Global Dialogues 2

Relational Sensibility and the 'Turn to the Local': Prospects for the Future of Peacebuilding

Wren Chadwick, Tobias Debiel, Frank Gadinger (eds.)

Centre for
Global
Cooperation
Research

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Editorial

The (Liberal) Emperor's New Clothes? Relational Sensibility and the Future of Peacebuilding

Wren Chadwick, Tobias Debiel, and Frank Gadinger

Duisburg, November 2013

Following two decades of post-Cold War interventions, peacebuilding in so-called post-conflict settings has become one of the most complex joint actions in international affairs. The academic discourse about peacebuilding and democratisation through international intervention was triggered in the early 1990s with Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Peace* (1992), later followed by an *Agenda for Democratization* (1996). While the concepts of peacebuilding and democratisation were initially understood as a social engineering operation of transferring externally-created blueprints, the recent discourse is shaped by widely acknowledged failures and deadlocks. Thus, discourses around peacebuilding and democratisation have shifted towards, on the one hand, normative questions about the morality of peacebuilding humanitarian intervention (e.g. Baer 2011; Welsh 2003) and, on the other hand, non-linear understandings of peacebuilding that recognize the importance of local societal processes and practices (e.g. Chandler 2013), the significance of local agency (e.g. Merry 2006) and turn attention to the possibilities of hybrid orders (e.g. Mac Ginty 2011; Boege et al. 2009; Kraushaar and Lambach 2009).

Peacebuilding scholars have highlighted shortfalls of 'liberal peacebuilding', in part pointing to conflict between global and local legitimacy claims and narratives of democracy,

negotiated through multiple practices of everyday life. While some authors still defend the model of liberal peacebuilding, describing this reflective criticism as exaggerated and misdirected (e.g. Paris 2010), it is fair to say that underlying foundations of previous linear and teleological approaches are increasingly being questioned or discarded in favour of more relational and culturally sensitive ones. However the contemporary debate mostly focuses on the normative, legal and political dilemmas around the concepts of peacebuilding and humanitarian intervention and less through the lens of cooperation in a culturally diverse world. The inherent requirement of cooperation in peacebuilding makes it an interesting focal point for analysing problems of global and local cooperation in the research agenda of the Centre for Global Cooperation Research, including for investigating what role 'culture' plays in these complex joint actions between the global and the local.

Peacebuilding, or the efforts to support it, involves working across division and through cross-cultural engagement. One fundamental area of division is significant cultural difference, including divergent understandings of person, community, rationality, economic life and socio-political order (Brigg and Bleiker 2011). These divisions are frequently at play in international peacebuilding and statebuilding enterprises. They are also entrenched more broadly in many states of the Global South where there is a significant disconnect between the state and its institutions (particularly as imagined by the international community and interveners), and socio-political practices animating most of the country. This disconnect is frequently concomitant with violent conflict, social unrest, disenfranchisement and marginalisation. Bridging, or otherwise addressing such a disconnect in pursuit of peacebuilding or state formation can be understood as a contingent process of necessary mutual cooperation between different global and local actors.

Thus, the critical debate on the relationship between international intervention and local legitimacy requires a shift towards more thorough consideration of interactions among people and social and cultural orders, including differing claims to legitimacy and authority. What democracy means, for instance, to people in Senegal, Sierra Leone or Cambodia in their cultural practices of everyday life is rarely noticed and less studied in the current research agenda of political sciences (see Schaffer 2000 and Bliesemann de Guevera 2012 for such rare examples). 'Western interventions' frequently presuppose particular models of democratic politics and the nature of the state – models that are clearly contestable. A key issue in this context is the changing nature of the interaction between the 'international' and the 'local' in discourses and practices of peacebuilding interventions. This is resulting in a new level of self-reflexivity on the part of interveners, an

attempt to reconfigure power relationships with the 'local' and a questioning of previous assumptions about the ability to achieve predetermined outcomes.

Against this backdrop, this edition of the Centre for Global Cooperation Research's *Global Dialogues* consists of five short articles that reflect on the ontological and epistemological entailments and consequences of such a shift, and consider how it might impact on peacebuilding practice. These questions were discussed during a workshop hosted by the Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global Cooperation Research in May 2013 and attended by scholars from a variety of disciplines and institutions. The articles draw on and continue these debates.

In the lead article *Relational Sensibility in Peacebuilding: Emancipation, Tyranny, or Transformation?* Morgan Brigg summarises the main challenges of the recent peacebuilding discourse about relational approaches in a world of complexity. Brigg goes beyond the conceptual level to explore the consequences of such a shift towards relational sensibility in peacebuilding. He asks whether such an understanding offers 'exciting news ways to improve and advance peacebuilding practice, redressing previously iniquitous power relationships to secure a more just and peaceful world through a democratizing ethos' (page 13). Brigg's conclusion is ambiguous: While the participatory process at the heart of the relational sensibility approach reflects a democratising impulse, the underlying assumptions of a flatter ontology can undermine the possibility of driving toward equity, justice and peace.

