

Introduction:
The Politics of Liberal Peace

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With the end of the Cold War, it appeared that a new ‘liberal’ epoch of international relations had emerged, based on a consensus that democracy, the rule of law and market economics would create sustainable peace in post-conflict and transitional states and societies, and in the larger international order that they were a part of. But in the wake of the failure of international efforts to create liberal governments through the peace operations of the 1990s (i.e. in the Former Yugoslavia, Timor-Leste, Sierra Leone, Haiti, Côte d’Ivoire, Kosovo, DR Congo and Burundi, among others) and the most recent high-profile failures (i.e. in Iraq and Afghanistan), sustained debate has emerged in both academic and policy circles around the value and validity of the ‘liberal peace’ approach to international intervention (see, for example, PRIO 2010; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2009; Newman et al. 2010; Tadjbakhsh 2011). This debate has often been polarised between the ‘critical voices’, who reject the premise that ‘liberal peace’ can or should be created through intervention, and the ‘problem solvers’, who study the faults of current peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts, but do not necessarily question their inherent value. This book advances our understanding of peacebuilding intervention beyond this unhelpful dichotomy by assembling chapters that present empirical research that investigates the degree to which the liberal peace is, in fact, imposed on post-conflict and transitional states and societies, and enters into dialogue with authors who suggest that we need to transcend conceptually the ‘liberal peace’ categorisation in order to develop more nuanced and empirically informed critical approaches. Through adding a richer and more nuanced range of investigations, this collection is designed to give the reader a comprehensive framing of the ways in which liberal peace has been understood in relation to interventions at the same time as it presents new frameworks for reconceptualising the liberal peace problematic.

The scholarly debate about international peacebuilding and statebuilding has increasingly become dominated by critical voices, in fact, so much so, that it is not difficult to find edited collections entirely devoted to critical frameworks and approaches to liberal peace, all varieties on the theme of problematising the alleged imposition of liberal forms upon the non-liberal or a-liberal Other. In one such collection, Tadjbakhsh and Richmond (2011, 232–3) argue that the critical approaches are so diverse that they can usefully be broken down into a typology consisting of at least five key types: communitarian critiques – problematising liberal assumptions of universal values; social constructivist critiques – arguing that liberal peace approaches are too technical and depoliticised, ignoring the role of values and identity; critical international theory approaches – highlighting the hegemonic power relations and interests involved in international interventionist missions; post-modern frameworks – which deconstruct the liberal assumptions of universalising progress towards a single form of modernity, the technocratic frameworks of liberal rationality, and the inscriptions of hegemonic forms of sovereignty; and post-colonial critiques – which challenge the divisions between the global and the local, focus on local context, and highlight the hybrid nature and outcomes of interventionist practices. Whilst it is a useful exposition of the diversity and richness of critical positions united around the liberal peace problematic, the current framing of the debate does not allow for an interrogation of the problematic itself, despite pointing to its many interpretations. This volume seeks to develop such an interrogation through prising apart the fictions and realities of intervention.

In structuring this volume, we include authors who are articulate representatives of the most critical approaches (see, for example, the pieces by Oliver Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty). These critics have a shared understanding of liberal peace policy practices, which they see as represented in a highly polarised international sphere, divided between liberal interveners (with liberal agendas) and non-liberal and a-liberal recipients (who do not share or resist these forms of alien imposition). Once this dichotomy is in place, they critically deconstruct it to show the hybrid and complex nature of peace operations and to suggest that policy makers should respond to this diversity of needs and interests by being more local or context-dependent, giving more than lip service to ideas of local participation and ‘ownership’.

Also included in this collection are authors who claim that this critical framing of the problem of ‘liberal peace’ can be seen to have reached an impasse, despite the fact that the critique of liberal peace is now central to so many authors working across different perspectives. Roland Paris suggests that this impasse has been reached because the debate on ‘liberal peace’ has increasingly departed from the study of international intervention itself. It often seems that the critique has a life of its own, only vaguely related to the analysis of policy practices and implementation and seemingly happy to squeeze every problem

of peacebuilding and statebuilding into the framework of the critique of the liberal character of interventions.

