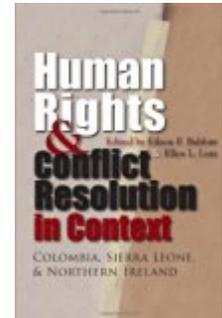


Eileen F. Babbitt, Ellen L. Lutz, eds.. *Human Rights and Conflict Resolution in Context: Colombia, Sierra Leone, and Northern Ireland.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009. x + 397 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8156-3205-4.



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Published on H-Human-Rights (February, 2010)

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Human rights and conflict resolution have traditionally been seen as two fields that have significantly different priorities; practitioners of each have expressed frustration with the actions of the other and how the other makes it difficult to attain goals on the ground. Regardless, practitioners of both fields have become the targets of violence in divided societies since they try to alter the dynamics of society in one way or the other. Andrea Bartoli and Thomas Bundschuh argue that despite all tensions, human rights practitioners and conflict resolution experts are more collaborators than competitors in their desire to attain peace for divided societies.

This book, edited by Eileen F. Babbitt and Ellen L. Lutz, bringing together scholars and practitioners of conflict resolution and human rights, examines these tensions, while at the same time pointing to the areas of common interest and the need for cooperation. The diversity of author backgrounds is one of the features that distinguishes the book from others; among the authors are scholars of law, theology, and political science,

as well as policymakers and diplomats. The focus on three cases (Colombia, Sierra Leone, and Northern Ireland) also gives a useful comparative angle without confusing the reader with too many examples. All in all, the book is an easy read even for those who do not have an extensive background in human rights or conflict resolution, yet it manages to explore the dynamics behind the challenges that face human rights and conflict resolution practitioners. The case studies provide a refreshing break from the large-*N* investigations that have already tied human rights violations to involvement in civil and international war.

The comparative case method employed in the book helps clarify the meaning of “human rights,” which can be defined in so many ways that the term sometimes seems to mean everything and nothing at the same time. Human rights might mean the right to survive not only physically but also ideologically; as Kathryn Sikkink notes, the guarantee of these rights does not have a direct relationship with the political system or economic welfare of a country. A number of conflicts

actually stem from these ideological survival instincts and to end a conflict, parties need to be assured that their traditions will be protected. An example of the concern for ideological survival leading to unlikely alliances is Colombia, where Liberals that faced a Conservative onslaught allied with Communists. In Northern Ireland, Neil Jarman notes, the removal of the threat of paramilitary violence gave nationalists a sense of security to mount public protests that they had not felt previously.

One dynamic that is made obvious throughout the book is that any conflict resolution method that dismisses the rights of individuals will be counterproductive. Though it may be tempting to gain an immediate decline in violence by ignoring the rights of some individuals in making concessions to combatants, in the long-term that creates the conditions for further conflict and human rights violations. For example, the fact that President Andres Pastrana ceded territory to FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) guerrillas in Colombia might have looked like a positive step toward conflict resolution, but it was widely criticized by human rights organizations since the move meant handing over civilians to abuses committed by FARC, as noted by Robin Kirk. In short, the existential rights of a movement may not be conducive to other human rights.

The book is also valuable for its contextualization of these three conflicts and recognition of the role of outside actors. In the case of Colombia, the United States initially played an active role by sending advisory teams, helicopters, vehicles, and small arms to support the Colombian government against the rebels. Due to a perceived Communist threat, which was exacerbated by the circumstances of the Cold War, top American military commanders in the region advocated the use of "hunter-killers" to collect intelligence and execute rebels. The plan was integrated into the local "Plan Lazo," which was a strategy that had at its

core a covert paramilitary force. Leonel Narvaez and Kirk note that the later U.S. focus on the war against drugs adversely affected the possibilities of political negotiation. The United Nations did not play a role in peace negotiations in Colombia since it was not accepted as a legitimate mediator by FARC. The influence of UN peacekeeping forces has also been limited in Sierra Leone, but in this case due to concerns of personnel security. However, in general, UN monitoring activities and advisory capacity have been much more welcomed in Sierra Leone when compared to the Colombian case. Joseph Melrose actually points to the frustration with the reluctance of Sierra Leone to address its own problems due to its excessive reliance on UNOMSIL (United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone) and ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group). In the Northern Irish case, Hurst Hannum points to the shaping influence of the European Court of Human Rights and the potential and limits of the EU role in conflict resolution. The bottom line is that international actors affect the way locals frame human rights, and the book provides plenty of examples of the dynamics of this influence.

The role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is one of the other dimensions explored in the book. Among the primary human rights groups in were those established by Catholic provincials and by lawyers who assumed the legal defense of human rights cases. Sierra Leone has always enjoyed a wide range of NGO presence, Michael O'Flaherty notes, and once again, faith-based and legal organizations took the lead. The prominence of these organizations reminds one of a sort of epistemic community of knowledgeable communities (especially religious and legal communities in conflict transformation) coming together to change the frames and policies.

The integration of human rights discourse into peace agreements is crucial, and the contributors draw attention to how international actors

learned from experiences in this area. For example, lessons from Bosnia and Herzegovina's Dayton peace agreement informed the structure of the Lome Agreement in Sierra Leone. Michelle Parlevliet compares and contrasts the South African and Northern Irish cases, with the argument that in Northern Ireland human rights have not been fully realized due to the exclusive focus on the state. Maggie Beirne and Fionnuala Ni Aolain state that human rights discourse covered not only nationalists' identity concerns but also unionists' worries about the survival of their tradition in the context of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland. Beirne and Aolain also draw attention to the constructive ambiguity in wording. This integration led to a major tension between accountability and inclusion, to use Babbitt and Lutz's terms. Who is to be punished and who can benefit from amnesty have been major issues in all three conflicts. This debate has implications for a significant number of other countries, such as Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, Peru, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Haiti, Cote d'Ivoire, Angola, and Togo, which have passed broad amnesty laws, as Bartoli and Bundschuh state.

In sum, the authors carry out a commendable project that has important policy implications. One is left with the hope that there will be many more such books that bring academics and practitioners together in an attempt to address the defining debates and tensions in the fields of conflict resolution and human rights.

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Citation: Nukhet Sandal. Review of Babbitt, Eileen F.; Lutz, Ellen L., eds. *Human Rights and Conflict Resolution in Context: Colombia, Sierra Leone, and Northern Ireland*. H-Human-Rights, H-Net Reviews. February, 2010.

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