Brigg's article is followed by two theoretical pieces that critically respond to his proposition. David Chandler provocatively suggests that the relational shift represents the 'end of the road for 'Liberal Peace'', arguing that such approaches are plagued by the same fundamental contradictions as the liberal intervention approaches it seeks to escape. At the core of this, Chandler suggests, is '[t]he paradox… generated by the need to justify external intervention and also claim to deny any relation of hierarchy with regard to those intervened upon' (page 25). In light of this, Chandler suggests that relational approaches fail 'to provide any new coherent project or purpose for external intervention' (page 20).

Kai Koddenbrock's piece continues the theoretical exchange by revealing the essentialising claims that he suggests underpins the debate both within these pages and more broadly. Koddenbrock examines aspects of Gayatri Spivak's strategic essentialism and Meera Sabaratnam's 'de-colonial' approach to intervention critique before proposing an alternative critical perspective which he posits may overcome the pitfalls of previous critique. Rather than avoiding essentializing claims, this approach deliberately contains two-fold essentialism. It 'essentializes the local by seeking his or her perspective on

intervention and essentializes the structures of world society in order to critique the self-evidence of Western intervention' (page 29).

The two final articles ground the theoretical discussion by exploring the question of how the debate about relational sensibility approaches to peacebuilding might be understood or evaluated with respect to concrete cases. Volker Boege discusses five aspects of Peacebuilding interventions in Bougainville which he suggests are both a reflection of the relational sensibility discourse in practice, and an adaptive response to forms of resistance on the part of 'the locals' 'who were far from being just 'recipients' of the internationals' peacebuilding agenda' (page 42). While these dimensions of the intervention were arguably key to its successes, they also highlight the limits of relational sensibility approaches which continue to take place within a liberal framework. Boege points out that the engagement was rather superficial and 'remained within the internationals' own cultural and epistemological comfort zone and confines, with 'the other', the local ways of being, doing and knowing (conflict, peace, culture…) merely seen as challenging and/or enriching Western ways' (page 43).

In the concluding article, Louise Wiuff Moe investigates the potential for combining a focus on relationships with a pragmatist emphasis on the 'everyday' as a way of breaking away from debates about liberal universalism versus local socio-cultural pluralism which dominate the current critique of liberal peacebuilding. Through an analysis of differing approaches to peace and justice in Somaliland, Moe illustrates the significance of everyday processes and relationships and the limitations of interventions that focus solely on hierarchical systems and frameworks.

This collection of short articles presents critical reflections on the 'turn to the local' that has come to increasingly characterise peacebuilding discourse and practice. Through an examination of the promise and pitfalls of the relational sensibility approach, we hope these contributions will advance the debate on how to reflectively and critically reshape modes of engagement and interaction in peacebuilding. Whether this debate will lead to a substantial re-definition of the terms of peacebuilding or instead remind us of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes,* uncovering the vanity of liberal approaches, remains to be seen.

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Relational Sensibility in Peacebuilding: Emancipation, Tyranny, or Transformation?

Morgan Brigg[1]

[1] Thanks to participants in the International Workshop on Democratic Interventionism and Local Legitimacy, held at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research, Duisburg, Germany, 22–23 May 2013. Particular thanks to Wren Chadwick for comments and advice in drafting this text.

Introduction

The past two decades of peacebuilding policy, practice, and research have seen the gradual emergence and consolidation of a significant discursive phenomenon. This apparently new way of talking about and framing peacebuilding efforts draws upon the practical wisdom of practitioners as well as institutional and scholarly sources of authority to make knowledge claims that influence peacebuilding policy and practice. The discourse has its recent origins in the burgeoning of the peacebuilding field from the early 1990s,[2] and particularly in the challenges made apparent by failures and intractable situations on the ground. In response, more and more practitioners and commentators have come to think differently about what should be done to advance peacebuilding and how to do it, in part by framing frustrations and failures as opportunities for learning and improved practice. In this new way of thinking, opportunities can be realised in significant part by thinking differently about the roles of the interveners and the 'intervened-upon'; by recalibrating the relations between 'internationals' and 'locals'. The recalibration involves, so the discourse goes, what might be termed a 'relational sensibility' – an attitude in which international and local interlocutors are focused, much more centrally than had previously been the case, on partnership, relationship and exchange.

The 'relational sensibility' discourse in peacebuilding is apparently in good company for it aligns with significant and innovative shifts that are afoot in our understandings of the social world, from systems-based approaches and complexity theory to the analysis of emergent and networked (rather than hierarchical) forms of order.[3] But this discursive phenomenon also raises important questions. Does it offer exciting news ways to improve and advance peacebuilding practice, redressing previously iniquitous power relationships to secure a more just and peaceful world through a democratizing ethos? Or does it herald a disturbing new era of double-speak that removes responsibility and destroys possibilities for meaningful collective action by dressing up failure as (possibilities for) success while entrenching existing power relations? Or yet again, can understanding and engaging with this phenomenon offer possibilities for transformation by intensifying its best effects and countering possible negative consequences?

[2] Peacebuilding practice and literature began to grow following the 1992 publication of the then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *An Agenda for Peace* (1995). The idea of peacebuilding, though, had been introduced significantly earlier by Johan Galtung (1976).