We bring these authors together in discussion with a range of positions that are much more sceptical about the assumptions underlying the ‘liberal peace’ debate itself. These include empirically driven chapters which suggest that the shared starting point – that international intervention can be adequately described as a liberal project of universalising transformation – is in need of critical re-examination. For example, Christoph Zürcher finds that liberal democracies cannot be created unless the local elites desire their creation, therefore challenging the critics’ assumption that liberalism can be imported in a non-consensual way. In her chapter, Campbell supports Zürcher’s finding that the imposition of liberal peace is not feasible, arguing that because of sticky bureaucratic routines and path dependency, intervening international organisations, international non-governmental organisations and bilateral donors are most often incapable of imposing significant change on dynamic post-conflict institutions. Analyses of Afghanistan (in Chaudhary, Ashraf and Suhrke’s chapter) and Uganda (in the chapter by Branch) suggest a much deeper ambiguity at the heart of intervention politics, arguing that the desire for control and influence is incompatible with the liberal policy aims. In demonstrating the vast gulf between the ambitions and rationales for intervention on the one hand and the ultimate effect of intervention on the other, these analyses beg the question of whether it is useful to characterise these missions as if they were ideologically coherent.

This collection also assembles authors who suggest that ‘hyper-critical’ approaches have become dominant because the focus on ‘liberal peace’ has shifted from empirical analyses of interventions to debate over the imputed ‘liberalism’ of intervening actors (see the chapters by Chandler, Hameiri and Sending). The study of post-conflict interventions, in this reading, has been displaced by, or risks becoming a vehicle for, epistemological critiques that are less concerned with the analysis of external intervention than with problematising or deconstructing the ‘liberal’ assumptions of Western modernity. It would appear that the understanding and assessments of peacebuilding and statebuilding have become a field through which a rather different debate has arisen. This is a debate around the nature of liberalism itself and the ways in which liberal universal assumptions – of progress, of rationality, of instrumentality, of the understanding of humanity itself – should or could be renegotiated in a globalised, post-colonial or post-political world.

In an academic and policy context, where the dominant framing of the problems of intervention has become that of the critique of the ‘liberalism’ of the interveners, those authors who are more cautiously sympathetic to the goals of liberal peace approaches suggest that even the staunchest or most ‘hyper-critical’ of critics (see Roland Paris’s chapters, ‘Critiques of Liberal Peace’ and

‘Alternatives to Liberal Peace?’), in fact, share the assumptions of liberalism. As a result, the critique of the ‘liberal peace’ is misplaced and counterproductive. This defence of liberal peace has elicited clear responses from those theorists who are more critical, enabling them to articulate their distance from a liberal framework by arguing that liberalism could only, in fact, ‘be saved’ if it were to ‘reinvent itself as a non-universalising political idea which preserves the traditional liberal value of human solidarity without undermining cultural diversity’ (Tadjbakhsh and Richmond 2011, 237). Until such time, however, ‘it is the hope of critical thinkers that bringing in context, the local and the everyday, will eventually take the “liberal” out of liberal peace’ (ibid., 237).

It appears that for some authors (see Richmond, ‘Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace’) the critique of liberal peace is the starting point for developing post-liberal frameworks of international intervention. Interventions which seek to articulate ways in which the recognition of difference can be the key to creating sustainable peace: ‘Treating the a-liberal populations with dignity, without trying to render them liberal, starts with recognising their equal worth, even if they may be needy of interventions to end violence and restore peace’ (ibid., 238). Here, it is respect for the ‘Other’ that should guide international intervention. This respect includes the reluctance to impose universal models onto these societies or develop external goals.

While some authors suggest that this critical and emancipatory approach is a radical challenge to power and policy-making, other authors suggest that privileging difference over universality is not inherently emancipatory or transformative. As Meera Sabaratnam indicates, analysing the concrete politics of critique in sites of intervention, rather than through the necessarily generic and reductionist critique of liberal peace, can be a better way of engaging the problem of domination, if that is its principal objective.

Once the *critical* nature of the critics of liberal peace is a subject of reflection, it appears that, in the debate over ‘liberal peace’, surprisingly little is at stake with regard to peacebuilding and statebuilding policy and practice. Nonetheless, the intellectual heat generated over the critique and defence of ‘liberal peace’ conceals a large area of political consensus. First, both the authors who are more sympathetic to the liberal peace and those who advocate a post-liberal or hybrid peace emphasise the binary division of the world into, on the one hand, a set of liberal actors with problem-solving agency and interventionist capacities and, on the other, a set of non- or a-liberal actors in post-conflict or transitional countries who are seen to provide the problem in need of resolution and are increasingly viewed as responsible for this resolution. Second, both advocates and opponents of the ‘liberal peace’ view liberal universalist assumptions as at the heart of the problem of post-conflict peacebuilding and share a desire to alter these assumptions and become more context-sensitive. Third, in many cases, both advocates and opponents of ‘liberal peace’ seek to support and

facilitate international intervention in the cause of peace- or statebuilding. Both argue that interventionist policies are *necessary*, regardless of the fine-grained distinctions in how such interventions should be conducted to overcome the universalising liberal assumptions of how polities, societies and economies operate. The ‘liberal peace’ problematic thereby poses the risk of constraining and limiting critical political engagement with the policies and practices of international intervention, allowing critical theorists to operate within dominant policy frameworks, rather than *critiquing* these frameworks.

