

**Avruch, Kevin. Culture and Conflict Resolution. Washington, DC:  
United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998.**

Deborah Goodwin

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Avruch, Kevin. *Culture and Conflict Resolution*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998

This is a thought provoking book; one which challenges and questions numerous established notions concerning negotiation and the implications of culture upon the process, and the author often disputes the arguments of many eminent scholars past and present. This is no bad thing and it is to be welcomed, especially since the author concerns himself with a subject which is implicitly important in modern conflict resolution, and has tended to be rather dismissed previously.

Seeking to move away from the notions contained in "how to do it" publications, Avruch makes a case that such mechanistic approaches are simplistic and one dimensional in their attention to what is really going on in a negotiation process, and it is an opinion with which this reviewer concurs. He instances Roger Fisher and William Ury's *Getting to Yes* (1991) publication which, while forming many useful frameworks, does tend to complement an "idealized Anglo middle class model of what negotiation looks like," (p. 79) and thus overlooks the multidimensionality and expectations that negotiators from different cultures might bring to any negotiation. He goes on to question Fisher and Ury's advice on dealing with emotions; separating the people from the problem might reveal interests, but might also result in the loss of the recognition of a different cultural framework at play. Avruch is seeking to make a case that negotiators, in whatever context, need to explore "culture" per se and to question the impact that it might be having on any negotiation, at any given stage. There has been a great deal of confusion over attempts to define "culture," he postulates, and this has led to it becoming a mere label or tag to place on any group of people, rather than their behavior. He claims that culture is a deeper concept; it is "an evolved constituent of human cognition and social interaction." It has been hijacked by other disciplines, such as political science, to explain away a conflict situation, and this is detrimental in social science terms; one need only refer to the way the idea of "culture" is used strategically in human rights causes, he argues.

The book discusses, analyses and, in some cases, dismisses the arguments of many established negotiation theorists, such as Zartman, Burton, Cohen and Druckman. This makes for interesting reading, and Avruch's style is engaging and challenging in itself. The postulations he puts forward invite the reader to question pre-established notions, and then to attempt to formulate and evaluate new ones. This is creative and stimulating to any reader wishing to enlarge their perceptions of a complicated communication process, and who might wish to probe the greater possibility and potential that lies within the recognition of a "cultural" influence existing in any negotiation context.

***Deborah Goodwin***

*Royal Military Academy Sandhurst*