[3] See, for example, Miller and Page (2007); Urry (2005 and 2003) and Eriksson (2005).

The emergence of a 'relational sensibility'

To identify the relational sensibility, we can note a shift in language, with a proliferation of new terminology now operational within policy documents and practice approaches in the peacebuilding field. We see a shift from elite and

expert-led plans and programs to bottom-up and grassroots-driven agendas; from predetermined outcomes to continuous learning and flexible programming. In parallel we see greater emphasis on ideas of local ownership, capacity building, and strengths-based approaches. At the back-end of individual peacebuilding programs and projects, there are moves to acknowledge and embrace unintended consequences through evaluation techniques that seek out, for example, most significant change.

In a similar vein, interveners increasingly 'facilitate' or advise rather than directing or doing, and the intervened-upon are 'empowered' to realise their own inherent capacities and abilities while interveners are now supposedly less-knowledgeable and less-empowered in their interactions with locals than has ever been the case before. Those who intervene are now coming to think of themselves and the intervened-upon differently. They may self-deprecate or declare a lack of knowledge; deferring to local expertise, they downplay their capacity to affect change and claim to learn from the locals as much as they impart their own knowledge and skills. Rather than teaching from on high, they seek out ethical, balanced, and reciprocally empowering exchanges, including for mutual learning. Relationship moves to the foreground, and is increasingly considered necessary to for the realization of program objectives and goals.

The relational sensibility discourse, arising from experiences on the ground (particularly from the challenges and failures), is thus evident in the language of policy papers, project proposals and reports that exerts a powerful influence on peacebuilding practice. It increasingly frames and influences the terms of interaction in peacebuilding and similar efforts, and the possibilities for global cooperation between internationals and locals. But it does not only have its origins in peacebuilding practice; it has at least partly gained traction because it also resonates with developments at wider levels, both in scholarship and in our changing understanding of social relationships, including the placement of human beings in the world.

Recent scholarly developments across a wide range of disciplines support understanding peacebuilding practice in terms of a relational sensibility. Historically, social analyses have drawn upon classical Newtonian understandings of the world, relying upon industrial and mechanical metaphors to develop linear, cause-and-effect understandings of social processes, including for influencing and programming social change. These understandings are increasingly complemented and challenged by ideas of complexity, networks, self-organising systems, and emergence – ideas that emphasise fluidity, focus on local-level interaction among agents within systems, and recognise that small inputs to a system can have disproportionately large effects and vice versa. Correspondingly, these

approaches direct our focus towards processes of interaction and exchange, evoking a relational sensibility whereby intervener and intervened-upon are more attuned to each other's capacities and impacts in the world, and particularly to contingent effects rather than the presumed agency of interveners.

One way to describe these recent scholarly developments is to say that they embrace a flatter ontology in which hierarchy is less important than openness and exchange, and understanding the world from an external perspective or 'God's-eye view' is less important than recognising people as co-participants and co-creators of social reality. In the most extreme version (though also simply the logical extension of a flatter ontology), humans lose their privileged status as surveyors of world. Such understandings lead us to move away from a strong distinction between subject and object, with humans occupying a privileged position from which to act upon the inanimate, towards a world where the inanimate, from systems to networks and even objects, gain some measure of agency. For many, this appears a strange and alienating new world. Perhaps the most striking and challenging for humanists is the way in which this increased recognition of the non-human apparently threatens to displace human needs and concerns in favour of other species and the environment. Nonetheless, these ideas are becoming influential in advanced theorising in the humanities and social sciences, raising fundamental questions about the position of humans in the world and their capacity to effect change.

Implications for peacebuilding

In peacebuilding practice, critical questions remain. Do emerging understandings that focus our attention on interaction and exchange help us to understand ourselves and our relationships better in ways that can contribute to more just, fair and effective outcomes in peacebuilding and development cooperation or do they have more nefarious implications? What dynamics become established as interveners insist that they do not have sufficient power or legitimacy to deliver particular peace and social change outcomes despite the obvious fact that they have the power and resources to be there in the first place? Three broad positions are worth considering.

First, some might suggest that the emergence of a relational sensibility reflects an appropriate level of modesty (in contrast to the hubris of earlier approaches to intervention) that begins to redress longstanding iniquitous, post-colonial power relationships, in part by allowing local people to develop and realise their own capacity and agency. This dynamic, furthermore, creates opportunities for innovative, co-learning and partnering that can generate new approaches for

addressing difficult and intractable problems and for realising long-lasting and sustainable social change and peace.

Furthermore, the participatory processes at the heart of this relational sensibility reflect a democratising impulse, and create possibilities for new forms of localized legitimacy that challenge and reach beyond formal institutional arrangement, often imposed through colonialism. Similarly, local, strengths-based approaches have more traction, are more able to tap into local forms of legitimacy, and allow a level of flexibility that enables adaption to the situation on the ground. The revised approach to peacebuilding, then, is simultaneously innovative, practical and emancipatory. Having recognised the shortcomings of earlier approaches, we could say that peacebuilding is now on track to achieve more effective and just outcomes.

