

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Mari Fitzduff, Chris E. Stout, eds. *The Psychology of Resolving Global Conflicts: From War to Peace*. Westport: Praeger, 2006. 1088 pp. \$275.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-98201-0.

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Published on H-Genocide (October, 2007)



The Path from War to Peace: An Uneven Journey

Since World War II, the overall level of global conflict has been on the rise. Researchers attribute much of the increase in overall conflict to societal or intrastate warfare.[1] Genocide and ethnic cleansing have also contributed to mounting death tolls. Given that much of this surge of violence has been intrastate in nature, there has been a concurrent increase in refugees and displaced persons. Unfortunately, the growth of international terrorism, the increasing number of countries and rogue nations with nuclear capabilities, and the renewed threat of biological warfare, have only added to overall levels of violence. It is upon this backdrop that a growing number of voices from a variety of backgrounds are calling for a blueprint to facilitate the resolution of global conflict and provide the tools to assist displaced populations. Mari Fitzduff and Chris Stout, in their three-volume set of edited texts, *The Psychology of Resolving Global Conflicts: From War to Peace*, present thirty-six essays addressing a broad array of topics within the framework of war and peace.[2]

The first volume in the series, *Nature vs. Nurture*, examines the biological, evolutionary, and personality antecedents of global conflict. There are several notable selections. For example, James Waller (chapter 4) examines the assumption that extraordinary individuals conduct evil acts and he offers evidence that suggests the opposite might be true—ordinary people have the capacity to commit such atrocities. Waller asserts that “by understanding how ordinary people commit extraordinary evil, we gain insight into how such evil can be lessened” (p. 105).

Harold Ellens (chapter 5), in a very thorough analysis, focuses on religious fundamentalism as an antecedent for mass violence—most notably worldwide terrorism. Ellens argues that although most Americans associate Islamic fundamentalism with violence, “every form of Fundamentalism has the potential for terrorist tactics to achieve its ‘divinely appointed’ ends” (p. 133). Bruce Bonta and Douglas Fry (chapter 7) challenge the assumption that cultures are inherently violent by presenting anthropological and sociological literature that describes the existence of non-warring societies and which deal with internal conflict in a manner that does not involve physical force. According to Bonta and Fry, an examination of “peaceful societies might hold some valuable insights for the rest of us about ways to reduce violence” (p. 176). Peter Suedfeld, D. Leighton, and L. G. Conway (chapter 8) discuss the importance of state and trait measures of cognitive complexity, specifically integrative complexity, during political decision-making, problem solving, and negotiations. Using empirical research and historical analyses, they examine state and trait complexity and make specific recommendations for negotiators, policymakers, and advisors.

The second volume in the series, *Group and Social Factors*, addresses the group needs, societal issues, and social psychological phenomena that facilitate global conflict and peace. There is a wealth of well-written, informative chapters in this volume. For example, the first chapter, written by Ervin Staub, examines the cultural and psychological origins of war. Staub draws parallels

between his earlier work on the antecedents of genocide and the factors that predispose a country to war. In discussing the prevention of genocide and war, Staub suggests, “democracy alone is not sufficient. True pluralism is required, in which varied voices can be expressed and heard” (p. 16). Paul Pedersen (chapter 2) discusses the different meanings ascribed to the concepts of conflict and peace in Western and non-Western cultures. Neil Ferguson (chapter 3) identifies social psychology theories that apply to the instigation, propagation, and resolution of intrastate conflict. His discussion of the psychology of the enemy image was particularly informative. Nicole Tausch, Jared Kenworthy, and Miles Hewstone (chapter 5) examine the utility of intergroup contact as a means to improve intergroup relations. The authors provide a very comprehensive analysis of Gordon Allport’s contact hypothesis, examining the cognitive and affective variables most apt to change as well as important intervening variables.[3] In an insightful essay, Brian Barber, Julie Schluterman, Ellen Denny, and Robert McCouch (chapter 9) focus on the increasing tendency for adolescents to become involved in political violence. The authors describe the many different means by which adolescents are involved in violence, the toll it takes on youth participants, and ways in which adolescents rationalize their behavior by finding meaning in their actions.