This collection seeks to put the politics back into the discussion of ‘liberal peace’ by unpacking the current state of the debate and suggesting alternative approaches beyond the original critique of liberal peace. To do so, it examines the validity of the critiques of contemporary peacebuilding and statebuilding practices through several in-depth case studies. It investigates the underlying theoretical assumptions of liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding, further critiquing the most fundamental of these assumptions. It also provides new theoretical frameworks through which to examine current peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions. The chapters are written by some of the most prominent scholars in the liberal peace and peacebuilding effectiveness debate, in addition to several new scholars who are making cutting-edge contributions to this rapidly growing interdisciplinary field of study.

Chapter Breakdown

The book is organised in three sections. The chapters in the first section introduce the volume’s theme through a historical account of the liberal peace critique and an influential account of the impasse. The second section presents findings from field research, which investigate the relevance of the critique to current peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions. The chapters in the third section revisit the liberal peace debate in the light of case study findings and outline new theoretical frameworks that advance the discussion beyond the initial dichotomous debate between liberal peace’s critics and proponents.

Part I of the book – *Introducing the Debate* – sets the stage for the volume by situating the historical and contemporary debates on the liberal peace. In the first chapter, Meera Sabaratnam narrates an intellectual history of the changes in international conflict management over the last twenty years, putting both the changes and the academic critiques of these developments into the context of historical events. She concludes that the idea of ‘peacebuilding’ appears to be disappearing altogether, as policy actors seek to focus on states and regional security. Roland Paris then offers a critical analysis of the impasse in the discussion of liberal peace, highlighting the shortcomings of some of the most

influential critiques, arguing that critics have mischaracterised and confused various other aspects of Western intervention with the practices and objectives of liberal peacebuilding.

Part II – *Not Such a 'Liberal' Peace? Rethinking Intervention* – brings together a wide range of authors whose work suggests that the 'liberal peace' framework for post-conflict environments, understood as externally driven liberal reform, may be overly narrow or misleading in focus. Three of the chapters point to the limited ability of external actors to promote reform, and three others show that there may be perverse and contradictory outcomes despite supposedly liberal intentions.

In his chapter, Ole Jacob Sending argues that both 'critical' and 'problem-solving' approaches to intervention have systematically failed to understand or acknowledge the extant power and agency of actors within the society in determining the outcomes of intervention. In this sense, they miss the actual social infrastructure of power and sovereignty that largely shape the effects of peacebuilding activity. Sending suggests that state-society relations should be the principal focus for understanding post-war interventions. Relatedly, Christoph Zürcher argues through different case studies that the emergence of liberal democracy in post-war environments only occurs where local elites demand that these institutions be created. Accordingly, peacebuilders have little influence on the degree of liberal democracy achieved in a post-conflict or transitional country, in spite of their assumptions or otherwise. The primary lesson for peacebuilders is that they must reduce their liberal ambitions, and focus instead on achieving the best possible outcome from the bargains that they make with local elites. Susanna Campbell's chapter deepens the line of argument that intervening organisations cannot determine outcomes in post-conflict environments. These organisations lack the learning or adaptive capacity necessary to force significant behaviour or institutional change on complex and dynamic transitional environments. Instead, they must negotiate and bargain with the local and national actors who are the fundamental determinants of the liberal outcomes that they claim to pursue.