Second, is the foregoing view of the consequences of relational sensibility too self-congratulatory or overly optimistic? Does it, instead, involve excuse-making and self-justification that masks entrenched structures and power relations? Interveners may talk about partnership, but donors typically require that the intervened-upon conform to and operate on the political, bureaucratic and administrative terms of the interveners. Funds must be acquitted in certain ways, and locals have to pursue objectives that align with donor-determined policy goals – targets for human rights as well as gender and youth inclusivity are continually pushed, and sometimes formulated as a condition of support. Locals are thus effectively required to regulate and govern themselves on the intervener's terms. In this way, dominant power relationships are entrenched in the most effective way: local people govern themselves in accordance with the wishes of the interveners even as they pursue peace, freedom and economic wellbeing.[4] Completing the circle, even the intervener-local relationship itself is conceptualised predominantly through the intervener's framing, including through the terms of the new discourse.

A no less disturbing implication of the foregoing critique is that the practices and approaches to empowerment, agency, and self-realisation that the interveners now make space for through a relational sensibility discourse perhaps only allow locals to realise themselves on the broad historico-cultural terms of the intervener. It becomes possible to wonder, then, if the new discourse allows for meaningful exchange between interveners and intervened at all. Perhaps, instead, it is a sophisticated way for interveners to grapple with either the challenges and lack of meaning generated by recent peacebuilding failures or post-colonial guilt arising out of the historical dynamics through which wealthy countries have achieved their current status in global politics.

Some might feel compelled to raise even more fundamental objections. Relational sensibility is underpinned, as noted

[4] This is the global governmentality critique. For example, see Dillon (1995)

above, by an ontological shift which defines categories of existence and reality in new ways. If, as this new discourse suggests, peacebuilders embrace unintended consequences, system effects and emergent change giving greater agency to the non-human systems within a flatter ontology, we necessarily give up the possibility of driving toward equity, justice and peace. When peacebuilders no longer believe they have the ability to affect an intended consequence, responsibilities decline or are eroded and we find ourselves capable of accepting 'whatever happens' as 'what needed to happen'. This creates space for interpreting our failures as new opportunities and therefore as indeed successes. In a world evacuated of cause and effect, process, interaction and exchange reign supreme with nobody taking responsibility for effects. This is a recipe for domination by the powerful, chaos, or both; a type of diffuse tyranny.

Third and finally, in addition to positions that highlight the possible positive or oppressive effects of the relational sensibility discourse, it is possible to hold both these possibilities in a critical embrace. In other words, does the relational sensibility discourse have the potential to simultaneously be both dangerous and liberating? And can we engage with it in an informed and critical way in order to realise its positive dimensions while guarding against the negative?

There seems little doubt that the new discourse can be deployed to challenge some dominant practices as well as institutional and other hierarchies by including alternative and under-appreciated voices and improving current ways of operating. Being more alive to the agency of local people, and putting this agency in exchange with that of the interveners, provides avenues for reflecting upon and reconfiguring existing power relations. This is one effect of the participatory ethos of relational sensibility. On the other hand, an awareness of this discourse and its effects makes it possible to identifying contradictions between the discourse itself and the practices it in fact comes to legitimise. This enables an analysis of the ways evolving peacebuilding practices may entrench or reproduce power relations and facilitates the debunking of myths that arise from the relational sensibility discourse (such as that participatory processes necessarily result in emancipatory outcomes). Such analysis also invites irony, for instance, in order to engage a discourse in which interveners purport to be present without acting.

Conclusion

An ambivalent, critical engagement with relational sensibility discourse – one that seeks to makes it possible to identify its positive effects while also partly disowning and critiquing it –

will not satisfy those who are looking for a new and reassuring formula for realising good. Similarly, it may concern those who seek an (ultimately unrealistic) approach that carves out a way of operating that cannot be turned to negative ends;[5] relational sensibility comes with risks that accompany all peacebuilding policy and practice. This approach will also not satisfy those who see the ontology underpinning the relational sensibility discourse as having fundamental and unequivocal implications for our ways of thinking about and practicing peacebuilding. Overall, of course, ambivalent critical engagement with relational sensibility requires intellectual labor and mental gymnastics, and this can be taxing or challenging. Nonetheless, this paper demonstrates that it is possible to engage both positively and critically with the relational sensibility discourse. Relational sensibility generates new possibilities for practice and, if we are alive to its risks, the underlying ontology does not necessarily fall upon peacebuilders like a cloud that blinds us to the political and ethical implications of relational ways of thinking and acting.

[5] See, for example, how training in the social sciences, and especially greater knowledge of cultural others, has recently been embraced and deployed by the United States military: Besteman and the Network of Concerned Anthropologists (2009).

