

## Book review

Hamber, B. & Gallagher, E. (Eds) (2015). **Psychosocial Perspectives on Peacebuilding**. New York: Springer (331 pages). ISBN 978-3-319-34887-2

*How psychosocial interventions integrate, interact, influence or are linked to the social context and changes that might take place in it is an under theorised and under researched area* (p. 5). The editors of this book hope to start the process to fill that gap and the book is therefore, a 'must read' for anyone interested in mental health and psychosocial support, peacebuilding and how those two can interconnect. Hamber and Gallagher look at peacebuilding through a psychosocial lens and plea for an ecological approach that goes beyond the 'psycho' and beyond the 'social' so that there is not only a relationship between the individual and their context (the wider social, political and environmental milieu) that affect wellbeing, but also between the interventions that are carried out and the context, and that – in turn - this context influences the individual. Their premise is that armed conflict and the political violence are rooted within the context, and therefore, dealing with the impact of armed conflict also should be contextual.

This book is a reflection of a (3-year) research project, undertaken by the International Conflict Research institute (INCORE), and includes case studies from several countries. The case studies describe how psychosocial interventions and practices contribute to changing social context and has specific focus on development, peacebuilding and other forms of social transformation.

The book contains six case studies and each study analyses different psychosocial factors related to peacebuilding and social transformation. The aim is not to make general

statements, but to develop new knowledge and theory of how psychosocial practices operate and can impact on wider social processes. These case studies are divided into three parts: part one consists of three studies that focused on psychosocial practices in a more standard project approach, the second part contains studies that focused on more creative practices, and in part three the studies focused on community rituals and embedded practice.

The first part contains three chapters. In the first chapter *Exploring How Context Matters in Addressing the Impact of Armed Conflict*, Hamber et al. introduce the book by giving their rationale for their research. It is noteworthy that they give clear descriptions of terms used throughout the book: *psychosocial programmes, practices and well-being* and *peacebuilding, development and social transformation*.

Sonpar describes, in her chapter *Transforming Conflict, Changing Society*, a study conducted in the Indian states of Jammu and Kashmir, an area of political violence since 1989. She examines the potential for psychosocial programming to transform conflict and bring about social change. Although she found changes at the individual level, that have effects in the larger society, at the sociopolitical level psychosocial programmes face severe limitations.

Hamber and Gallagher explore in their chapter *Youth and Masculinity in Northern Ireland*, how trauma, as it applies to interventions with young men, is conceptualised within the context of violence and Northern Ireland. They describe the multifaceted problems the participants face and conclude that psychosocial support and economic strategies to help the young men are not linked. Therefore, they state that individual transformation and a structural

peacebuilding approach within the context of an economic growth model is a necessity. In chapter four, *'Rethinking Psychosocial Programming on Post-War Sri Lanka'*, Samarasinghe outlines the challenges nongovernment organisations (NGOs's) face within an environment that lacks accountability and justice. She evaluates several programmes and concludes that most of them did not picture a need for larger impact within their mission, nor thought about the potential impact on social transformation. She further states that the role of government is crucial in guaranteeing sustainability for services and that NGO's should share their knowledge to develop more meaningful and culturally appropriate interventions.

The second part of the book, on creative practices, covers two chapters and starts with a chapter by Brinton Lykes and Crosby on *'Creative Methodologies as a Resource for Mayan Women's Protagonism'*. They discuss the uses of creativity in projects for Maya women who have experienced gross human rights violations, such as sexual violence. They conclude that engagement with creative methods contributes to trauma work in post conflict or transitional contexts. Furthermore, it also contributes to understanding local and national forms of social transformation, development and peacebuilding.

Palmary, Clacherty, Nuez and Ndlovu present, in their chapter *'Community-Initiated Approaches to Trauma Care in South Africa'*, three case studies of what they called *'trauma-care'*. Therefore, the chapter does not focus on interventions *per se*, but on how migrant communities find their way in spite of the disrupting effects of being migrants in South Africa. In their case studies, a range of activities are described that can be considered as trauma reduction activities or psychosocial interventions. Therapists and policy makers could use this as a source for designing interventions across many existing contexts.

The third part of the book addresses *Community Rituals and Embedded Practices'* and

includes two chapters. In chapter 7, *'Legacy of War, Healing, Justice and Social Transformation in Mozambique'*, Igreja describes how local courts and rituals can play a role in healing and how these practices have changed due to conflict and over time. He focusses on the *gamba* spirits and *gamba* healers; a local model of healing and conflict resolution that brings scattered family members together in a successful way.

In chapter 8, *'Death and Dying in My Jerusalem: The power of Liminality'*, Shalhoub-Kevorkian explores the psychosocial practices following the loss of beloved ones in Jerusalem and shows that art is an important element for community healing and resilience. She shows how colonialism in current times not only controls the living, but also the dead. In other words, how the macro system within the community influences the meaning system and how people find a way out, with all its political implications.

In the final chapter, *'Towards Contextual Psychosocial Practice'*, the editorial team argue for a conceptual shift. Psychosocial practices should go beyond treating individuals and groups with context and culturally sensitive methods and approaches, and as such interventions and practices should shape social change. This is the reason I think this book is a *'must read'* for all people who working in conflict affected areas; to realise that our work should contribute to social change and economic development. Therefore, we need, as the editors' state, more insight into the interdependence and connections between change at the individual, social and community levels.

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