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BOOK REVIEW

# Universities and Conflict: The Role of Higher Education in Peacebuilding and Resistance. Edited by Juliet Millican, London and New York: Routledge, 2018. 254 pp. ISBN: 978-0-367-33876-3 (pbk).

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## Introduction

A book written by the academic director of a community engagement team that involves the introduction of experiential and reflective learning and the promotion of community support at the University of Brighton (UK), this book shows how universities can play a particular role in informing policy, influencing publics or developing the attitudes and values of their students (p. 5). Juliet Millican decided to compile the chapters for this book during sabbatical research among accounts drawn from the field and written by academics, managers, and community



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partners from several regions. After visits between November 2014 and January 2016 to Bradford, Belfast, Palestine, Bosnia, and Burma (and meetings with academics from Congo, Egypt and Rwanda), Dr. Millican surveyed these places and people with some questions about the "university roles."[1].

This book is perceived as an accessible resource for academics, managers, funders, and policymakers concerned with the [peace and conflict] higher education in different parts of the world (p. 6). The book editor begins the evidence with conceptual issues through the "social role" and social responsibility of a university, universities' institutional response, universities' responses taken by academics, student-led protests or resistance (against dictators and despots), and implications for the future.

The first part (conceptual issues) directs the readers' attention to the roles and responsibilities of universities (Chapter 1), the science of peace (in deciphering conflict stages) (Chapter 2), and the correlation among higher education, conflict sources and peacebuilding (Chapter 3).

The second part (institutional responses to conflict or occupation) shows how Queen's University Belfast changed its role during the violence (Chapter 4). Then Chapter 5 reveals the activities a university in an occupied city can do. Chapter 6 questions should the university help build peace through the experience of the Programme for a Peaceful City (PPC) PeaceHub at the University of Bradford?

The third part gazes at academics' responses in teaching or researching local communities. Chapter 7 looks at the expertise shown by the Clinical Legal Education Programme at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem.

Chapter 8, written by two scholars from the Universities of Belgrade and Sarajevo, talks about a specific Master's program in peacebuilding in three locations in the Balkans. Braniff and Bell discuss an adult education program run by the University of Ulster (Chapter 9).

[1] These questions included (1) what have been the roles that your university has played in local conflict or occupation, and what roles have it might play in post-conflict recovery? (2) What evidence is there of the impact the university has had in terms of this role? (3) How far are your views shared by your colleagues or senior management? Are there different positions in relation to this approach? and (4) Who else should I be talking to about this?

Chapter 10 picks up the question of language and debates and looks at the training for English language teachers in Bosnia. Then Chapter 11 examines the role of research in the Institute of Women's studies in Birzeit.

The fourth part analyzes student-led responses to protests or resistance through three chapters. Chapter 12 examines student responses to a university system under attack in Myanmar when the closure of universities was seen as a way to keep the peace. Chapter 13 provides insight into student-led resistance in contemporary South Africa to challenge traditional university curricula and government policies that uphold apartheid inequalities. Chapter 14 reflects on students' role in Burmese politics over the years and sees the university as a microcosm from which to measure development in society.

The fifth part on the implication for the future draws out key themes and patterns emerging from the different case studies and relates these to the conceptual issues raised in the book. The method of this review is a mix of the so-called "reader reviews" (by individuals who purchased and read the book) and "editorial reviews" (by a professional entity).

**Book Division**

The book is compiling 15 articles that are divided into five parts: conceptual issues, institutional responses to conflict or occupation, academic-led responses (working through disciplines with government and local communities), student-led responses of protest, and implications for the future).

The main three conceptual issues discussed by this book are a university's social role and responsibility in many contexts, the stages of conflict and the science of peace, and higher education's roles (conflict causation, post-conflict peacebuilding).

Institutional responses to conflict or occupation are represented by three articles. The first article is written by John Brewer on Queen's University (Belfast) in times of violence and peace. The second article is about Palestinian studies (protests, prisoners) by Penny Johnson. The third article is written on Reflections from Programme from a Peaceful City (by Lisa Cumming, G. Chesters, and A. Khatun).