The final volume in the series, *Interventions*, introduces various approaches to conflict resolution (individual, group, structural) and the promotion of peace by examining relevant psychological theory, field research, and existing conflict resolution strategies. There are several notable selections. For example, Ilana Shapiro (chapter 1) provides an in-depth examination of the various approaches to conflict resolution using a “levels of analysis” framework. Ronald Fisher (chapter 2) provides a historical overview of centers focusing on interactive conflict resolution (ICR) strategies and then comments on the past, present, and future issues faced by those using this approach. Of particular importance is Fisher’s discussion concerning the lack of research documentation and assessment of ICR interventions. Byron Bland, Brenda Marea Powell, and Lee Ross (chapter 6) provide a detailed examination of the Middle East peace process focusing on the failed Oslo negotiations, the Geneva Accord, the Nusseibeh-Ayalon Agreement, the strategy of gradualism, and the U.S. “Road Map” to peace. Drawing on their experiences working on the peace process in Northern Ireland, the authors highlight several concerns, including the need to address feelings of loss, the pursuit of justice in negotiations, and the importance of

developing a non-humiliating peace process. Jane Moccasin and H. Bulhan (chapter 9) provide an exhaustive analysis of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs in Somalia using their analysis of over four hundred former combatants and military subjects as a backdrop. In a provocative essay, Mike Wessells (chapter 10) examines the phenomena of children as war combatants covering a full spectrum of issues from entry to reintegration. Of particular importance was the coverage devoted to policy and practice suggestions. In the next to the last chapter, Stephen Cimbala (chapter 11), citing examples from twentieth-century conflicts and U.S. counterterrorism campaigns, details the means by which military persuasion can be a successful tool.

In creating *The Psychology of Resolving Global Conflicts: From War to Peace*, Mari Fitzduff and Chris Stout conceptually divide the material into the three aforementioned volumes. While this seemed like a useful means to organize a large body of literature, some of the selections did not readily conform to their somewhat arbitrary division. Indeed, research on intervention strategies exists in all three volumes. Still other selections seemed at odds with the stated aims of the relevant volume. The result was a general lack of cohesiveness throughout each of the volumes. For example, the first volume in the series, *Nature vs. Nurture*, begins with a discussion of biological and genetic underpinnings of violence (chapters 1-3). However, Waller’s essay (chapter 4) on the ordinariness of evil was primarily social psychological in focus and thus more appropriate for inclusion in the second volume of the series, *Group and Social Factors*. Although the remaining chapters in volume 1 appear personality-based, Bonta and Fry’s essay (chapter 7) on peaceful societies also seems more appropriate for the second volume in the series. In contrast, the bulk of the chapters in the second volume, *Group and Social Factors*, appear to be consistent with the editors’ stated focus. Although, the last two essays in the second volume, Rachel MacNair’s piece on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (chapter 10) and Kimberly Theidon’s essay (chapter 11) on reconciliation, seem more appropriate to the third volume. Volume 3, *Interventions*, contains a very broad set of essays devoted to resolving conflict. However, one cannot help but be overwhelmed by the wide range of topics. For example, essays range from conflict resolution strategies, psychosocial healing, and PTSD to chapters on military persuasion, the psychology of a successful war, and the role of “voice” as a root cause of violence (the later essay seems more appropriate for one of the earlier volumes). This disparity of topics must have made the division of

chapters very difficult.

