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Series on Transitional Justice, Volume 6
FOREWORD

This book adds new dimensions to current transitional justice models. The title correctly suggests that in post-conflict situations there is no one agenda for coming to terms with large-scale past abuses but that a variety of ways and means commend themselves for rendering justice and rebuilding societies. The contributors to this volume offer perspectives which link the transitional justice debate to the structural causes of violence and conflict. Their chapters reveal a wide span of human compassion and expand transitional agendas to include the exigencies of justice for past, present and future generations. In fact, these agendas addressing large-scale patterns of injustice, discrimination, repression, exploitation and acts of brutality are essentially the core of a comprehensive human rights agenda.

In many conflict situations acts of violence causing human suffering affect and victimise most severely the vulnerable and marginalised sectors of society. It is widely recognised and expressed with serious concern by the United Nations Security Council that in particular women and children account for a large proportion of those adversely affected by armed conflict, and that in such situations sexual violence and rape are rampant. Similarly the recently adopted United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) recalls with deep concern that indigenous peoples have suffered from historic injustices as a result of the colonisation and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources. This book analyses and discusses the plight of vulnerable people who have endured a state of exclusion and discrimination for centuries. It asserts that transitional agendas should also tackle the root causes of exclusion and discrimination, render social and political justice, and foster processes of equality and participation with the goal of eradicating for good patterns and policies of exclusion and discrimination.

The normative basis for transitional agendas was in its essence already embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which was proclaimed as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. Subsequent legal instruments strengthened the edifice of human dignity and justice with special concern for the disadvantaged, the disabled, the excluded and the victims of gross human rights violations. These instruments affirm the claim that women’s rights are human rights, that children’s rights are human rights, and
that indigenous rights are human rights. It appears there is a growing awareness that all people, notably the marginalised, the excluded and the victims of deeply rooted discrimination, are to be included in the solemn human rights pledges and undertakings to which nations have committed themselves. However, as is repeatedly intimated in this book, a conspicuous gap persists between commitment and conduct, between undertakings and realities.

That reparation must be an essential ingredient in any process of transition is worthy of special attention, and reparations certainly form an essential component of the transitional agendas reflected in this book. Reparative justice in its various forms of restitution, compensation, rehabilitation and satisfaction, does not only imply acknowledgement of harm done and a legal and moral prerequisite to honour victims’ rights, but it also constitutes a pledge to prevent the recurrence of wrongs committed. Having been from the inception closely involved in the long process that led to the adoption in 2005 by the United Nations of the Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, this preface writer notes with satisfaction that reparation principles were duly taken into account by contributors to this volume. While the reparation principles are not only meant to give guidance in transition processes, and while their function in coming to grips with historical wrongs is most relevant but still under dispute, it is beyond doubt that these principles and guidelines and their implementation should be key elements of justice in the framing of all transitional agendas.

Theo van Boven
Maastricht, January 2010
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Gaby Oré Aguilar and Felipe Gómez Isa
Madrid, June 2010
CONTENTS

Foreword ................................................................. v
Acknowledgements ..................................................... vii

Introduction
Gaby Oré Aguilar and Felipe Gómez Isa ............................... 1

Addressing Horizontal Inequalities in Post-Conflict Reconstruction
Graham K. Brown, Corinne Caumartin, Arnim Langer and
Frances Stewart ......................................................... 11

Introduction .............................................................. 11
1. Groups, horizontal inequalities and conflicts ......................... 12
2. An overview of policies towards reducing HIs in post-conflict
countries .............................................................. 19
3. Do post-conflict policies include policies towards reducing
inequalities? ............................................................ 26
4. Conclusion ............................................................ 29

Makau Mutua ............................................................. 31

Introduction .............................................................. 31
1. Human rights and the African reality ................................ 34
2. Can human rights recover the African state? ....................... 35
3. Reconceiving transitional justice .................................... 38
4. The limitations of transitional justice concepts .................... 40
5. As a way of conclusion ............................................. 45

Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights in Conflict Situations:
Evolving Perspectives
Sunila Abeysekera .......................................................... 47

Introduction .............................................................. 47
1. Issues of inequality: from a gender lens ............................ 49
2. The role of women in conflict: issues of inequality .............. 50
3. The narrow focus on women in conflict situations; the early years of
the 20th century wars .................................................. 53
Women in the Sri Lankan Peace Process: Included but Unequal
Kumudini Samuel ................................................. 67