Five articles portray academic-led responses. Munir Nuseibah wrote "Clinical human rights education in an occupied territory: attempting to bridge the human standards' gap" as the first article. Dzuverovic and Kapidzic write an article on "Bridging the 'international-local gap' in peacebuilding through academic cooperation: the Balkan Master's Program in Peace Studies. J. Byrne, M. Braniff and J. Bell show the "Peacebuilding through education: empowerment and engagement in times of instability." For Bosnia and Herzegovina case, L. Kasumagic-Kafedzic writes about "Social and moral responsibilities of foreign language teachers in post-conflict, fragile and fragmented Bosnia and Herzegovina." Eileen Kuttab shows Palestine's situation through "Reflections on education as a political practice: the Institute of Women's Studies and the rule of research as a vehicle for change in Birzeit University, Palestinian territories."

Three articles represent student-led responses to protest (resistance, peacebuilding). The first article (Student responses to the absence of a functional university system: alternative pathways to higher education in Myanmar) is written by C. Medail and A. Doffegnies. The second article under this part is written by S. Heleta, A. Faiyela, and T. Nkala entitled "Disrupting coloniality: student-led resistance to the oppressive status-quo in South Africa." The third one is "Whose democracy? The university student protests in Burma/Myanmar, 2014-2016" by Rosalie Metro.

The implication for the future is settled by one article (Working with institutions, academics and students to confront questions of peacebuilding and resistance) by F. Burke and J. Millican.

**The Concepts and Arguments**

The opening Chapter 1 offers the argument that the concept of 'three missions' (provisions of public or private good, development of individuals, and creation of knowledge or delivery of services to society) universities have to contribute to society is different in different times and contexts (p. 25). Surprisingly, in times of political stability, it is often easier for universities to engage with a broader community than in times of fragility and conflict (p. 25). The moral of the story is that despite pressures to commodify knowledge and learning,

global initiatives continue to identify their broader moral responsibility to societal and global futures.

Chapter 2 tells the story of the Peace and Conflict research that was born during the first decade of the Cold War. The most interesting key insight or concept of this Peace and Conflict research is the '**conflict cycle**' or the 'curve of conflict' (Levinger, 2013; Lund, 1996). Different scholars identify different stages. Kriesberg (1998: 339), for example, identified these stages as bases, manifestation, escalation, de-escalation, and termination, and Kriesberg believed that these stages are helpful as long as they are not treated as rigidly bounded and sequenced. Naraghi-Anderlini et al. (2001) developed a three-stage model: preparation and pre-negotiation, negotiations and transformation, and settlement and consolidation. This chapter explains these stages further as part of the "science of peace and conflict."

Chapter 3 provides a broad overview of the complex relationship between higher education, conflict and peacebuilding. It is argued that the sector can contribute to the causation or resolution of conflict and support or undermine efforts to build peace (p. 44). One of the conclusions is that higher education can contribute to transitional justice processes in post-conflict or post-war societies. First, universities can provide professional and technical support to transitional justice processes. Second, higher education can play a positive and negative role in dealing with the legacy of conflict. Third, higher education can contribute symbolically towards transitional justice; for example, Saddam University was renamed al-Nahrain University after Saddam's overthrow.

Chapter 4 represents the edited book's "institutional responses to conflict or occupation" part. Chapter 4 reviews the changing history of Queen's University Belfast and highlight the various interpretation of its role during the violence. During the conflict, Queen's University was what Mary Kaldor (1999) calls a 'zone of civility' or a space relatively protected from surrounding violence.

Chapter 5 (Protests, prisoners and Palestinian studies) explores the tension between Birzeit University's academic mission and its roles as a new Palestinian "national institution" that resists military occupation. The university also takes the role of an informal prisoners'

committee, set up at Birzeit University by a faculty member in 1983 as a form of passive resistance.

Chapter 6 answers the intriguing question, "Should universities actively help build peace?". Drawing on the experience of the Programme for a Peaceful City at Bradford University, this chapter describes the ways the authors of the chapter find the responses to the societal contexts. Taking three examples of the author's works, they outline their practical peacemaking interventions and share their post-EU Referendum response (p. 90). These activities produce three critical reflections that are important to share. First, community activists, youth workers, etc are sometimes overlooked by local agencies who prefer to liaise with more traditional forms of leadership, such as local councilors and faith leaders (p. 97). Second, technical peacebuilding language can often disengage people. When external peacebuilding NGOs facilitated the early workshops, people invited to be 'third party neutrals' or 'insider impartials' were turned off for the questions of neutrality. Third, Universities that have developed and sustained collaborative relationships and networks can utilize them in many ways, particularly during difficult times (p. 98).

