A CRITICAL SURVEY OF POLITICAL ECONOMIES OF PEACE AND CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

This article is a contribution to the critique of political economies of peace and conflict. Its contentions are threefold: that liberal peacebuilding is in crisis, that the neoclassical paradigm for economic recovery from conflict has rubbed salt into war wounds, and that external intervention to cure strangers of their strangeness has produced hybrid forms of peace. The article traces a dynamic shift in scholarship dealing with post-conflict reconstruction that embraces a range of disciplines, particularly post-colonial studies. From an international relations perspective the shift has enriched academic studies with a new emphasis on the importance of local agency and everyday life.

Keywords: liberal peacebuilding, statebuilding, neoliberalism, post-conflict economies, casino capitalism, Balkans, IMF.

АПСТРАКТ

Оваа статија е придонес кон критиката за политичките елементи за мирот и конфликтите. Нејзините тврдења се трислојни: дека либералното градење на мирот е во криза, дека неокласичната парадигма за економско заздравување од конфликтите само дополнително ги отвара раните, и дека надворешната интервенција за да ги излекува странците од нивната настраност единствено продуцира само хибридни форми на мир. Статијата ја следи динамичната промена во школите кои се справуваат со постконфликтна реконструкција што опфаќа спектар на дисциплини, особено во постколонијаните студии. Од гледиште на меѓународните односи промената ги има збогатено академските студии со акцент на важноста на локалните служби и секојдневниот живот.

Клучни зборови: либерално градење мир, градење држава, неолиберализам, постконфликтна економија, казино капитализам, Балкан, ММФ.

The main point of this article is to suggest that a significant shift has occurred in peace studies to challenge the dominant liberal (and in economics neoclassical/neoliberal)

paradigm that has been preoccupied with improving the techniques of building peace. One of the most interesting developments in the study of peace and conflict over the past twenty years has been an interdisciplinary broadening of approaches in International Relations (IR). Particularly significant has been a trend away from military-security preoccupations and the inclusion of critical political economy, long neglected but now in the forefront of studies on, and explanations for, contemporary conflicts. The relationship between poverty, economic development, protest, political movements and war has become even more relevant in the post-modern advanced capitalist world – on account of what Foucault regards in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2004) as the invasion of politics through the privileging of an economic regime of knowledge as truth.

Among pioneers in the context of modern interventions and peace operations two French aid workers, François Jean and Jean-Christophe Rufin, published a collection of studies, Economie des Guerres Civiles (Paris, Hachette, 1996), based partly on experiences working for non-governmental organisations in war-torn societies. They were interested in how warriors engaged in the predation and exploitation of local populations, how trade changed, how markets were disrupted, taxes imposed, emergency aid diverted, and how diasporas lent financial support to combatants and how these fighters would often trade with each other. Regrettably the book was never translated from French into other languages. Other works, notably on the Balkans by Susan Woodward¹ and Carl-Ulrik Schierup,² and on Rwanda by Peter Uvin,³ established links between the structural adjustment policies imposed on developing countries by international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF and World Bank and violent conflict. A major impetus for violent conflict in independent Rwanda lay in the quest for export-led growth and a disastrous slump in coffee prices in the period 1989–91. In the Balkans, Yugoslavia experienced the biggest fall in standards of living after the 1970s of any European country, and social and political tensions were inevitably exacerbated by austerity measures introduced at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the early 1980s. Subsequently, the body of academic work on the political economies of reconstruction and on the aggressive neoliberal economic ideas promoted by donors in war-torn societies, has grown exponentially, including this author's own contributions.⁴

The Neoliberal Paradigm

The neoliberal hegemony, experimented on former socialist countries of Europe and the USSR, comprises privatisation and financialisation of public goods, entrepreneurship through micro-finance and support to the 'free market', foreign investment, export-led growth and integration of societies with little comparative advantage into a global trading

system. The paradigm represents a denial of politics, reifying the notion that an autonomous sphere of economics, protected by an *a priori* logic, determines political practices without being subjected to them. This determinism is reflected in conditionalities and structural adjustment policies promoted by aid agencies, donors, corporate interests, and international financial institutions, and in the merging of peacebuilding with statebuilding to 'reinforce and "lock in" liberalizing political and economic reforms'.⁵ The renowned Yugoslav economist, Branko Horvat, recognised that neo-classical economics was based on flawed assumptions to produce a theorem that 'evaporates in the thin air of artificiality'. He argued, for example, that in international trade, '[e]xploitation is magnified because of international monopolies and political domination and so no meaningful competition may be assumed'.⁶ Neoliberalism also entails welfare shocks that damage social cohesion and requires authoritarian controls.⁷