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Relational Sensibilities: The End of the Road for 'Liberal Peace'

David Chandler

Introduction

Today, classical 'liberal peace' approaches to post-conflict development, based on imposing a set of international policy-prescriptions founded on universalist understandings of the importance of liberal democracy, the rule of law and human rights, are out of favour. These approaches are seen to be externally-driven, hubristic – in their assumptions of external actors having the right policies and the means to attain them – and to express a narrow understanding of politics, focusing solely on the limited and artificial formal or public political sphere.[1] Approaches which appreciate the limits of the universalist approach but still adhere to the liberal peace ontology of external intervention, emphasize the alternative policy-approach based on the appreciation of 'relational sensibilities', as outlined by Morgan Brigg in the lead piece in this collection. The 'relational' understanding of the limits to peacebuilding interventions starts not with the artifice of international designs and blueprints but with the 'real', grounded problematic of the local or societal agents and actors and the processes, practices and interrelationships that shape their ideas and understandings (see further Schmidt 2013). These relational approaches emphasize the importance of local agency (often hidden or unrecognized) to fulfilling international aspirations.

This short response piece seeks to conceptually illustrate that the 'relational approach' is more akin to a pale imitation of the liberal peace than a critique of its underlying ontological assumptions. Relational critiques – focusing on plural understandings, respect for local agency and non-liberal understandings – remain stuck in the paradox of liberal peace: the contradiction between the claim to have a right to intervene (and thereby have some superior moral or material qualities) and the claim to treat those intervened upon as equals and to respect local cultures and values. The 'relational' critique has essentially operated at a different spatial level – the 'local' rather than state-level – but has not managed to provide any new coherent project or purpose for external intervention.[2] As the focus of peacebuilding has become increasingly relational and 'bottom-up', the aspirations of liberal peace transformations have been dissipated (the aims and goals of intervention have been much less aspirational) but relational approaches have provided no positive replacement. Even within the 'relational sensibilities' approach, as highlighted below, the contradictions of the liberal peace – between international blueprints based on universalist assumptions and accepting local conditions and contexts and therefore not having any rational basis for intervention – have been all too manifest. As a result of this failure, the relational approach has increasingly become reduced to celebrating the self-reflexivity of international interveners themselves. This retreat from any transformative peacebuilding project signals the end of the road for liberal peace understandings.

[1] Oliver Richmond describes the liberal peace approach as 'a model through which Western-led agency, epistemology and institutions, have attempted to unite the world order under a hegemonic system that replicates liberal institutions, norms, and political, social and economic systems' (2011: 1)

[2] Critical relational understandings seek to overcome the hierarchical divide between interveners and those intervened upon by rejecting the view that 'we know better' and seeking to wish away power inequalities by adopting more open, plural and egalitarian approaches to peacebuilding intervention. These approaches lack coherence as they still reproduce the external subject position of the liberal intervener, understood as neutral or technical expertise, external to the problematic; described well by Ole Jacob Sending as an 'Archimedean' approach, see Sending (2009). Pragmatist approaches overcome this bifurcation between 'external' and 'internal' perspectives by re-articulating the relational problematic and removing the external subject position of the intervener, see, for example, Moe and Vargas (2013). Approaches informed by philosophical pragmatism have their own problems but have the coherence lacking in relational approaches remaining within the liberal peace paradigm, see further Chandler, 'Resilience and the "Everyday": Beyond the Paradox of "Liberal Peace"', forthcoming.

The Rise and Rise of the Local

In the 1990's framings of liberal peace universalism, formal political processes at the local level were often problematized – for example, in terms of local elite resistance – and these problematic blockages to liberal international norms were understood as amenable to resolution through a combination of top-down, internationally-imposed carrots and sticks. Once local elites were removed from power or constrained, it was assumed that the externally drawn up plans for democracy-promotion or for peacebuilding could continue unhindered. However, these liberal interventionist aspirations have since dimmed in the wake of failures in the Balkans and in other post-conflict scenarios from Afghanistan to Iraq. The understanding of political blockages has shifted from the more easily accessible formal level of local state institutions to the less accessible level of societal relations. With this shift, the emphasis has moved from liberal, ends-based or goal-orientated interventions to understanding the limits to change in the relational or 'hybrid' politics of social or everyday practices and interactions.

Rather than being understood to be resisting through the political motivations of self-interest, elites are today more likely to be understood as lacking the capacity or the authority to implement Western policy-making goals. A recent book which upholds the linear approach, advocating that international actors should assert more leverage over recalcitrant elites, stands as an exception to the general trend in thinking in the post-conflict literature (Zürcher et al. 2013). Critical international relations theorizing – focused on the Western export of 'Liberal Peace' and the problematic nature of 'top-down' frameworks which ignore local societal influences – stresses the need for 'bottom up' theorizing; giving a much larger role to local agency and the spaces and mechanisms which need to be accessed in order to understand, empower and transform local actors. Rather than focusing on the formal public political sphere of domestic elites, analysts argue that researchers needed to go deeper into the societal sphere, particularly to those actors capable of expressing, influencing and shaping 'grass roots' opinion.