Five chapters populate the third part of the edited book (academic-led responses). Chapter 7 shows how some academics have designed a clinical legal education program (and pro-bono legal services in the Al-Quds University in Jerusalem) in occupied territory. Since only the decisions of Israeli administrative authorities or Israeli courts are enforceable, these bodies do not recognize or enforce international law in its universal standards (p. 113). This difficult dilemma is represented by a clinical operator: "This **gap** appears in our first meeting with the students. On the one hand, we want them to refer to the international standards of human rights as their reference point, but on the other hand, they have to understand that Israel does not apply these standards in its legal, military, and judicial institutions". This complex situation of running an educational program in a complex legal context brings a great realization that "this education should also use a simultaneously realistic approach" (p. 117).

Chapter 8 (Bridging the '**international-local gap**' in peacebuilding through academic cooperation) retells a story of a creation of a region-specific academic program (in the Balkans) in peace studies that offers an innovative solution to bridging the international-local gap in

peacebuilding. Since 2011, three universities in the Balkans (the University of Belgrade, the University of Sarajevo, and the University of Zagreb) partnered up with academics and practitioners from Swiss to design and implement a peace studies program. Through the introduction of democracy and free market economies, former adversaries in the Balkans were expected to begin acting cooperatively (p. 123). With a focus on outcomes rather than processes and structures rather than actors, the agency in liberal peacebuilding lies mainly with international institutions. Then the critical literature on peacebuilding built a strong argument for an alternative approach and paradigm shift towards "locally informed notions of peace" in theory and practice (p. 123). At last, University of Zagreb administrators' lengthy accreditation and cautiousness to enter institutional cooperation with other countries in the region (20 years after the conflicts ended) reveals mistrust in the Balkans (p. 131). There are still issues in the program implementation that need solutions, such as the language (command of English), tuition fees, lack of infrastructure, links to practitioners and study trips in the region (p. 131).

Chapter 9 shows the Northern Ireland experience around the university's role as a research, civic and educational facility that emerges as central to any peacebuilding endeavor. The chapter argues that Universities as '**civic beings**' have some potential to contribute to building peace in spaces of conflict and violence. The Civic Empowerment module at Ulster University in Jordanstown was devised and implemented to identify the need for greater civic engagement in the predominantly Unionist/Loyalist Carrickfergus area (p. 140). As the prime location for protests/conflicts of civil disturbances and violence around the flag issues in 2012 and 2013, Carrickfergus is a place from where the participants of the intervention of peacebuilding are taken. The Civic Empowerment program provides a limited but practical example of how a University can engage proactively in communities that are disenfranchised from the peace process (p. 146). The pedagogical challenges of social distance, of feeling alienated from both peace and education, were overcome by bite-size lecturers, interactive teaching styles, and topical issues that had ramifications for the participant's daily life (p. 146). Finally, the model offers a form of engagement in a university that can contribute toward a

peace process at the macro level while supporting grassroots initiatives to manage conflict at the community level.

Chapter 10 shows that the role of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 21 years after the war, can be re-affirmed by taking a critical stand in analyzing **the role of education**, in particular the role of universities, in contributing to fragility or mitigating its impact. This chapter also discusses whether teacher education, in particular of in-service foreign language teachers in primary and secondary schools and pre-service student-teachers at universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, can take on such a critical responsibility in social recovery by making their small inroads into post-war development and survival within fragile Bosnia and Herzegovina (p. 149). Critical Pedagogy itself becomes a powerful influence in the field of language education and teacher development, driving some of the conceptual changes in the critical direction. Critical pedagogy is fundamentally an educational philosophy that encourages and empowers educators to take a critical look at the role of education in a broader social context and to comprehend teaching as a dynamic process of constructing knowledge with learners, not as a set and prescribed course (Byram & Feng, 2004). In conclusion, the teaching and learning of languages have an essential part to play in developing an interdisciplinary approach to a positive culture of intercultural understanding, peacebuilding, and reconciliation (p. 160). By introducing new educational paradigms in teacher education and classroom teaching and through specific intercultural contents grounded in Critical Pedagogy, the teachers of foreign languages can build their individual resilience and contribute to building the resilience of the children they teach (p. 160).