These and other limitations to the behaviour of external actors in transformative intervention projects result in situations which cannot really be described as liberal. In their chapter, Torunn Wimpelmann Chaudary, Orzala Ashraf Nemat and Astri Suhrke show through an analysis of legal reforms in Afghanistan that the presence of interveners has resulted in seemingly contradictory laws that both uphold and deeply limit women's rights. The authors show that international actors working on women's rights lack coherent action, have little political impact and fail to develop an overarching objective to achieve this most symbolically important of liberal values. They describe the footprint of the West as deeply ambiguous, and in so doing argue that liberal peacebuilding is not inherently progressive. In a pointed analysis, Adam Branch

claims that the attempt to institutionalise international law in conflict and post-conflict environments through the activities of the ICC is highly selective and politicised. In examining the contribution of the ICC to the peace processes in Uganda, the chapter makes the case that this selective legal disciplining of the Lord's Resistance Army has rendered the political conflict harder to address, by framing it as part of a campaign for global justice and the institutionalisation of liberal norms. Indeed, he argues that this framing itself inhibits rather than progresses this agenda in any meaningful sense. Thania Paffenholz's chapter also problematises the 'global' lens that proponents and critics of the liberal peace use in their analysis of 'civil society' support. She argues, through a functional analysis of the different roles played by civil society organisations, that they are highly diverse, with no inherently 'good' agenda. Critics and supporters have tended to engage only with urban elite NGOs; however, more attention needs to be paid to the vulnerable and excluded parts of society who are often most affected by the conflict, but currently left out of the 'liberal peace' debate.

In Part III – *Rethinking the Critique: What Next?* – we introduce perspectives that recognise the contributions of the liberal peace debate but seek to get beyond the 'liberal peace' as a basic framework for analysing intervention and answering some of the questions. In doing so we aim to present new research agendas for approaching intervention, based on alternative readings of the political.

Roland Paris opens this section with a piece arguing that we need to go beyond the liberal peace debate as, to date, the critics of liberal peace have not been able to offer alternatives to liberal frameworks that help us to understand the need for intervention or the problems to be addressed. He concludes that the limited alternatives presented by the critics suggest that, despite its well highlighted shortcomings, in a broad sense there is no viable or attractive alternative to the liberal peace. David Chandler's chapter argues that the 'liberal peace' debate has become less about the questions that emerge from experiences of intervention than a critical validation of interveners' own fictions, in which they are agents of a liberal world order. In this, both power-based and ideas-based critiques of the liberal peace end up arguing in different ways that the problem encountered by the liberal peace is the existence of a non-liberal Other, which is either culturally or politically not amenable to liberal transformations. What is lacking is a conception of the political subject that might enable a more critical approach to the limiting statebuilding transformations that interventions do in fact effect. Shahar Hameiri's chapter extends this focus on the actual impact of interventions. He argues that debates on the liberal peace have focused on the absence of liberal transformations rather than the emergence of other constellations of power. Through analysing the case of Cambodia, he demonstrates the critical purchase of seeing intervention as establishing a multi-level regime of regulatory governance. This

framework offers an understanding of the dynamic between interventionist and elite political actors, as well as an understanding of the social forces that bind them.

In his discussion of the hybrid peace, Roger Mac Ginty offers a clear account of how this framing changes the focus in analyses of intervention. He argues that an engagement with hybridity allows researchers to acknowledge and explore the interstices of co-operation as well as the differences that our normal categorisations paper over. Through identifying four different sites of interaction with the liberal peace, the chapter offers a framework for analysis that highlights the connections rather than the divisions between interveners and domestic agents. Oliver Richmond's chapter suggests that the alternative to the liberal peace should be the 'post-liberal peace' which is characterised by a recognition and respect for difference. He argues that this is a hybrid of liberal and local modes of being which focuses on the everyday as a site of politics and struggle. This involves the re-negotiation of the liberal peace in line with the traditional and customary to create a post-liberal peace. Meera Sabaratnam's chapter, by contrast, looks at the question of the liberal peace through the lens of anti-colonial critiques in the twentieth century. She argues that these radical and activist critiques of power pointed out deprivation, hypocrisies and inconsistencies in the concrete practices of empire through subverting and re-deploying supposed universals rather than highlighting cultural difference as the root of failure. Through engaging with the politics of critique in Mozambique, she argues that this is a more useful and progressive frame for analysing intervention than one which turns on trying to manage the difference between the liberal and the local.

Conclusion

The editors of this collection have intentionally decided not to provide a concluding chapter. It is to be hoped that the different positions and perspectives gathered here will enable the reader to undertake their own reflections upon the material. The purpose of the collection is to bring together a range of authors engaged in the analysis of 'liberal peace' framings of international intervention. Our intention was to co-ordinate this debate, not to force the authors to speak with one voice or to assimilate their views. We have organised the collection in a way which makes the different perspectives accessible and enables the reader, if they so choose, to follow the chapters as if a debate were being held in front of them.

Bibliography

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