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Book Review



Milena Dieckhoff, *La médiation internationale. Entre guerre et paix* [International Mediation. Between war and peace], Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2022, 245 p., ISBN 9782724638752

Transforming the manuscript of a doctoral thesis into a clear, concise, and didactic work that can be used by non-specialists in the field is often a perilous exercise. It's never a foregone conclusion, as the codes governing the two genres diverge quite widely. The exercise is therefore time-consuming, which no doubt explains why the book is published here six years after the thesis was defended.

With *International Mediation*, Milena Dieckhoff proposes to illustrate the diversity of practices that underpin the notion of mediation and argues in favour of a ternary typology to describe an empirical heterogeneity that the author documents abundantly through selected case studies from the post-Cold War period.

International mediation is defined as “a triadic pacification process between a third-party mediator from outside the conflict and the parties involved, aimed at overcoming the initial conflict situation and finding a negotiated solution to the conflict”. The restrictive nature of this definition is barely explained. Admittedly, the chosen definition echoes the book's subtitle – “Between war and peace” – but it still leaves out whole swathes of international mediations relating to disputes – commercial, regulatory and others – that are non-conflictual in the sense that none of the parties involved envisage resolving them by force. Readers should therefore understand that the author is interested in international mediation as an instrument of conflict prevention and resolution. Readers interested in other types of mediation will not find what they are looking for.

In synthesising her manuscript, Dieckhoff had the good sense not to sacrifice the methodological dimension altogether. Indeed, it was essential to retain a minimal explanation of two crucial aspects of the work. The first is

the importance of typology, which, in the author's words, places her research in a Weberian paradigm where the establishment of ideal types constitutes an important instrument of knowledge. The second is the dynamic relationship between typology and case studies, the latter being "invested with a function that is not merely illustrative, but explanatory".

The author proposes to structure her approach around three types of mediation. This ternary typology is preferred to the binary typology dominant in the literature. The latter contrasts with, on one hand, an essentially technical vision of mediation, viewed from the angle of the various methods, techniques and expertise that have developed considerably in the field in recent decades, and, on the other, a classical approach that tends to see mediation as merely a particular modality of international diplomatic life.

In Dieckhoff's ternary typology, the first type is described as "political mediation," in which the ambivalent dimension of politics plays a major role both between the parties and between the parties and the mediator. "Expertise mediation" is the second type of mediation. It refers to processes where the mediator's particular expertise plays an essential role, and where important issues are at stake at the crossroads of knowledge and power. The third type is called "societal mediation" and aims to highlight the nature of the link that characterises the triadic relationship at the heart of mediation, and to question what it means to "make society," in a context marked by conflictual relations.

In addition to an introductory section and a conclusion, the book is structured around three chapters devoted successively to (1) conceptions of mediation, (2) the practice of mediation, and (3) the functions of mediation.

The first of these chapters meets two objectives. The first is to demonstrate that international mediation cannot be properly understood without first questioning the key concepts of conflict and peace, and then taking account of the diverse logics underlying political, expertise, and societal mediation. The second objective is to show that, beyond the differences highlighted to qualify conflict and peace and to understand the rationality of mediation, what is common to all types of mediation is indeed to apprehend peace as a process.

The second chapter shows that the diversity of mediation practices is expressed as much in the mediator's relations with the parties in conflict as in the more concrete organisation and methods put in place, testifying to the varied modalities of internationalisation through mediation.

The third chapter also highlights the great diversity of functions between political, expertise and societal mediation, both in terms of the actual recomposing of the conflict and the function performed by the actor-mediator. Each of the three chapters closes with a useful summary table.

The illustrations and lessons learned from the seven case studies (Aceh, Georgia, Guatemala, Kenya, Mozambique, Sudan, and Sri Lanka) lend empirical depth to the discussion, which is never abstract or disembodied.

Altogether, Milena Dieckhoff's analysis provides the reader with a useful reading of a significant segment of international mediation (that aims to prevent or resolve armed conflict). This objective is achieved by means of a ternary typology based on the concepts, practices, and functions of these mediations. The wealth of empirical material mobilized to illustrate as well as construct this reading grid is undoubtedly the book's main strength, and the reason for recommending it for further reading. It is a pity that this empirical wealth is not mentioned on the cover of the book.

In this respect, we can only regret the catch-all style title – which we can only guess was imposed by the publisher – that insufficiently specifies the content of a work which, despite its undoubted qualities, is certainly not a handbook of international mediation.

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