Chapter 11 traces the foundation of the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University in 1994 and the challenges it has faced in establishing itself as a radical academic discipline. The Oslo Agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians in 1993 resulted in partial autonomy of the Palestinian Authority (PA) over areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including education (p. 163). As a leading higher education institution, Birzeit has played an important role in **resisting the occupation** and advancing higher education (p. 164). The acting president Gabi Baramki says, 'we needed a university to develop Palestine, train professionals, act as a laboratory for ideas and create a leadership' (2010: 33). The Women's

Studies program was founded in 1994 as a minor program in the Faculty of Arts. This program reflects the national socio-cultural and political context and provides alternative critical knowledge from mainstream discourse. The team that runs this program understood the importance of addressing gender issues within a national liberation struggle in a colonial context; simultaneously, the team worked toward **democratic transformation** in state-building. Since its beginning, the program at Birzeit University has been linked to the aims of the Palestinian women's movement and community needs (p. 167). In conclusion, after two decades and more, the Institute has survived the different historical phases of the occupation by setting relevant and critical programs to the needs of the community in general and women in particular. Palestinian women face different levels of oppression: the occupation that represents national oppression, social and patriarchal domination, and economic and class exploitation and marginalization (p. 174).

To represent the **responses of students** in protests and resistance, Chapters 12, 13 and 14 come from Myanmar and South African experiences. Chapter 12 tells how Myanmar, under military rule, has suffered from low-quality education for many decades. Since its peak in the 1940s and 50s, Myanmar's higher education quality plummeted to the poorest quality education in the world (p. 179). Thus, this lack of access to quality university education in Myanmar provoked a 'student response' through which young people sought to gain, outside of the troubled system, the skills they deemed essential to support reform in the country. Since students cannot access decent universities without looking for them outside of the formal system, there has been a strong correlation between 'civil society activists and 'student' identities in Myanmar (p. 180). Chapter 12 was produced after semi-structured interviews with students and organizations across civil society (conducted between June and August 2016). Chapter 12 assesses the reasons for the failure of Myanmar's higher education to fulfill its role. It provides a window on how alternative pathways students have sought (formal, informal, non-formal education) have been important to set functions of higher education. Student responses to the failure of higher education have ranged from pursuing education overseas, taking self-study (informal education), and going through non-formal training programs. In conclusion, without a functioning university system, the creation of civically minded individuals

continues through formal education overseas and informal and non-formal education in Myanmar (p. 188).

Chapter 13 represents the **student-led resistance to the oppressive status quo** in South Africa that brings structural inequalities and injustices. Using the #FeesMustFall banner, students protest the lack of transformation in post-apartheid South Africa and the country's universities. After the dawn of democracy in 1994, the post-euphoria turned out to be the realization that "deeply entrenched inequalities and injustices are still at the core of the country's social fabric" (Suransky & van der Merwe 1016: 577). Most students, as part of the #FeesMustFall movement, do not remember life during apartheid as they were born after 1994 (p. 192). They are questioning why, after more than two decades of freedom, black South Africans 'still suffer from poverty, inequality and unemployment on scales, not unlike their condition under apartheid' (Clark, 2014, p. 94). South African universities are still largely Eurocentric, rooted in the colonial and apartheid dispossession, looting and humiliating of Africa and its people (Heleta, 2016, p. 3). The tactics of the #FeesMustFall movement fall into three main themes: symbolic, disruptive and retaliatory. The end of the story of this #FeesMustFall is so intriguing that the readers are highly recommended to read this chapter by themselves for the best effect.

Chapter 14 returns to Burma/Myanmar to retell the stories of **student-led protests** there in 2014-2016. Seeing the controversial National Education Law (NEL) that was passed in 2014, several university student groups banded together to form the Action Committee for Democratic Education (ACDE). The ACDE led a nationwide strike of university students, issued 11 education-related demands, and organized a four-hundred-mile protest march (Zin, 2015). The intriguing stories and their endings are warranted readings by the readers to get the best information and facts about the student-led protests and analyses offered by the author of this article.

