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Review of Corporate Peace: How Global Business Shapes a Hostile World

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Book Review:
Corporate Peace: How Global Business Shapes a Hostile World

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Corporate Peace: How Global Business Shapes a Hostile World. Mary Martin. London: Hurst & Company, 2020. Hardcover, 320 pp. \$26.24 (US). ISBN: 9781-787381-278.

The author, Mary Martin, is the Director of the UN Business and Human Security Initiative, London School of Economics IDEAS. She was formerly European Business editor of *The Guardian*, and later *The Daily Telegraph*.

The author takes us around the world beginning in 2006 in London and revisits her London experience 10 years later. Throughout the book, Martin utilizes numerous analogies and metaphors of walls, bulwarks, and perimeters that provide security, yet also serve as barriers that curtail collaborative efforts among governments, companies and local populations. Each of the ten chapters of the book introduces us to a different case study, in a different country, with a different set of circumstances. She takes us through a wide range of case studies that explains the necessity of having to triumph and overcome challenging conditions.

In Chapter 1, Martin lays out her definition and purpose of writing *Corporate Peace*: “This book proposes that re-imagining security as something that deals with individual, family, and community safety and welfare, offers a new lens for looking at the role of business” (p. 17). Martin successfully achieves her objective by taking a microscopic lens approach to examining the oftentimes overlooked aspects of the influences of foreign corporations on local culture within families, communities, small villages, as well as impacts on the environment. Martin sets the tone in Chapter 1 for what will follow in subsequent chapters with her initial vivid portrayal of extractive industry operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

She begins our book journey in a London meeting where a private security company, investors and other stakeholders strategize their plans for extracting rubber, diamonds, copper, cobalt, rubber, and other minerals from the “beautiful and remote mountain scenery of [the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo]” (p. 2). While the mineral extraction occurs in the remote regions of the Congo, Martin immediately engages the average reader by bringing this far-away mining activity home to the everyday consumer. She clearly identifies how everyday consumers of mobile phones and Sony Playstations, benefit from products that contain these natural resources mined in the Congo. She describes the fragility of “the perimeter fences” which represent the “protection, safety and wealth” that “separate companies from communities” in which both entities seek higher standards of living (p. 5). Martin makes the case for the value of the role of the United Nations ‘Global Compact’ “Business for Peace” (B4P) initiative and acknowledges the contributions of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in combatting malaria. She calls for “re-imagining security as something that deals with individual, family and community safety and welfare” and states that “foreign corporations are an essential part of delivering physical, material and emotional security” (p.17). Chapter one sets the stage for the remainder of the book’s chapters which primarily follow a similar case study-type recipe that juxtaposes descriptions of the local environment and culture with business operations and frequently unstable politics, in order to “reveal a bigger picture about peace, conflict and development, and how they connect to companies” (p.19). Throughout the

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book, Martin challenges analysts to not view companies in a negative light, but to look deeper and to learn more about what is more complex than a simple right or wrong issue.

In Chapter two Martin takes the reader to Syria, Iraq and Serbia to better understand the importance of breaking down barriers between companies through peacebuilding and calls for increased alignment among global security efforts. Martin argues that the key to peacebuilding is to go beyond military threats and to establish increased collaboration within the international community. Over time as peacebuilding has transitioned into state building, Martin rightfully questions the western influence; for example, NGOs in Kosovo grew from 65 to 2500 over a five-year period between 1999 and 2004. Martin skillfully delivers historical and present-day perspectives of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which depends on the voluntary acts of corporate executives. Martin advocates that the reader “re-examine ideas about corporate care and responsibility” as community relationships are increasingly being recognized as “central, not merely incidental, to their [the corporation’s] success” (p.26).

In chapter three, Martin provides a poignant historical perspective about the vast control of Asian and African trade by ‘Leviathans,’ the Dutch and British East India Companies and the Hudson Bay Company as well as these entities’ strong contributions to western colonial expansion. Martin gives a picturesque assessment of modern-day Leviathans who gather annually in well-appointed accommodations in Davos, Switzerland for the World Economic Forum. Here, Martin definitively encourages dialogue and opens the door for critical conversations as she contrasts the comfortable, well-protected and secure surroundings at Davos with the home countries of many of the World Economic Forum participants. This chapter may give rise to a multitude of crucial dialogs about humanitarian aid, disparities and power, to name a few issues.

Chapter four surveys peacebuilding efforts in Columbia and the role of Shell Corporation in Nigeria, where it seems that business, politics and society are so integrated that they shape one another. Martin effectively depicts the multifaceted role of Corporate Social Responsibility. This chapter sets the stage for the chapters that follow by asking the question “...can corporations step in to fill gaps in preserving well-being and safety?” (p. 63).

In Chapter five we venture into Mexico City, described by Martin as “a sprawling conurbation held together by smog-choked freeways and barrios of low-rise housing, arranged on grid patterns” (p.65). Readers see that Mexican cartels have taken hold, yet Unilever’s products are abundant, and Walmart has had rapid expansion. This chapter is a riveting read, and the section on “safety in ice cream” takes us down to the local community and individual level in explaining the day-to-day challenges of an ordinary Mexico City ice cream truck driver (p. 82). Here, readers would benefit from more vibrant descriptions of local Mexican culture; such portrayals would provide more sensory appeal, thereby drawing in the reader more. At this point I wished that the author had shared more stories about individuals and their daily lives in previous chapters.

We continue our international journey in chapters six through nine. Each chapter takes place in a different country and represents a complex case study unto itself that demonstrates the multitude of issues in balancing doing business operations and corporate social responsibility. Each chapter paints a different vivid portrait of integrated cultures, of how lives are lived, and of the business, social, political and cultural changes that abound. These intriguing chapters encourage readers to learn about the intricacies of conducting business with discordant constituencies while promoting peacebuilding. Martin continues to achieve the objective of this book by recognizing the possibility

of striking a balance between promoting business development and maintaining peace among corporations, government entities, and communities.

In the final chapter, chapter ten, the author revisits the secure confines of London ten years later, in 2016. She poses a broader question raised later in the book “What does it take for a company whose principal aim is to maximise profit, cut costs, preserve its competitive advantage and guard its reputation with investors, customers and employees, to actively address the problem of a struggling society, trying to save itself?” (p. 178).

Overall, Martin realizes her initial purpose, which is to encourage readers more closely examine the often-unnoticed aspects of the influences of foreign corporations on local culture within families, communities, and small villages. As previously noted, I wanted to know more about the local communities, as in the example of the ice cream truck driver presented in chapter five. Several questions remain for me for the author to address: Is it more than just the right thing to do to protect, maintain, and uplift local communities? Why is it important to preserve the cultures of these local communities? What brings the people in these cultures alive? What will additional knowledge tell us about the interplay among foreign companies, politics, and local communities? Increased coverage and more in-depth knowledge of local cultures may illuminate and more clearly elucidate this interplay. Perhaps additional and colorful examples of culture, including drinking Turkish coffee, experiencing the vibrance of Mexico City, or witnessing the skill of leatherworkers in Nigeria can place readers in the midst of the atmosphere of these important cultures, allowing us to witness first-hand the importance of preserving these at the local level. Such increased coverage brings the reader closer, thereby raising our awareness and enhancing our understanding. Finally, this book is an intriguing read for anyone with similar interests. I would strongly recommend this text as an excellent addition to any course that would focus on Corporate Social Responsibility, Social Entrepreneurship, Social Innovation or Global Peace Education, by addressing one or more of the following: citizenship, sustainable development, corporate accountability, and creating shared value (CSV).