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Book Review

Confronting Ethnic Conflict: The Role of Third Parties in Managing Africa's Civil Wars, Jennifer L. De Maio. Lexington Books, 2009

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Third party interventionists have long attempted to confront civil war conflicts in the world. Although current literature reveals that third parties, particularly in civil war contexts, play a vital role in the termination and preservation of these conflicts, De Maio's book offers suggestions regarding the mechanisms that cause ethnic conflicts. The book examines four cases of third-party efforts: Burundi from 1995-2005; Somalia from 1988-2003; Sudan from 1983-2005; and the 1994 KwaZulu-Natal civil conflict in South Africa.

Drawing from these specific case studies, De Maio examines whether there are any successful strategies of peace building caused by third party action and the results required for long-term stability in a post-civil war society. De Maio's rationale for the use of these specific case studies is that they all have different situational outcomes and different kinds of third party involvement that provide data as to why some strategies divert violence, while others do not. While the uniqueness of each case is briefly explored, there is no in-depth discussion of the contribution of these cases to the drop in civil war dyads in Africa from 2001-2005 Africa. De Maio adopts what Findley and Teo call an 'actor-centric' approach in that she interviews 50 actual interveners (i.e., policy makers, diplomats and negotiation leaders) who represent international and regional organizations which determine and formulate intervention

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strategies. This qualitative approach differentiates De Maio's work from traditional forms of third-party strategy verification, which use secondary data to make conclusions about the peace implementation process (for example, signed agreements, non-governmental and governmental reports).

Di Maio's work is based on ethnic conflict and third party intervention/engagement. The book is divided into two sections with nine chapters. The first section gives a rationale for focusing on ethnic conflict and reviews and integrates a wide range of data to provide a conflict event history framework. The author goes on to discuss the causes of ethnic conflict. This includes a number of tables describing the violence of warring inter- and intra-state groups and the success or lack thereof by peace builders. In addition, there is a discussion on theories of ethnicity and ethnic identity, including an interesting discussion of a socially constructed identity as the cause of conflict.

Having established the existence of ethnic conflict throughout the world, the second section and remaining chapters address the strategies for intervention and present case studies of warring nations in Africa. In chapter four, the focus changes to the presentation of a model of successful intervention developed by the author, which includes operationalizing peace as establishing a negotiation process that leads to peace building efforts and a stable government. This may include the cessation of conflict, but not a conflict-free ideology, a topic not often engaged by conflict scholars. In developing her own model of successful intervention strategies, De Maio falls into a pitfall common to scholars that position conflict as a logical argument rather than an emotional one. Most conflict is driven by emotions. While it makes sense to plan strategies around logic modalities, it is ineffective, given the emotional drive, in getting adversaries to desist from conflict for more than a few months or years. Although logic is usually ineffective in curbing violence, understanding the logic of the adversaries is of great importance, but the efforts proposed by this author consist of an initial attempt toward managing conflict. The emotional dimension of conflict is equally important in managing conflicts.

The author suggests several strategies for third party interventionists in building long-term peace opportunities by showing how socio-psychological factors influencing the conflict are important to establishing vital opportunities for peace. Her model can be summed up in her explication of the three contributions that interventionist can make toward the peace building process that are considered common challenges:

- Modify the perception and plan strategies around the way adversaries think about achieving their goal. Through this process, the adversaries discover

that they can no longer achieve their goals through the current available techniques (i.e., military means). The purpose is to get the adversaries to entertain the thought that the cost of war outweighs the cost of peace.

- Gain institutional ‘buy-in’ by implementing a strategic plan that is inclusive of the institutional choices of the local actors. Before institutional reform takes place, the authority of local and regional actors should be considered because they carry great weight and bring stability, consistency and continuity to the process.
- Institute coherence in internal co-ordination systems before employing external co-ordination efforts. Interventionists may not display sustainable cooperation with other international communities.

The author suggests other strategies, such as taking action early and incentives, but does not give detail to demonstrate how they operate. Based on the structure of each chapter, it is clear that this is a doctoral dissertation turned into a book. The author uses language specific to the plan of a dissertation (i.e., ‘I use both theoretical research and empirical analysis’, ‘my primary research methodology’). Using academic language for a dissertation is arguably appropriate, but the audience using the book as a guide to implement policy and other practical uses might find the language of the academy a little less meaningful.

The last four chapters present case studies which are the central focus of the book. Each case study introduces the history and conflict dynamics of each country, intervention strategy use along with an evaluation of the intervention performance based on the strategies outlined in chapter four. The author further articulates insightful resolutions as to why each conflict was intractable and then suggests goals that might be pursued to engage in peace building success.

The book would be more accessible if De Maio used the fifty voices of those international, national and local actors she interviewed about their decision making process in reducing intra-ethnic group tensions. How successful intervention is accomplished is far more beneficial than developing a model based on common problems.

There is much to recommend about this book. De Maio provides a good review of relevant literature and topic regarding ethnic conflict. This is documented in tables demonstrating ethnic conflict in various countries. De Maio also expands upon third-party intervention techniques with potential remediation techniques, ensuring the continued value of this work for future researchers. Although most chapters may not be relevant and interesting to everyone, the book is certainly a must read for diplomats, third party interventionist, economic officials, researchers and

educators interested in studying ethnic conflict and third-party intervention strategies.

The book's main flaw is that it reads like a dissertation rather than a book about ethnic conflict resolution strategies. We applaud the author for not dictating how to do third party intervention, but for combining theoretical grounding and practical cases to explore ethnic conflict that remains very difficult and in need of greater attention.