## Epilogue

To end the collection of the papers, the editors of the book foresee a strong case for considering the higher education sector, university institutions and their staff and students as

key players in resistance and post-conflict peacebuilding structurally, economically and socially, using their extensive networks to both learn from each other and contribute at all levels. The following is the reviewer's own recollection of lived experience under the dictatorship.

The 1st Feb Military coup in Myanmar shocked the entire people of Myanmar, and people expressed their frustrations toward the coup in own various ways, including mass protests, the CDM movement and the boycott of military factories' products. Ultimately there was the emergence of people's resistance forces across the country and the subsequent military deadliest response to the people's resistance. According to the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (AAPP), the total number of people killed by the military so far is 2,401. Moreover, the county has been in chaos since the military coup. The main pillars of the country, such as the economy, health, and education, have collapsed. University-level education has been stopped due to the CDM movement of teachers, professors, and students; primary and secondary education systems are also stopped. In a nutshell, people in Myanmar have lost their faith in education under the military regime, and the military coup in Myanmar heavily affected the entire education system of Myanmar. It also affected my (the reviewer's) online studies while the reviewer was in Myanmar and on campus (in-person studies in Thailand) while the reviewer was in Mahidol.

Before the military coup, I (the reviewer) took courses online because I could not travel to Mahidol due to the Covid-19 pandemic. After the military coup, I suffered a nightmare all time. The military shut down the internet, and Myanmar-based students could not attend class most of the time. Moreover, the news of mass shootings, mass killings, and arbitrary arrests of civilians and military targeting young people kept coming. Moreover, I was always afraid that I might be targeted for arbitrary arrest by the military as I am a Kachin girl living in the conflict zone of Myanmar. All of these senses of fear have negatively affected my mood for studies, and I felt insecure all time. I have seen many fighter jets flying over the roof of my house almost every day since the military and KIA renewed fighting after the military coup. I feel insecure while living at home. Many neighbors started preparing bomb shelters at their

home compound as they have years of experience making these shelters to cover aerial bombardment on civilian targets by military fighter jets.

While I could not focus on my studies due to the conflict and ongoing suppression of peaceful protesters across the country, including mass killings, arson attacks on villages, and arbitrary arrests, I faced an additional barrier in accessing my online classes. Those barriers included the internet shutdowns by the military all over the country. Thus, I missed many classes due to a lack of access to the internet. That ultimately forced me to come to Thailand and continue my study amid the surge of Covid-19 everywhere. So, I traveled from Kachin to Yangon to prepare for my visa to Thailand. Normally, as Yangon is a big city in Myanmar, it was always very safe from armed conflicts (unlike many states like Kachin state). There were non-stop gun shooting sounds and burning of houses every night, even in the main streets after the military coup. Soldiers would shoot into the houses if the lights were on at night. Although full of electric lights and crowded places, Yangon City turned into a dark and quiet place at night soon after the military coup. In Yangon then, people started to turn off the lights from 8:00 PM onward due to fear of gun shootings by the military, who used to come to civilian wards every night.

It deeply affected my psychology and mentality. The terror was a nightmare for me, and I will never forget this experience. Additionally, while I was preparing to travel to Thailand, there was a heavy fear that I would be arrested at the airport because there was news of people getting arrested at the airport trying to leave the country. However, given the country's situation, I did not have an option except to leave the country to continue my study. So, amid fears of arrest at the airport and other risks, I went to the airport by clearing all photos related to a military coup and removing all my social media accounts from my phone. Luckily, nothing happened to me while I was at the airport except for answering many questions for traveling purposes to Thailand by the airport police.

After I arrived in Thailand, I got some form of relief from the trauma I have experienced in Myanmar. There are still some forms of tension in my head, and it is because I feel guilty that I left the country while my fellow people are being killed day and night time every day in my country. After I left the country, I heard the news that many of my close friends had

passed away, and I was in shock after hearing the news of my father's sudden death. However, because of my commitment to finishing my study and educating human rights knowledge to the young people from Myanmar, I forced myself to study and complete the courses amid many sacrifices, challenges, and fear. My student life during the military in Myanmar is unforgettable in my whole life.

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