

From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda by ELISABETH KING
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From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda is one of the few empirical works that examine violent conflicts from an educational perspective. The primary aim of the book is to analyse the role of education in creating conditions for ethnic conflict and the multitude of ways it could potentially contribute to peacebuilding in Rwanda. The book provides a comprehensive analysis of the interrelationship between education, conflict and transformative peace, drawing upon an extensive empirical study that utilises semi-structured interviews with a range of participants, including Rwandans and Belgians, a comparative historical analysis that spanned from colonial period to the post-genocide Rwanda, and curriculum and education policy analysis. In her analysis the author raises some critical points about manipulation of the education system in producing and sustaining 'socio-structural and psychocultural' conditions at different epochs of Rwandan history which eventually led to a horrific genocide.

The book also highlights some possibilities to correct the problematic educational policies and practices in order to reshape a new Rwandan society that is inclusive, forward looking and sustainably peaceful. The book is broadly framed within the debate about the 'two faces of education' (Bush & Saltarelli 2000) to question the fundamental idea that education is inherently a positive intervention; instead, it argues for a critical understanding of the type of education that fuels conflict and the type that fosters peace. These ideas are not necessarily new but are tested empirically in this country case study. More specifically, the book reveals that the dominant assumption held by national policymakers and international development partners that 'ethnic ignorance' essentially led to conflict in Rwanda is flawed. It also expounds on the synergetic interactions between psychocultural factors – 'categorisation, collectivisation and stigmatisation' which led to rationalise the proximate causes of genocide. The book argues that schooling in Rwanda was a central element of this manifestation.

Second, the book provides a sense of hope linked with the positive role of education in building societal peace. This line of argument essentially delves into addressing the causes of conflict such as promoting horizontal inequity, reimagining a new shared future through reconciliation and accepting complex Rwandan identities, and developing critical thinking skills. The arguments in the book have resonance with those in another case study contribution in the field by Burde (2014) who analyses schools and violent conflict in Afghanistan.

The book consists of five key chapters and introductory and concluding sections. It begins with a discussion about cross-disciplinary literature that deals with education and peace and conflict studies. Chapter 1 provides a useful critical analysis of the two opposite 'pathways' from education to conflict or to peace – leading to a conceptualisation of the interactions between education, conflict and peacebuilding as a 'continuum' in which schooling ranges from the negative outcomes for societal peace (e.g. perpetuating horizontal inequalities, linguistic repression, manipulation of history and stigmatisation of

certain ethnic and social groups) to the processes that nurture conditions of peace and social transformation (e.g. addressing exclusion at schools, recognition of diversity, promoting horizontal inequity and critical thinking). Here, the author provides an analytical framework for the central argument in the book.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide an overview of educational processes during the colonial period and post-independence Rwanda (1962-1994) respectively, which demonstrates that the selection in education, curriculum, language of instruction and pedagogy during these periods were discriminatory along ethnic lines. Education is also portrayed as an instigator of 'resistance and liberation' (Pherali 2016) – that the Hutu graduates who became critically aware of structural injustices, horizontal inequalities and discrimination revolted against the state and societal oppressions. These chapters argue that pre-genocide education played a complicit role in cultivating perceptions of historical dominance of Tutsis and persecution of Hutus that stigmatised Tutsis collectively, laying foundations for ethnic persecution.

Chapter 4 is perhaps the most relevant section in the book from the point of view of current educational stakeholders, including the Rwandan government and development partners who support education in Rwanda. Despite some gains in terms of securing stability, promoting justice, reconciliation and economic development, as the author argues, the government is increasingly becoming oppressive and dictatorial against its political opponents, resulting in a gradual decline of civil liberties. It is noted that the outlawed ethnic identities have been replaced by new corresponding divisive terms (e.g. survivor = Tutsi and perpetrator =Hutu) and the Tutsi-dominated political class capitalises on the 'genocide ideology' to silence alternative views. This analysis resonates with situations in similar political states elsewhere today. Generally, 'authoritarian' regimes are intolerant of criticisms, maintain state fragility and cultivate fear about the consequences of threats and insecurity (see Feldman & Stenner 1997). They normally avoid investing in political succession and transformation (e.g. Cambodia, Zimbabwe and Syria) but instead perpetuate the narratives of historical catastrophes as a key deterrent to political resistance and a strategy to remain in power. The author paints a bleak picture of Rwanda's efforts to build sustainable peace through education as she argues that education in Rwanda today has yet again become a tool of political monopoly that serves for conformity and national homogenisation. Chapter 5, however, offers a comparative perspective for peacebuilding through education and highlights the weaknesses and opportunities of the Rwandan state in this process.

The main conclusions of the book revert back to the original ideas about the 'two faces of education' (Bush & Saltarelli 2000) and stress on the need for appreciating the contentious role of education in order to maximise its socially constructive contribution. It concludes with a powerful message that as long as ethnic identities govern the practice of discrimination and remain drivers of unjust social, educational, economic and political experiences, the denial of ethnic discourse simply to promote 'a high level of abstraction' of national identity would only fuel conditions of conflict. Hence, the book makes some courageous recommendations to the Rwandan government in terms of reconsideration

of its discourse on 'ethnic identity' and instigating reforms in education to promote inclusion, recognition of diversity and revision of historical narratives.

Overall, this book is an excellent contribution to the new field of education and conflict which, through its empirical richness and sophisticated conversations with cross-disciplinary research and theories, raises critical issues about education in fragile environments, and hence should be of deep interest for both national stakeholders and the international development community who support education in Rwanda and beyond.

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