

BOOK REVIEW Elias Omondi Opongo

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Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Edited by Sandole, D.J.D, Byrne, S., Sandole-Staroste, I. and Senehi, J.

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This *handbook* depicts a variety of thirty seven chapters which give an interdisciplinary analysis of conflict resolution concepts and practice, largely from academic standpoint. Almost all the authors of the chapters have an academic background and this explains the dense analytical approach the book takes. The book is divided into four major parts: the first treats key concepts and theories in conflict resolution, the second looks at conceptual and methodological issues, the third examines the various processes of conflict resolution and transformation, while the fourth and last part takes a multidimensional approach, largely case based, that discusses the alternative voices and complex intervention designs. The variety of chapters in each part open discussions on the existing trends in conflict resolution from historical, social, economic and political perspectives.

Some chapters take a more evaluative approach to conflict resolution practice: Esra Gurkaynak *et al* (2009: 286-300) discuss the evaluation of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, Richard Rubenstein (2009:495-508) examines the role of an ‘empire’ like United States in creating new trends in conflict resolution, and the implications of hegemonic powers in bringing new implications to the practice of peacebuilding. In a convoluted and largely self-quoting text, Johan Galtung (2009: 511-524) takes stock of conflict resolution practice and the inter play between various disciplines which build towards what he calls *conflictology*. Galtung (2009:520) identifies three trends in conceptualization of conflict based on the subject matter: “One picking up on hatred, one picking up on violence, one more abstract, picking up on incompatibility, contradiction.”

A number of chapters draw on the conceptual linkages across practices: Stephen Ryan takes a look at the concept of conflict transformation in relation to conflict resolution, while Nimet Beriker (2009:256-271) examines the missing link between liberal international relations theory and realistic practice, Thania Paffenholz (2009:272-285) discusses the link between conflict and development while Kevin Avruch (2009:241-255) weaves cultural perspectives and the practice of conflict resolution.

The major gap in the book is that the chapters take a more liberal peace approach to conflict resolution while relying heavily on international relations concepts. This approach ignores civil society/non-governmental organizations and grassroots generated conflict resolution mechanisms. The types of conflicts treated generally fall under inter-group categories, whether religious, ethnic or national, but with an emphasis on social, political and economic components of conflict analysis. Jessica Senehi (2009:201-214) for example gives a compelling case study of virtual dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis while assessing how this process promotes empathy between two sides despite the fact that the parties in conflict do not physically meet. She justifiably acknowledges that given the social, economic and political inequalities between the two sides it becomes difficult to achieve the intended results. As a consequence, the identity of the weaker (Palestinians) of the two parties becomes invisible. While the author asserts that, within this framework of virtual dialogue, stories build bridges across cultures, she however does not undertake an impact analysis to test the practice. She equally does not discuss how this practice integrates with other forms of conflict resolution on the ground.

Several authors engage in an inutile exercise of seeking conventional understanding of the various conflict resolution exercises. Given the nascent nature of conflict resolution studies, such discussions do not add much value. Stephen Ryan (2009:303-314) for example discusses the concept of conflict transformation while examining the multiple trends within the discipline. He concludes by making an obvious statement: due to the fact that “the concept of conflict transformation covers so many different ideas and strategies, it is not possible to be simply for or against the idea.” (2009:312). Ausan Nan (2009:383-395) discusses holistic (broader-universal perspective) peace processes against contingency (issue based, limited to time and context) approach to peace building. The author makes a strong point that holistic approach seeks to create a logical link that weaves various processes of conflict resolution. However, rather than force a continuity and wholeness of processes of conflict resolution, as the author does, it is important to acknowledge the independent interaction and gradual build up peacebuilding processes. While Paul Arthur (2009:369-382) takes into account the role of collective memory in

transitional justice, he fails to give an in depth analysis on the tensions between traditional and international justice. He scantily mentions Gacaca in Rwanda, *Mato Oput* in northern Uganda, and Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa.

This *handbook* certainly covers a wide variety of issues in conflict resolution. However, a more comprehensive approach would have brought into discussion other emerging trends in conflict resolution. These include, A) the religion-conflict nexus: Palestinian-Israeli case studies have been cited, but a broader analysis that brings a new discourse into religious components in conflict resolution, beyond the stereotype *Islam-terrorism* perception would have broadened the discussion. B) Development-conflict nexus beyond Paul Collier's greed-grievance analysis has been discussed by Thania Paffenholz (2009:272-285). However, a critique on liberal economies, the role of multinationals and marginalization of states would have generated a comprehensive discussion. C) A broader case-based analysis: the cases treated in the *handbook* are mainly from Middle-East, Europe and US, yet there are other credible conflict resolution experiences in Asia, Africa and Latin America that would have widened the spectrum of the *handbook*; D) Practitioners voices are obviously missing. As a *handbook* it would have been vital for the editors to consider including critical voices from the field and examine the light and shadows of academic-practitioner interactive disciplines. E) The last and equally important component that could have been included in the discussion is ecology and conflict resolution. Environmental and ecological conflicts continue to be a challenge to conflict resolution mechanisms.

There is limited number of *handbooks of conflict resolution*. One that has been in recent circulation has been (2000) *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution* edited by Morton Deutsch, Peter T. Coleman and Eric C. Marcus, published by Jossey-Bass, San Francisco. This book takes a more theoretical approach based on psychosocial analysis of conflict resolution. A new hard cover book is (2009) *The Sage Book of Conflict Resolution* edited by Jacob Bercovitch, Victor Kremenyuk and I. William Zartman, published by Sage Publications, London. The chapters in this book rely mostly on international relations approach to conflict resolution.

Hence, the *handbook* edited by Sandole *et al*, is a complementary addition that makes a persuasive case on the interdisciplinary approach based on theory, analysis and practice of conflict resolution.

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