In conflict studies it was apparent that intervention could pave the way for economic shock treatment. For example, the Rambouillet ultimatum to Serbia-Montenegro of 23 February 1999 specified that '[t]he economy of Kosovo shall function in accordance with free market principles' and the reallocation of ownership and resources of governmentowned assets, pensions and social insurance, revenues and any other matters relating to economic relations (1999, ch. 4a, art. 1). Subsequently, 'the Quint' of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy controlled the Kosovo Economic and Fiscal Council (operated by Americans and Australians paid for by USAID), while the EU exercised control over economic development (except for the financial sector, over which USAID had total control). The Kosovo Trust Agency (in charge of privatisation), was entirely in the hands of a neoliberal EU appointee, its aim to preserve or enhance the value, viability, and corporate governance of socially owned and public enterprises in Kosovo.⁸ The IMF applauded this structural adjustment model of fiscal stringency that involved reductions in government expenditure and consumption power. The IMF also advised further controls on wages, social welfare, public sector employment, and compensation for workers thrown out of work by privatisation.9

Apparently without contradiction transition programmes are designed to reduce the economic role of the state while at the same time interventionists claim to be engaged in state-building. One long-term impact of structural adjustment, for example, has been to sharply reduce development aid to agriculture from the 1980s onwards. Assistance to state agricultural marketing was removed, and the World Bank's *Development Reports* had no emphasis on agriculture until 2008. The global food crisis has led to a reinstatement of agricultural production as a development goal but developing countries generally and post-conflict countries in particular, have had few state defences to control imports and protect local production. Thus the influence of the Chicago School of neoliberalism and the 1989

'Washington Consensus', albeit subsequently amended to upgrade social policy, permeated the peacebuilding by interventionists.

Paradigm Challenged

The dominant paradigm of political economy is challenged by the broadening of peace studies in IR to acknowledge the theoretical and empirical work of critical economists, development studies experts, sociologists, anthropologists and others.

While economic narratives have been notably influential in policy-making circles, the sub-disciplines of development studies and political economy have been significant in informing academic re-conceptualisations of conflict and peacebuilding studies. Theoretical and fine-grained analysis emerged in development studies in a major work directed by Frances Stewart and Valpy Fitzgerald who investigated horizontal as well as vertical economic inequalities arising from differential development – though this was partly a heuristic device, given that spatial and class poverties overlap.¹⁰ Other developmentalists' critiques also addressed prevailing liberal orthodoxies. In some cases these have been concerned with development generally,¹¹ in others directly linked to conflict,¹² and often with an emphasis on local or regional experiences relevant to conflict studies.¹³

A particularly interesting example, informed by peacebuilding in the Balkans, has been Milford Bateman's critique of the cycle of indebtedness and the opportunity costs in various localities arising from the neoliberal microfinance industry.¹⁴ A panacea much favoured by aid donors and IFIs for poverty reduction in post-conflict situations, this weakly regulated, untaxed, and high interest bearing system completely collapsed in Andhra Pradesh in 2010.

A further direction in development studies highlighted the functions of borderlands as sites of dynamism, leading to greater appreciation of the developmental role of liminal areas. Instead of regarding borderlands as locales repleted with unrest, disorder and crime, their dynamics are accorded complexity and relevance, as central authority first loses control and tries to reassert it in post-conflict transformations.¹⁵ This is particularly true of border areas where exchanges of goods and people occur, and ethnicity is subordinated to shared experiences, as in the 'Arizona' market formalised by US forces in the borderland between Brčko, Republika Srpska, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Extending the Boundaries of Debate

The contributions from political economy and development studies have been augmented by non-economists working in other disciplines, neo- and post-colonial studies, sociology, social policy, geography, and anthropology. Conceptual expansion occurred in IR from the late 1990s when academics sought to explain internationalised conflicts that did not fit simple monocausal reasoning. David Campbell and Lene Hansen emphasised the importance of the social construction of identity differences.¹⁶ Constructivist explanations could allow for the cross-cutting discriminations and internecine warfare evidenced by the killing of 'moderate' Hutus in Rwanda, the 'political executions' by hardliners of same-group 'traitors' in Northern Ireland, inter-ethnic trading by opposing forces during the wars in Yuqoslavia and intra-ethnic fighting between Bosniaks in north-east Bosnia and Herzegovina. Revisionist interpretations had the attribute of turning the spotlight away from the ethnic 'others' and onto the apparatus of capitalism and the structural violence of globalisation. Amy Chua's critical legal analysis highlights the tensions inherent in capitalist development where accumulation is concentrated in minority ethnic groups that then become scapegoats for economic crisis, as the Chinese did in Indonesia in 1997.¹⁷ From the work of David Harvey in critical geography,¹⁸ Ellen Meiksins Wood in historical sociology,¹⁹ and Naomi Klein in investigative journalism,²⁰ it is also established that a neoliberal ideology of aggressive deregulation of finance, manipulation of economic crisis, capital accumulation by dispossession, spatial discrimination, conditionalities to qualify for economic assistance, and commodification of public goods and public space, has been highly stressful.

