks after conflict ends?
- How do policy processes after conflict circumscribe or enhance armed groups' and networks' scope for operation and profit potential? Does this seem to differ between areas with or without large international operations (such as UN peacekeeping operations)? How so?
- What are the obligations of national and international actors – including private actors such as corporations – in dealing with elite networks involved in illicit trade, especially where those networks directly contest or undermine institution-building efforts? In what circumstances should elite networks be co-opted, broken up, or ignored? How do these networks impact on peacebuilding efforts focused on governance, rule of law, socio-economic reform, and security sector reform? Is sustainable peace possible where significant illicit trade continues?
- Leaders and commanders of armed groups are often either brought into the post-peace agreement government in order to reduce the likelihood of their becoming spoilers, or else indicted and taken before a special court or other legal proceedings. But what are the obligations of national and international actors towards the rank-and-file ex-combatants? Is DDR sufficient, and does it work? Under what circumstances? Should ex-combatants receive preferential treatment over non-combatants? Can policy towards ex-combatants be sensitised to the local context, including the embeddedness of the various armed groups, types of recruitment, conflict history and length, and the situation of ex-combatants vis-à-vis the rest of society?
- What are the most effective policy responses for improving the economic, health, and living conditions of households, notwithstanding humanitarian aid interventions?

Gender

A growing amount of work has been done on the gendered dimensions of conflict, including the way in which gender roles can change and be changed during conflict (Karamé 2001; Sørensen 1998; Bjerkan 2007). However, despite important advances

– notably the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and the development of implementation plans by some countries, including Norway (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006) – work on gender in both research and policy tends to remain marginalised. Particularly with regard to armed groups and elite networks, the “default setting” is male. When women are considered, it is typically as victims: as sex slaves for male fighters, or objects of purchase for the customers catered to by trafficking networks. This is undoubtedly true for many, but ignores the reality that women are also fighters, key links in networks (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000), and active agents in their own and their household’s survival. Some productive areas for future research include:

- How does conflict affect gender roles in households? How does this vary by e.g. place (urban/ rural), livelihood, religious or ethnic differences, and duration of the conflict? Are women-headed households more vulnerable than male-headed households during conflict?
- Insofar as gender roles change during a particular conflict, are these changes desirable? Undesirable? Sustainable?
- What roles do women play in networks, and does this vary according to the object of trade or the basis of the network’s authority (embeddedness)?
- What are the lasting effects of conflict on gender relations (both men and women), particularly in terms of domestic and sexual violence?
- What roles are women fulfilling within armed groups? Does a woman’s participation in an armed group impact on the options later open to her – in terms of marriage, return to home community, or employment? Is there a specific stigma attached to being a female involved in an armed group, as opposed to male involvement in an armed group? If so, what is the basis of this stigma?
- Are women participants in armed groups more likely to participate in “peacekeeping economies (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002)”, e.g. as prostitutes? How can policy interventions improve the standing and situation of the most vulnerable women in conflict and post-conflict societies? More generally, how do the “military masculinities (Higate 2003)” of peacekeeping operations impact on local society, and does this undermine peacebuilding attempts at legal reform and governance?
- How can female participation in peacebuilding be increased at the grassroots levels? Is it the responsibility of the international community to attempt to influence or dictate the role and participation of women in societies emerging from conflict?

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The War Zone as Social Space: Social Research in Conflict Zones

Conflict zones are difficult subjects for empirical research seeking to understand how certain structures, networks, strategies, behavioural patterns, and modalities of violence are created, exploited, manipulated, and replicated. Understanding the dynamics, flashpoints, and structures of conflict may help prevent its eventual recurrence; while understanding the adaptations and strategies employed by those caught in conflict would be of use to humanitarian and policy interventions during and after the war.

The goal of this Review is twofold: to map existing research, identifying findings that are directly relevant to the policy and practice of conflict prevention and resolution; and to clarify areas of interest for future research agendas. To do this, this Review focuses on three relevant groups in conflict zones: armed groups, elite networks, and households.

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