The sense of a 'disconnect' between formal political authority and social processes and practices is central to relational approaches to peacebuilding. In these framings, international policy-makers need to connect with, to understand and to enable or influence local agency, now seen as key to successful peacebuilding outcomes. For Jean Paul Lederach, a leading analyst in this area, the key to peacebuilding is not Western

knowledge or resources but local agency: 'The greatest resource for sustaining peace in the long term is always rooted in the local people and culture.' (Lederach 1997: 94) In this framework, locals are foregrounded, not in terms of formal political representation but in terms of the social processes and relationships in which they are embedded. The approach to the local is thus transformed to 'see people in the setting as resources, not recipients' (Lederach 1997: 94). In this way, there is a 'move beyond a simple prescription of answers and modalities from outside the setting' to 'empowering the resources, modalities, and mechanisms for building peace that exist within the context (Lederach 1997: 95). It is recognised that there is no quick diplomatic solution to conflicts that can be agreed and somehow imposed from the top-down or by external actors, rather, it is 'the healing of people and the rebuilding of the web of their relationships' which takes centre-stage (Lederach 1997: 78).

This may seem to be a radical departure from traditional theorizing but relational approaches tend not to focus on transforming economic and social relations but on the social associations, spaces and practices which are understood to reproduce them. Here, societal problems are addressed at the level of practices, ideas and cognitive frameworks held to produce the problematic reality or problematic responses to the stresses of post-conflict transformation. By shifting 'politics' to society, these approaches open up 'a new object, a new domain or field' for policy intervention (Foucault 2008: 295): the 'local'.[3] In relational approaches, the focus of the problematic is the local level, understood as the sphere within which political agency operates in the production and reproduction of barriers to – as well as the facilitation of – peace.

[3] See for example, the 'Local First' development and peacebuilding initiative, launched in November 2012, led by Peace Direct and supported by the Overseas Development Institute and linked into the UK Government's Building Stability Overseas Strategy (http://www.localfirst.org.uk/).

From Patronising the Local to Working on the Self

There are clear shortcomings associated with attempts to overcome the limits to liberal peace approaches through trying to intervene in and to influence 'local' socio-cultural understandings. Many of these attempts seem to reproduce the universalist assumptions of liberal peace universalism, merely operating at the level of the local rather than state institutions. Although there is the language of local knowledge and resources, needs and interests and the empowerment of local people, the policy aims and policy agenda remain very much ones in which enlightened Western external interveners, equipped with liberal universalist understandings, attempt to transform the barrier of local cultural–social frameworks through intervening in the inter-subjective understandings. Because intervention is consciously aimed at transforming the minds and understanding of local people – and thereby necessarily setting up a hierarchy of understanding – the gap between the external perspective and the 'local' arena becomes clearer the more the international 'empowerment' agenda extends into the society.

This becomes clear in projects such as the comprehensive 'rule of law' promotional campaigns, where internationally-funded NGOs seek to inculcate liberal understandings at the local community level. Often this work has been seen to be patronising and demeaning to those whom international interveners seek to 'empower'. The more extensively the internationals seek to engage with the relational complexities on the ground and the more culturally sensitive they seek to be, the more patronising the interventions become. Examples from one international rule of law project report include a 60-hour Culture of Lawfulness course to be taught in schools (NSIC 2011), encouraging the media to incorporate culture of lawfulness themes into documentaries, soap operas, game and talk shows (NSIC 2011: 9), therapeutic workshops for citizens to 'give voice to the obstacles and frustrations they face along their "journey" to a culture of lawfulness' (NSIC 2011: 11), an annual 'Most Legal and Most Safe Neighborhood' competition (NSIC 2011: 11), culture of lawfulness supported hip hop and rap festivals – including 'The Culture of Lawfulness is an Awesome Challenge' rap contest (NSIC 2011: 12, 27), public education billboards with personal testimonies concluding with the phrase: 'and YOU, what are YOU going to do for lawfulness?' (NSIC 2011: 13), pledges for lawfulness by the town mayor in front of primary school children (NSIC 2011: 16), local Chamber of Commerce prize 'Culture of Lawfulness is my Business' (NSIC 2011: 18), and a Culture of Lawfulness 'paint fest' (NSIC 2011: 24). Local pastors and lay preachers were even given manuals on how to introduce rule of law themes into their services (NSIC 2011: 26).

'Bottom-up', relational approaches such as these have been increasingly understood to be limited by the liberal universalist framings which they explicitly draw upon (and explicitly defend). Here the 'rule of law' was consciously articulated as an external rationality, as somehow the preserve of the West, meaning that any attempt to 'artificially' construct rule of law regimes hardly appeared feasible. Even the best and most determined (you could even say messianic) attempts to engage with the 'local', in order to transform cultural values, seemed to fall prey to the problems of 'artificiality' (which had already beset international attempts to export liberal peace norms and understandings at the formal, institutional or state-level). Furthermore, no matter how culturally sensitive these interventions were, they still – in fact, inevitably – produced hierarchical understandings, which problematised (even pathologised) local understandings and values, and came across as patronising and neo-colonial.

However, the alternative approach of adapting liberal understandings of legal and constitutional practices to local socio-cultural contexts, would appear to be equally problematic.

