[Review of: J. Millican (2018) Universities and Conflict: The Role of Higher Education in Peacebuilding and Resistance]

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DOI
10.1080/07294360.2019.1663035

Publication date
2020

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Higher Education Research and Development

HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT
2020, VOL. 39, NO. 3, 621–625

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

BOOK REVIEWS

Universities and conflict: the role of higher education in peacebuilding and resistance, edited by Juliet Millican, London and New York: Routledge, 2018, 254 pp., £84.00 (hardback), £31.99 (eBook), ISBN 978-1-138-09213-6

The unceasing presence of various forms of (large scale) violence all around the world, as well as the newer trends of democratic backsliding, refugee crises and spread of fake news, can leave one pessimistic about the possibilities to counteract those phenomena and bring about a more peaceful, equal and just world. Therefore, the scholarly works that analyse the educational efforts to oppose conflicts, nescience and oppression, and create alternatives to them are more than welcome. They offer theoretical and empirical insights for a further development of peace education and give the much-needed inspiration and hope that another world is possible despite the challenges. *Universities and Conflict: The Role of Higher Education in Peacebuilding and Resistance* – an edited volume featuring the contributions of 21 scholars, policymakers and peace educators – is a notable example thereof.

In the introductory words of the editor Juliet Millican (2018, p. 1), the book's twofold goal is 'to raise questions about the changing role of a [public] university and its relationship with the broader society in which is located, and to explore what that means in the context of civil conflict or occupation'. As the subtitle makes it clear, these issues are studied for the purpose of encouraging and facilitating peacebuilding and resistance to oppression. Many contributors also note the other way in which universities and other educational bodies can impact the environment in which they function: by inciting violence and supporting oppressive practices. However, with the exception of the South African case study, this Janus-faced character of education is not empirically examined in more detail.

The collection consists of five parts: 'Conceptual issues', 'Institutional responses to conflict or occupation', 'Academic-led responses, working through specific disciplines with governments and their local communities', 'Student-led responses of protest, resistance and peacebuilding' and 'Implications for the future'. Part 1 addresses the current debates in the scholarship on education and conflict, and delineates the theoretical foundations of the publication, while parts 2, 3 and 4 provide case studies from England, Myanmar, Northern Ireland, Palestine, the post-Yugoslav region (too broadly denoted as 'the Balkans') and – as mentioned above – South Africa. The closing single-chapter part 5 synthesises the findings of the three preceding empirical sections and discusses their relevance and implications for higher education and peacebuilding around the world.

Before zooming in on the contents any further, it is important to note that this volume concentrates on state-funded education because of the 'constraints of the research period/project' (Millican, 2018, p. 9). In light of the ever-increasing demands to accelerate and multiply the production of research output with ever-decreasing human and financial resources, this explanation sounds plausible. Nonetheless, a slightly longer account of the experienced limitations would have been more satisfactory, especially because this book wants to attend, too, to the effects which neoliberalism and marketisation have on the role and functioning of universities in (post-)conflict settings.

Another observation needs to be made regarding the somewhat confusing use of the terms 'universities' and 'higher education'. The introductory chapter points that the collection 'focuses on universities as institutions, rather than higher education as a sector' (Millican, 2018, p. 9), but throughout the pages, these terms appear to be treated as near-synonyms.

The latter approach is confirmed by Francesca Burke and Juliet Millican (2018, p. 221) in the closing chapter, where they state they use these terms 'almost interchangeably', but acknowledge 'that differences between them [the two terms] are more significant in some countries than in others' (Burke and Millican, 2018, p. 221). The explanation that follows helps understand that context-bound variation but does not clarify how it relates to the concrete countries and regions which are analysed in the case studies. It does not resolve either the presence of discrepant information regarding the use of terms and the book's focus. On a different note, it would be better to address the terminology already in the opening chapter instead of leaving that discussion until the very end.

The publication is centred around the three, often overlapping, tasks of universities: transfer of the existing knowledge to students (education), development of new knowledge (research) and contribution to the larger society (service). This tripartite mission is analysed in the context of the absence of peace or presence of fragile peace. In addition, the reader can obtain useful knowledge on the stages of conflict – escalation, de-escalation, post-agreement and peacebuilding – and its consequences on people's personal lives and the functioning of society. As such, the volume facilitates a more comprehensive understanding not only of the interaction between universities and conflict but also of universities as an institution and conflict as a social phenomenon.

Eleven case studies, organised in three parts, form the core of this collection. Part 2 shows universities' institutional responses to conflict, part 3 presents examples of academics' engagement with oppression and peacebuilding, and part 4 looks at student-led activities to counteract authoritarian practices, exclusion and poor quality of the curriculum. The case studies are well-chosen since they shed light on a whole range of aspects: for example, the local community-based peacebuilding activities of the Programme for a Peaceful City at the University of Bradford, the creation and implementation of the Regional Master's Programme in Peace Studies for the purpose of bringing together local and international academics, students and knowledge (jointly organised by the University of Belgrade, University of Sarajevo and University of Zagreb), and the student protests in Myanmar against educational reforms aiming at discouraging anti-governmental dissent.

The variety of issues notwithstanding, the distinction between part 2 and part 3 is not very clear: Some of the case studies that are presented as institutional responses could be just as well seen as academic-led responses and vice versa. Furthermore, it is surprising that Palestine is explored in three contributions and Northern Ireland and Myanmar are featured twice each, whereas cases from, for example, the Americas are noticeably absent. This imbalance might be a result of the already-referred-to constrains of the research project, and the unfortunate reality that the editor cannot always choose the topics simply based on their relevance, but also has to take into account the availability of contributors who can produce a text within the provided time frame and the overall concept of the envisioned publication. Still, the selection should have been elaborated. A more explicit explanation would have provided a stronger grasp not only of this specific book project but also of the complexities and challenges of creating an edited volume – a process not all readers might be familiar with.

The authors differ in their direct involvement with and distance from the activities which they examine, leading to uneven sharpness of the applied critical lens. Heterogeneity can be observed also regarding the authors' relation towards their ethnic or national collective, as well as the use of a more or less engaged terminology. All those issues have to do, too, with the fact that the addressed endeavours occur in places which do not necessarily share a similar form, intensity and history of violence. The presented variations add to the richness of the case studies and the comparative insights which they provide. This diversity does not

take away, though, that some analyses should be supplemented with more empirical data, whereas other contributions would benefit from a reduction of the amount of details.

In sum, this book is a valuable, invigorating and easily accessible resource for academics, university board members, policymakers and funding bodies that engage with and exercise an influence upon the development of higher education. Given the omnipresence of (the threat of) violence all around the world, as well as the existence of diverse forms of injustice, oppression and inequality, the relevance of the featured contributions extends far beyond the areas with an ongoing large-scale conflict. The collection equally talks to scholars of Peace and/or Conflict Studies, and to those who create policies on, finance and implement peacebuilding. In fact, works like this one can help the exchange of knowledge and skills between all those actors and potentially lead to the improvement of higher education and peacebuilding alike.

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https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1663035