Managing the differential economic and social impacts of neoliberalism and its disempowerment of classes of non-entrepreneurs requires both stress alleviation and, following Michel Foucault, new forms of social discipline and 'governmentality'. A particularly rich anthropological analysis of continued violence in El Salvador points to strong links between the introduction of economic neoliberalism and the continuation of political violence. As a prime example of authoritarian neoliberal managerialism, the Nationalist Republican Alliance (Partido Alianza Republicana Nacionalista, ARENA) government re-coded the violence associated with high levels of crime after the civil war had officially ended in 1992 as a post-war reassertion of 'normal criminality', against which the individual had to address risks with self-protection and self-insurance.²¹ This has a particular irony, somewhat lost on proponents of 'liberal post-conflict statebuilding', given that killing continued after the civil war had formally ended and that agents of the state were often the perpetrators. Economic rationalism and liberal assumptions that states are the most meaningful repositories of social contracts attainable by governed peoples were also contested.²²

Post-colonialism, Hybridity and Subaltern Agency

Perhaps the most noteworthy twist in the interrogation of paradigmatic liberal peacebuilding has derived from the influence of post-colonial studies. Here students of peacebuilding encounter echoes of the imperial mind, depicted as a case of the 'backward' being developed in the image of the powerful.²³ As the western Europeans were deeply

engaged in previous centuries in trying to convert people to new ways of thinking and behaving, this development in contemporary IR is particularly relevant as a field of investigation. Christopher Cramer contends that violent conflict is an essential part of development, and that the processes of development are themselves conflictual: '[I]iberal amnesia about the often brutal foundations of democratic, capitalist modernity is just one example of a tendency to cover up. . . foundational violence.'²⁴ Ironically, these same former imperialists have also been subjects of 'free market' empire, with serious consequences for development and social cohesion evidenced in the financial crisis and social unrest since 2007.

Obviously, the foreign presence in peacebuilding has a different dynamic to nineteenthcentury imperialism. Nevertheless, the oversight, guidance, control, and conditions exercised by aid and development agencies morph seamlessly into the aggressive pursuit of permanent integration into the global capitalist structures. The international financial institutions take over where the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance leaves off. In common with colonial power, international actors and agencies in peacebuilding disavow their impositions with discourses of good governance, law and order, stakeholding, participation, reform, local ownership, empowerment, and trouncing spoilers. As Branwyn Gruyffed Jones, contends, 'discourse about development – and its most recent agenda of "good governance" – has naturalized the structures of global inequality and exploitation that were the product of European expansion and formal colonialism'.²⁵

But at the point of enunciating disavowal, the internationals expose the inherent instability of their social engineering. They cannot transpose ideal forms of politics and governance or repress the local customs and devices of everyday life. The inability of foreigners to create stable identities or institutions with organic roots after violent conflict produces hybrid peace. For Homi Bhabha '[h]ybridity is the sign of productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities', and his unpacking of hybridity in inter-cultural relations privileges local agency that 'terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery'.²⁶ Ilan Kapoor's expansion of Bhabha's work embraces the political economy of uneven development to expose the fluidity and instability of colonial power when confronted by local agency that disrupts, diverts, and splits power through everyday struggles.²⁷

Resistance to, or adaptations of, western norms and values by populations in war-torn societies – from Bougainville and Timor Leste to Haiti and El Salvador – has led to hybridities in peacebuilding. Ivo Andrić captured the meanings of this hybridity after the Austrians displaced the Turks in Višegrad in 1878:

The newcomers were never at peace; they allowed no one else to live in peace. It seemed that they were resolved with their impalpable yet ever more noticeable web of laws,

regulations and orders to embrace all forms of life, men, beasts and things, and to change and alter everything, both the outward appearance of the town and the customs and habits of men from the cradle to the grave.... Naturally here, as always and everywhere in similar circumstances, the new life meant in actual fact a mingling of the old and the new. Old ideas and old values clashed with the new ones, merged with them or existed side by side, as if waiting to see which would outlive which.... By a natural law the people resisted every innovation but did not go to extremes, for to most of them life was always more important and more urgent than the forms by which they lived.²⁸

The outcome can be regressive for particular ethnic groups and classes while enhancing the economic mobility of rentiers and criminals. But disaggregation and fine-grained analysis of informal and shadow economies in war and aftermath also reveals the functionalities of unaudited economic activity. This is not to justify or condone such appalling crimes as the trafficking in body organs in Kosovo, where a post-war trade developed out of Kosovo Liberation Army war crimes.²⁹ But informal work in the street, untaxed labour on construction sites, smuggling, bribery and corruption have thrived in environments without regular employment or welfare. Unaudited economies may serve to fulfil everyday needs and cement social relations, as well as to take windfall advantage of a foreign presence or to accumulate capital on the back of the feral asset stripping of social property and public goods. In contractual terms, unaudited economies deprive authorities of tax revenue and distort economic incentive structures. Yet, in terms of group solidarity, as Francesco Strazzari argues for Kosovo, 'through overlapping networks of social, political and economic cohesion, criminal actors are not regarded as a threat to the (nation-) state, but – on the contrary – as working in its defence'.³⁰