The paradox of liberal peace advocacy is fully highlighted in radical or critical 'relational' attempts to defend international intervention, but which deny that local culture will be necessarily seen in these liberal, 'problematic' ways by external interveners. For more critical or radical liberal peace theorists, intervention needs to be done in more self-reflexive ways which similarly seek to problematise Western understandings of liberal universality. These critical approaches are often drawn towards pluralist anthropological frameworks in order to develop an ethical methodology of intervention which can break free from the hierarchical understandings explicit in liberal internationalism. Here, the plural and 'hybrid' outcomes of international intervention are seen as positive and to be encouraged. In fact, the experience of intervention, it is alleged, can be a mutual learning exchange between intervener and those intervened upon; fixed cultural understandings on both sides can be challenged through 'unscripted conversations' and 'the spontaneity of unpredictable encounters' (see for e.g. Duffield 2007: 233–4; Richmond 2007: 177, see also Jabri 2007: 177).

The 'unscripted conversations' approach, however, raises the obvious question: 'Why then intervene in the first place?' The answer is that intervention is essentially a mechanism of inter-subjective enlargement of reflexivity, enabling an emancipation of both intervener and those intervened upon, through creating possibilities for both to free themselves from the socio-cultural constraints of their own societies and to share a pluralised ethos of peace which, through pluralising, goes beyond both liberal universalism and non-liberalism. As Morgan Brigg and Kate Muller argue:

> Conflict resolution analysts and practitioners might facilitate this process [of increasing exchange and understanding across difference] – something which has already begun – by openly examining and discussing their own cultural values within their practice. This can generate possibilities for more dynamic conflict resolution processes by extending the practice, also already underway, of opening to and learning from local and Indigenous capacities, including different ways of knowing, approaching and managing conflict (2009: 120–1, 135).

For Richmond, this plural and emancipatory peace, based on mutual learning and exchange, is thereby 'post-liberal' (2011). Here, cultural understandings are also seen as malleable and open to inter-subjective transformation, enabling liberal peace approaches to overcome the problems of conflict, crime and reconstruction but without privileging universalist understandings (although these views can be critiqued as no more than the anthropological ethics of cosmopolitan liberalism, this is not the focus here).[4]

[4] For an excellent critique along these lines see Shannon (1995: 659–80).

The paradox of liberal peace is merely brought into full focus in these critical approaches which have found it impossible to escape the emphasis on socio-cultural norms and values. The ethics of radical liberal peace are those of cultural pluralism and the 'respect and the recognition of difference' beyond the divide of 'liberal and non-liberal contexts' (Richmond 2009: 566). However, it is clear that the problematic is one that still shares much with the liberal universalist vision, merely questioning its ability to fully accept the existence of plurality (see also Sabaratnam 2013: 259–78). As Richmond argues: 'Behind all of this is the lurking question of whether liberal paradigms are able to engage with, and represent equitably non-liberal others – those for which it infers a lesser status' (2009: 570). For Richmond, the liberalism of liberal peace shapes the understanding of the problem as one of pluralisation that 'requires a privileging of non-liberal voices' and the 'ongoing development of local-liberal hybrid forms of peace' (2009: 578). As critics such as Audra Mitchell have pointed out, this framing problematically focuses on fixed or essentialised socio-cultural understandings, counter-positioning a 'liberal' international to a 'non-liberal' local (2011: 1623–45).

Conclusion

The approaches based upon relational sensibilities are often understood to be a critique of the liberal peace approach but whether they are grasped in terms of a neoliberal attention to errant or problematic 'local' rationalities or as radical or critical interventions based upon mutual 'unscripted conversations', relational approaches fail to break away from the paradox of liberal peace interventions. The paradox is generated by the need to justify external intervention and also claim to deny any relation of hierarchy with regard to those intervened upon. The problem is the hierarchical claims of interventionist power itself – which are merely reproduced in the discourses of relational sensibilities. In their epistemological critique of the hierarchy of liberal reason, relational approaches presuppose this hierarchy as their starting point.[5] The epistemological privileging of 'local' knowledge then becomes the basis of value pluralism, but always from the standpoint of the problems of liberal democracy and universalist approaches to public institutions and the rule of law (see for e.g. Brigg 2010; Mac Ginty 2008). As long as the discourse stays on the level of shared rationalities of spatially differentiated inter-subjective collectivities, both academic and policy discussion remains trapped in the paradox of liberal universalism and value relativism (Richmond 2009).

[5] A useful critique of the neoliberal, constructivist and post-structuralist understandings of culture as constructed meaning is Scott (2003).

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Strategic Essentialism and the Possibilities of Critique in Peacebuilding

Kai Koddenbrock

When Gayatri Spivak coined the term 'strategic essentialism' during the nascent debates about postcolonial theory, she was trying to uphold a sensitivity for the political need to assert difference and to insist on the existence of structural inequalities even though she acknowledged that this may, in fact, be ontologically untenable.[1] Reading Marx and Derrida into each other, Spivak's work constitutes one of the most sustained attempts to examine the pitfalls of materialism and deconstruction and what they might mean for the possibility of critique at the intersection between activism and academia. Our debate about the current state of peacebuilding mirrors many of the issues Spivak was grappling with at the time. As the previous contributions have shown, the politics of asserting difference – for instance, distinguishing the liberal from the non-liberal or the international from the local – is one of the core features of the debate in these pages.

