Review Essay

The Cat in the Hat: Can technocratic peacebuilding lead to transformative peace?

Campbell, Susanna P. *Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. ISBN: 9781108290630, 306p.

Krause, Jana. *Resilient communities: Non-violence and civilian agency in communal war*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. ISBN: 9781108675079, 294p.

'You have to act as if it's possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do that all the time.' - Angela Davis

I urge peacebuilding scholars and practitioners to think about three pertinent questions. First, how can we mitigate dispersed peacebuilding activities that often lack focus and privilege donor agendas with limited local normative resonance? Second, how do we work with *policy time*? (Christie and Algar-Faria, 2020). Scholars and practitioners in the field are well aware that short-termism, and the urgency to produce results, can, and does undermine strategic thinking: it encourages an 'impatient' peace (Hom, 2018). Short-termism and time-bound projects cannot account for, or cater to the longer-term needs of communities. Given this tryst between policy time and effective peacebuilding, how can peacebuilding organisations think strategically, in ways that allow them to learn from, and continue to monitor the results of their actions beyond bureaucratic *clock time*? (Christie and Algar-Faria, 2020: 156). And, finally, how can peacebuilders use valuable institutional knowledge from project implementation, to encourage not only organisational learning and reflection, but also stronger legacies? (Podder, 2020).

Two recent books on accountability, and resilient communities help us address these questions. Susanna Campbell in *Global Governance and Local Peace* asks to whom should peacebuilders be accountable and how can learning from the implementation of peacebuilding activities offer better cues for their performance? Campbell's study offers a useful entry point for examining the potential for adaptation across different types of organisations engaged in peacebuilding. She finds that although international organisations, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and donors behave in similar ways at the country office level, multi-mandate INGOs engaged in development and peacebuilding prove to be more flexible or adaptable. The country office staff in INGOs can exercise greater agency by sidestepping bureaucratic formalities and overcoming rigid cultural and normative constraints on the other two types of organisations (p.230).

Limits of Technocratic Peacebuilding

Critical peace studies scholars have probed the constraints, limitations, and sometimes contradictory results of INGO activities (Christie, 2012: 7). On the one hand is the 'anarchy of their good intentions' (Goodhand, Hulme and Lewer 1999: 81), on the other is their underlying motivations and less than accountable relationships with states and elites (McMahon, 2017). Regardless of motivation, in terms of performance, Campbell finds that accountability to donors or formal peacebuilding accountability incentivises certain learning behaviours that involve meeting 'clock time' (Hutchings, 2007), managing budgets and activities, and tick box learning (Mac Ginty, 2012). Efficiency in these areas brings recognition as a reliable partner, and encourages donors to keep funding projects, that are detached from local needs.

As an 'involved observer', in her role as an evaluator for several UN Peacebuilding Fund projects in Burundi, Campbell finds that what matters most is informal local accountability, defined as privileging the interests and needs of the locals over the interests of donors. Building bridges between the country office staff, and local actors is important for meaningful peacebuilding. It requires what Campbell refers to as 'bending the rules', in ways that account for local needs. This is because the straitjacket of donors' clock time does not match up with the reality of the local context or how 'time' plays out in peacebuilding. However, donors may remain oblivious to local adjustments, as they can go unaccounted for in formalised reporting.

Campbell's typology of organisational learning has four types: peacebuilding learners, micro-adaptors, sovereignty enforcers, and stagnant players (p.54). She explains variation in country office performance of two INGOs, CARE Burundi, and the Burundi Leadership Training Programme, by applying the organisational learning typology as a cue for performance (pp.92-141). INGOs have greater potential for positive peacebuilding performance when they are 'peacebuilding learners', and remain adaptive and responsive to the local context. Their smaller size, and relative independence, enable stronger local accountability. From 15 years of experience of working in post-conflict countries, I find this more likely at the onset of reconstruction when donors themselves are trying to understand the context. With time, donor agendas become more directive, as the international community steers peace- and statebuilding processes in the direction of a liberal peace. While Campbell focuses on the tension between local peace building, and global accountability, it is not entirely clear how local accountability may vary across different projects, and why. However, her book does stimulate us to think about how short-termism in peacebuilding practice mitigates against the adoption of long-term policies. It inhibits the chances of a locally-owned, long-term, and transformative peace.

Learning and Reflection: Making Time for a 'Pause'

To engage with the long-term effects or what I term the legacy of peacebuilding, we must think beyond projects, and engage with the 'peace writ large' (Fisher and Zimina, 2008: 9). Instead of treating project objectives as 'locked in', once an agreed programme of work has been funded, donors must allow for greater flexibility, by building in the time for taking a pause, and adjusting project designs during their lifecycle. Methodologically, this is challenging. Taking a pause, or long-term evaluation do not 'fit' into the DNA of the peacebuilding industry. Amidst the constraints of time and resources, rarely is there the ability or willingness to turn attention inwards, and to capitalise on the institutional memory of the country office staff, or reflect on the archived documents from multiple projects. Yet, systematically analysing this knowledge can help donors and implementing agencies learn about the legacies that they leave behind once country offices shut down, fostering more strategic, and long-term approaches to peacebuilding (Podder, 2020).