Sites of hybridity display resistance, traditions, and customs where alternative forms of everyday life are respected. In their encounters with the foreigner, subalterns accept, adopt, subvert, resist, mimic, and mock the interventionism. Their narratives have surfaced occasionally. With tragic irony, in November 2010, UN peacekeepers from a de-developed former colony, Nepal, mandated by developed states in the Security Council to keep peace in another de-developed former colony, Haiti, were popularly suspected of having introduced cholera, re-writing the ordained script of interventionism whereby the rescuers are supposed to prevent the spread of mayhem. Rioting and attacks on 'white' ethnicities, humanitarian allies of the Nepalese, were anticipated.³¹ Imperfect international performances, sometimes re-coded as 'unintended consequences', discount the more persistent mockery of peacebuilding foreigners as 'white tourists', irrespective of their race.

Except when designated as 'spoilers', romanticized victims, or western-trained allies, the voices and agency of the subalterns have been almost entirely absent from the liberal narrative of peacebuilding. But a growing and deep interest in local agency and in the

relationship between the local, the state and the international, has also been a hallmark of the turn towards the decolonisation of peacebuilding. The topic of local agency, and the (re)claiming of local traditions and informal economies, has become an issue for scholars. The way that local people respond to interventions by external actors has been a fruitful terrain for exploration conducted by Béatrice Pouligny, Oliver Richmond, Roger Mac Ginty, Paul Higate and Marsha Henry among others,³² and stands as a tribute to the earlier work of Jean and Rufin. For example, the ambivalence of the international agencies and the local resistances that expose and exploit the contradictions in power have invigorated the work of critical geographers, sociologists, and now students of peacebuilding, who have incorporated local voices in their research, in effect speaking *with* the subaltern. Such critiques, however, have not necessarily solved the paradox of constructing subaltern accounts from privileged academia, so much as acknowledging, witnessing and recounting everyday life from local perspectives.

Conclusion

Obviously, two major trends in international politics are also challenging the neoliberal peacebuilding paradigm, and providing an international context for conceptual change. First, interventions by China and India, and the participation in UN operations by South American countries with different approaches to so-called free market doctrines, have contributed to upsetting the dominance of the IFIs and the Euro-US alliance.³³ NATO states and partners have also been diverted into regime change wars while claiming to promote human security. Second, the crisis in financial capitalism has further undermined the rationale of structural adjustment – though the horror of protectionist policies for undeveloped economies persists, and donors and IFIs seem determined that so-called 'local ownership' of peacebuilding should be located *within* the parameters of neoclassical economics.

Also, the study of 'peace interventions' exposed the limits of neoliberal peacebuilding. By about the start of this decade, scholars were breaking with the orthodox paradigm of peace, evident, for example, in work on Islamic and Chinese modes of interaction in Lebanon and Sudan.³⁴ Western concepts of peace, the state and sovereignty have been revealed as unstable, along with Western economic norms, institutional capacity and problem solving approaches. A crisis in the liberal peace and peacebuilding failures laid bare the representations of conflict as purely located with the ethnic identities of strangers, who had first to be rescued from violence and then cured of their strangeness.³⁵

The influence of research in disciplines beyond IR, as well as critiques from within that field, also ruptured the debates that had revolved around problem-solving and technicist refinements of intervention. Consequently, IR has been opened up to debates about

everyday life and well-being, challenging its traditional emphasis on states, governance, international society and institutions. It has meant not only that peacekeeping and peacebuilding ceased to be a monopoly (and niche interest) for IR students, but also that IR itself has become less exclusive in approaches to the field. In particular, the enrolment of economic, spatial, sociological, and ethnographic studies has enriched the subject area, not least in raising such fundamental questions as 'what is peace' and 'whose peace'? Future debates are likely to recognise the importance of cultural and post-colonial studies for understanding the interactions and negotiations that are produced when the subaltern and international power engage politically. The discipline of economics can usefully recognise that resistance is always present in the instabilities and uneven developments of these encounters, albeit mediated by the 'norms of the international'. It seems clear that foreign interventionists are unable to create stable identities or institutions with organic roots, and that resistances expose and exploit the contradictions in power that they wield, creating hybrid political economies of peace as people struggle to live their everyday lives. Thus the political economies of everyday life need to be investigated in any conception of peace.

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NOTES

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