Recognition and Relatedness

How can we pursue conflict resolution beyond the influence of sovereignty? In what ways can we respond without disavowing cultural others and governing difference? Part I of this book generated these questions through a critical engagement with conflict resolution, yet also suggested that the seeds for addressing them are already partly sown within conflict resolution itself. Conflict resolution is a practically engaged enterprise, committed to responding to people in conflict. This combination of practical engagement and responsiveness is a valuable resource for addressing challenges facing the field. Nonetheless, the possibilities should not be overstated, and realizing them requires sustained critical inquiry. The conceptual grounds for responding to others, including for undertaking dialogue and exchange, have largely remained implicit and continue to risk capture by the influence of sovereignty. There are, for instance, ongoing encounters across cultural difference in conflict resolution, but the field remains largely dominated by Western approaches. This situation reproduces the culture challenge and governs difference, thereby compromising the capacity of conflict resolution to address some of the contemporary world’s most difficult conflicts. We need to explore avenues for dealing with pressing challenges facing the conflict resolution field while remaining cautious about commonsensical appeals to exchange and dialogue. To do so, it is necessary to ask questions about the relations between sovereignty and the field’s advanced theoretical formulations.

Recent and promising theoretical developments frame conflict resolution as a cosmopolitan venture which respects individual difference within a single humanity. Cosmopolitanism ideals resonate with conflict resolution goals and practice. It is also the case, however, that questions about how to pursue cosmopolitan goals, particularly across difference, are yet to be adequately worked through. Consider the
fundamental question of how we approach and engage others. In recent decades, the notion of recognition has come to be assumed as a prerequisite for just political relations. But basic questions about who is recognizing, and what dynamics are at play are yet to be adequately resolved. The risks and possibilities of recognition, including its efficacy for moving beyond the influence of sovereignty, need to be scrutinized in efforts to advance cosmopolitan conflict resolution. We may not be able to dispense with the apparently commonsensical notion of recognition, but we do need to proceed carefully in order to address the culture challenge and the governing of difference in conflict resolution.

Recognition is a popular way of approaching difference, but other resources are also available to us. Numerous philosophers have put great emphasis on the value of what we can call relatedness—the fundamental being together of humans deriving from the fact that before anything else we are “in-the-world and with-others.” Relatedness promises possibilities for relationships across difference hitherto suppressed in mainstream conflict resolution by the influence of sovereignty and mainstream social science. A key question for progressing conflict resolution’s relationship with difference is how recognition and relatedness interact with sovereignty, and what they can offer for addressing the culture challenge and the governing of difference in transnational liberal conflict resolution.

This chapter explores the place and efficacy of recognition and relatedness for mitigating the influence of sovereignty within the context of cosmopolitan conflict resolution. After outlining the call for cosmopolitan conflict resolution, the chapter probes the ethico-political efficacy of cosmopolitan recognition. It shows that while recognition is commonsensical and characterized by movement toward equality, it is also accompanied by significant risks because it is bound with the relations of domination it seeks to surpass. To further examine this quandary, I explore the workings of recognition in the context of conflict resolution work with Australian Aboriginal people. I show that recognition tends to fall back upon the sovereign self and mainstream social science ways of knowing which appropriate rather than adequately acknowledge difference. Cosmopolitan recognition is a necessary component of just political relations, but it cannot be the primary logic for moving conflict resolution beyond the influence of sovereignty.

The second half of the chapter explores relatedness as a means of addressing the shortfalls of recognition in conflict resolution. While recognition converts experience and interactions with others into categories and objects for knowing, relatedness refers to a pre-cognitive