Donor funding must be strategically linked to the objective of strengthening organisational legacy in a country, a point that Campbell does not allude to. Her study does, however, help us understand that learning must be internally guided, rather than tied to donor-specified M&E. It must become part of the 'moral compass' of peacebuilding actors. In practical terms, this would require overcoming the internal divisions, resource competition, and mistrust within the peacebuilding field. If done well, sharing of knowledge through inter-organisational learning can contribute to encouraging transformational processes, while pursuing technocratic peacebuilding. Campbell's focus on organisational learning is a starting point for thinking about this future.

Transformative Peacebuilding

In transcending from technocratic to transformative peacebuilding, it is imperative to enhance our knowledge about communities and their resilience. As Cockell notes (2000: 23), 'sustainable peace can only be founded on the indigenous societal resources for intergroup dialogue, cooperation and consensus'. Communities are central actors across the conflict to peace continuum. Understanding the nuances of civilian agency, and adaptability during conflict, can help peacebuilders engage with the endogenous capacity of resilience, to which most organisations remain oblivious. Krause's book helps reverse this trend.

Her study of civilian agency in the escalation, and de-escalation of violence, explores conditions under which a quick escalation from micro-incidents of communal violence, to what she terms 'communal war', or 'non-state conflict between social groups,' may take place (p.15). Using examples of gang-fighting from Ambon, eastern Indonesia, and Jos, Central Nigeria, Krause undertakes a rich, ethnographic study of ethnically, religiously, and socio-economically mixed communities, to explain how, and to what extent, they are mobilised for violence. She highlights the role of political and religious actors in controlling or enabling the polarisation of social identities, and post-victimisation traumatisation.

Her research offers insights into social learning during conflict. Often, peacebuilding actors fail to work with the social learning that has been accumulated during the conflict years. In Sierra Leone, for example, self-protection efforts and the use of social knowledge for exercising discipline and control over armed actors were part and parcel of a conflict better known for its 'anarchy' (Kaplan, 1994). Indigenous civil society that spontaneously responded to the needs of the population during the conflict was side-lined once the peacebuilding industry took over (Datzberger, 2015).

Co-option into external agendas undermines local communities' capacity for mobilisation, managing conflict escalation, and facilitating demilitarisation. Without harnessing their agency, communities are likely to return to their own ways of doing things once civil society projects cease, and ad hoc structures like child protection committees, women's groups, and youth groups become defunct amidst the pressures of everyday survival. This is a point that many practitioners I have met over the years in post-conflict countries across Africa have found to be true.

Krause's research also makes us think about pre-existing institutional capacity. In examining how violence escalates through the political mobilisation of an "everyday violence network" (p.41), such as street gangs or vigilantes, and the mediating role of local leaders, Krause encourages us to think about the social networks, and institutions that can be critical to making programmes work. This kind of ethnographic knowledge can help transcend some of the superficial 'conflict analysis' frameworks that inform donor programming. Berdal (2020: 205) underlines "the importance of contextual awareness and 'deep' knowledge of the conflict environment as a prerequisite for effective peacebuilding." Krause's strength lies in unveiling this deep knowledge of the context.

In conclusion, peacebuilding remains effectively a patchwork of projects that create friction and at times confusion for local communities (Millar, 2013). Anyone who has worked or researched in post-conflict countries knows that peacebuilding generates unrealistic expectations, like access to services and sustainable livelihoods, even when the state remains mired in corruption and debt. The disappointment that follows shapes how locals experience peacebuilding as 'minor utopias' (Winter, 2006). To end on a positive note, transformative peacebuilding need not be utopian. Pursuing transformative peacebuilding through technocratic peacebuilding can be possible if technical activity is incremental, long-term, and committed to change.

In this way, technical and transformative peacebuilding need not be contradictory. In fact, through internal learning and reflection, peacebuilding organisations can develop a greater awareness of their 'strategic' objectives. They can use indigenous M&E tools that assess performance even when projects are completed, and donor funding has ceased. Both Campbell's and Krause's research converge on the point of remaining grounded in local knowledge and capacities. They help us take note of what matters most. Campbell's study underlines that local accountability matters more than accountability upwards. Effective peacebuilding requires flexibility, responsiveness, and creativity. It demands learning and reflection, the ability to pause, and think. Krause's study offers insights into how civilian agency, institutional capacity, and resilience are enablers to peace. Understanding endogenous structures and capacities, and supporting, rather than replacing them with externally imported models, can become the most effective route to sustainable peace.

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