Introduction: the gendered nature of peacemaking ........................................ 67
1. The Sri Lankan peace process ........................................ 69
2. Lessons from the peace process .......................................... 72
   2.1. Stages in a peace process ........................................ 73
   2.2. Pre-negotiation stage ........................................... 73
   2.3. Framework/substantive stage ..................................... 74
3. Women’s engagement with the formal peace process ......................... 75
   3.1. Women call for a stronger ceasefire agreement ..................... 75
   3.2. Women call for a gender sensitive framework to peacemaking ...... 76
4. Appointment of the Sub-Committee on gender issues .......................... 78
   4.1. Confidence building ............................................ 79
   4.2. Women or gender ................................................ 81
   4.3. Division of responsibility and agenda setting ........................ 82
   4.4. SGI’s terms of reference ......................................... 83
5. Conflict and masculinity .................................................. 86
6. Analysing the Sub-Committee on gender issues .................................. 87
   6.1. Appointment and composition ...................................... 87
   6.2. Autonomy and compromise ....................................... 89
   6.3. Marginalisation from mainstream agenda .......................... 89
   6.4. Inclusiveness ..................................................... 92
7. Representation and participation: dilemmas, challenges and
   lessons learnt ....................................................... 93
   7.1. Engaging with militant women .................................... 93
   7.2. Engagement with the State ....................................... 94
   7.3. Political autonomy ................................................ 95
   7.4. Engagement with civil society and the politics of coalition
       building ........................................................... 98
8. Reclaiming the emancipatory politics of feminism ............................. 99
9. Way forward: negotiating political engagement for social
   transformation ....................................................... 100
2.3. CESCR, concluding observations on conflict and post-conflict countries ............................................. 146
  2.3.1. Recommendations on countries immersed in conflict .... 147
  2.3.2. Recommendations on countries in transition .......... 148
3. ESCR in transitional justice mechanisms .......................... 152
  3.1. Prosecutions ...................................................... 153
  3.2. Reparation adjudications ........................................ 156
  3.3. Truth commissions ................................................. 163
  3.4. Policy and institutional reform ................................. 164
4. Conclusions and way forward ....................................... 166

Exploitation of Natural Resources in Conflict Situations:
The Colombian Case
Giulia TAMAYO ............................................................... 171

Introduction ................................................................. 171
1. Preliminary considerations ........................................... 175
  1.1. The impact of conflicts on the environment and ecosystem .... 177
  1.2. The impact of state policies and natural resource management during conflicts .................................................... 178
    1.2.1. Gender impact in armed conflicts ............................ 179
    1.2.2. The impact of conflict on indigenous peoples .......... 180
  1.3. Resource management policies and national security ......... 182
2. Responsibilities under international law ............................ 183
  2.1. Responsibilities for violations of the right to the environment and natural resources ........... 183
  2.2. Responsibilities of the state and non-state actors for violations of the rights of women and indigenous peoples .................. 185
  2.3. Perspectives on international responsibility for environmental and natural resource protection in contexts of armed conflict ...... 188
3. Colombia: a prolonged conflict with high human and environmental costs ......................................................... 189
  3.1. Land occupation by paramilitary and armed non-state belligerents ......................................................... 191
  3.2. The linkages between national security policies and the eradication of coca plantations ........................................ 191
  3.3. Human rights violations and environmental defenders ........ 194
    3.3.1. Impact on women’s rights ........................................ 195
    3.3.2. Impact on indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants ...... 198
      3.3.2.1. Loss of habitat and forced displacement .......... 198
      3.3.2.2. Investments and mega-projects in indigenous lands and Afro-Colombian communities .... 201
3.4. Legitimisation of the appropriation of indigenous territories and resources ........................................ 203

4. Conclusions and perspectives .................................................. 204

Indigenous Peoples and Peace Agreements: Transforming Relationships or Empty Rhetoric?
Jérémie Gilbert ................................................................. 207

Introduction ................................................................. 207
1. The new deal: redefining the state ........................................ 209
   1.1. The recognition of the indigenous identity .................... 209
   1.2. Negotiating self-determination and autonomy ............... 213
   1.3. Political rights and political participation .................... 217
   1.4. Land rights ............................................................ 218
2. Empty rhetoric: limitations to the implementation of peace agreements ........................................ 220
   2.1. The ILO and peace agreements: the case of Mexico and Bangladesh ........................................ 222
   2.2. The UN and the monitoring of implementation: the case of Guatemala ........................................ 225
Conclusion and way forward .................................................. 228

Gender in Post-Conflict Reconstruction Processes in Africa
Itziar Ruiz-Giménez Arrieta .................................................. 231

Introduction: incorporating gender in the world of peacebuilding ......... 231
1. Obstacles to integrating gender equality in peacebuilding ........ 235
   1.1. The implementation of universal prescriptions ............... 236
       1.1.1. The illusion of neutrality in post-conflict intervention .... 236
       1.1.2. Invisibility of gender in the genesis of violence and in political resistance struggles ............. 238
       1.1.3. The rebuilding of exclusive systems ...................... 241
       1.1.4. Identity and diversity in the experience of women .... 241
   1.2. Barriers to the effective integration of women and gender issues in peace missions .................. 243
   1.3. Obstacles to the effective inclusion of African women in peace processes .................................. 247
       1.3.1. Factors endogenous to African countries .......... 250
       1.3.2. Conflicting factors in the 'liberal peace complex' ...... 251
           1.3.2.1. Strengthening of armed combatants in peace processes ........................................ 251
           1.3.2.2. A policy of selective justice and impunity ........ 252