In her introduction to the series, Mari Fitzduff makes clear her desire to include a wide variety of approaches towards understanding global conflict and peace. Although this strategy resulted in several well-written essays, there was a significant amount of unevenness across all three volumes. Some approaches were particularly well suited for a series devoted to understanding and resolving global conflict, while others seemed more appropriate for a discussion of individual acts of aggression. For example, Melvin Konner (vol. 1, chapter 1) and Douglas Noll (vol. 1, chapter 3) discuss the biological, neurophysiological, and genetic underpinnings of interpersonal violence. The authors then proceed to extend these precursors of individual violence to mass violence. Unfortunately, without providing relevant empirical support, the authors force the reader to make a very tenuous leap of faith. A fact that Ferguson addresses at the beginning of his essay (vol. 1, chapter 2) when he states that “aggressive drives and killer instincts have been so long and thoroughly discredited that there is no need to rehash them” (p. 42) and suggests that biological explanations of war are merely “distracting the attention of the public and policy makers away from sociocultural explanations” (p. 47). In other cases, the authors seem to be taking research findings from one area of psychology and forcing it to fit into the peace domain. For example, Noll suggests, “peacemaking and negotiation processes, if seeking peace, should take into account how best to stimulate oxytocin, endorphins, and serotonin within the participants’ brains” (p. 84). Ellens (vol. 1, chapter 5) describes research that suggested a link between low levels of the enzyme MAO A and subsequent violence. He then proceeds to make the case that those with a fundamentalist worldview and their leaders might also have low levels of MAO A, thus providing “a rational understanding of the horrid phenomena with which the world is faced in such persons as Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Osama bin Laden, Ariel Sharon, Yasir Arafat, and the like” (p. 114). In both cases cited above, the authors provide no evidence to support such bold assertions.

Contributing to the overall unevenness of the three-volume set was the inclusion of material lacking empirical support. For example, in her discussion of the relationship between humiliation and war, Evelin Lindner (vol. 1, chapter 6) asserts that gender was an intervening variable given the fact that women are “In and Down” and men are “Out and Up.” Lindner created these descriptors based on the fact she “spent the last thirty years practicing as a global citizen” and observed women primar-

ily inhabiting the private cultural sphere and men generally occupying the outside or public sphere (p. 147). While there may be some intuitive charm to her descriptions, she provides very little empirical evidence to support these observations or their impact on the relationship between humiliation and war. Tracy Wallach (vol. 1, chapter 11) approaches conflict and its evolution to peace from a psychoanalytic perspective. Although some of her claims appear intuitive to those well versed in psychodynamic theory, she relies heavily on historical anecdotes to support her assertions. Jordan Peterson’s essay (vol. 3, chapter 2) on peacemaking is interesting but devoid of empirical support, instead relying heavily on philosophy and folk wisdom. Interestingly, throughout his chapter, Peterson only refers to peacemakers as men. Cynthia Cohen (vol. 3, chapter 4) asserts that resources should be devoted to the arts and cultural programs when rebuilding war-torn countries. Although the implementation of artistic and cultural programs are an important step for returning a war-torn country to relative normalcy, the fiscal reality of these situations demands that funds need to be directed to areas where they have the greatest impact. Unfortunately, Cohen does not provide much in the way of empirical support to influence policymakers’ fiscal decisions, instead relying on anecdotal statements such as “you could see people being moved by the story” (p. 82). Similarly, Tamara d’Estree (vol. 3, chapter 5) introduces the role of “voice” (i.e., the ability to express one’s opinion) as an important predictor of intergroup conflict. However, evidence supporting the link between loss of voice and aggression (i.e., the frustration-aggression hypothesis) was largely anecdotal, such as from the Columbine High School shootings and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States.

Given the current state of world events, the editors of the series, Mari Fitzduff and Chris Stout, should be applauded for creating a series aimed at addressing the resolution of global conflict. Indeed, their efforts have resulted in a solid group of essays, from a variety of perspectives, clearly advancing our understanding of the field. However, in their quest to provide multiple theoretical and practical approaches to this issue, the authors produced a series that is somewhat uneven in its delivery and in content. Nonetheless, the occasional gem of an essay within each volume is well worth the bumpy journey.

Notes

- [1]. For more information on global conflict trends

see: <http://www.berghof-handbook.net/>.

[2]. The titles of the individual volumes are: *The Psychology of Resolving Global Conflicts: From War to Peace*, vol. 1, *Nature vs. Nurture*; *The Psychology of Resolving Global Conflicts: From War to Peace*, vol. 2, *Group and So-*

cial Factors; and *The Psychology of Resolving Global Conflicts: From War to Peace*, vol. 3, *Interventions*.

[3]. Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, MT: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

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Citation: Michael Hulsizer. Review of Fitzduff, Mari; Stout, Chris E., eds., *The Psychology of Resolving Global Conflicts: From War to Peace*. H-Genocide, H-Net Reviews. October, 2007.

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