All previous contributions revert to some kind of essentialism to make their point. Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism allows us to look at the strategic implications of these essentialisms. In their editorial, Chadwick, Debiel and Gadinger claim that peacebuilding entails 'working across division' such as the division of 'significant cultural difference' (Chadwick, Debiel and Gadinger, 8); clearly an essentializing claim on the parts of the authors. This implies that the essence of culture is one of the crucial components of peacebuilding. Morgan Brigg, then, posits a new relational discourse of intervention and peacebuilding practice which goes about the international–local divide differently and more skilfully. For him, this is the essence of current peacebuilding. He thus asserts that in the discursive and practical realm, the practice of peacebuilding has been improving. In his response, David Chandler accuses Brigg of representing the 'end of the road for 'liberal peace' because even relational peacebuilding practice would fall prey to the key paradox of liberal interventionism: if liberal intervention really took the intervened upon 'other' on equal terms, it would have no normative justification to intervene in the first place (Chandler, 20). Chandler goes on to accuse Brigg and Richmond and other critics of the liberal peace who advocate a more 'relational' or sensitive approach to peacebuilding of always taking intervention as a given (Chandler, 24). Chandler's strategic essentialism becomes visible when considering his broader body of work. His internal critiques of peacebuilding discourse have always ended with one of two claims: in discourses of intervention, the possibility of political struggle *or* the autonomy of the subject has been essentially and ontologically foreclosed.

After briefly introducing Spivak's notion of 'strategic essentialism', this short discussion paper investigates in more detail Chandler's and Brigg's strategies, introduces a recent critical strategy proposed by Meera Sabaratnam and ends with a proposal for critique that takes both the intervened upon and the structures of world society seriously. I will advocate a strategic essentialism that tries to be relational and totalizing at the same time. It essentializes the local by seeking his or her perspective on intervention and essentializes the structures of world society in order to critique the self-evidence of Western intervention. This is a conscious strategy with potential for political clout.

[1] I am grateful to Wanda Vrasti for bringing the term ‚strategic essentialism' back to my attention during a recent discussion.

Spivak's understanding of strategic essentialism

What is Spivak's understanding of 'strategic essentialism'?[2] In discussing the work of the Indian Subaltern Studies collective, one of the cradles of postcolonial theorizing, Spivak advocated a 'strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously political interest' (1988: 205). In doing so she was suggesting that essentialising difference, such as cultural difference or the difference of historical experiences, could be justified when done so judiciously to achieve a political objective. However, the way in which this was done was what mattered to Spivak; the problematic of speaking *for* someone must always be reflected upon.

The Subaltern Studies collective rethought the history of India through a Marxist lens in order to retrieve the 'subaltern consciousness' (Spivak 1988: 205) needed to build a postcolonial India. Spivak was largely sympathetic to the project but cautioned that academics should always be conscious 'that it [the consciousness] can never be continuous with the subaltern's situational and uneven entry into the political (not merely disciplinary, as in the case of the collective) hegemony as the content of an after-the-fact description' (1988: 208). That is, historians and philosophers retrieving that 'subaltern consciousness' should always be cognizant that what they make this consciousness to be does not necessarily map the consciousness of the actual subaltern in India. But this, Spivak argued should not preclude academics from strategically deploying this essentialized notion of 'subaltern consciousness' in order to make their politico–historiographic point.

With the rise of feminism and postcolonial theory in the US since the 1980s, Spivak's Derridan deconstruction became highly influential. However the term 'strategic essentialism' began to be used as a catch-phrase that often came with the assumption that anti-essentialism was *the* right ontology and Spivak felt obliged to clarify her understanding of 'strategy' in an interview on the issue. In that interview she spoke about the 'possibility of mobilizing people to do political work without invoking some irreducible essentialism; ultimately, how we can determine when our essentializing strategies have become traps, as opposed to having strategic and necessary positive effects' (1993: 3). She argued that 'deconstruction

[2] Spivak later distanced herself from the use of the term but retained its meaning. See below.

doesn't say there *is* something like the decentered subject… To think about the danger of what is useful, is not to think that the dangerous thing does not exist' (1993: 10). Strategy, then, consists in the continuous assessment and critique of one's conceptual and political choices, constantly reflecting upon their dangers and potential achievement.

Strategy and essentialism in our debate

I think that our debate in these pages is in large parts about the kind of 'strategic essentialism' we employ. It may be worthwhile to render this explicit. Morgan Brigg, for example, welcomes the inherent ambivalence of the 'relational sensibility'. For him, it allows one to be 'more alive to the agency of local people' but also enables one to zero in on the way 'evolving peacebuilding practices entrench or reproduce power relations'. Brigg thus advocates a strategy of ambivalence. For him, what is happening in current peacebuilding critique and practice is both worrying and promising. He embraces this as a satisfying call for 'ambivalent critical engagement' (Brigg, 17). Ultimately, this is his understanding of the strategic role of the academic; dealing with ambivalence and dissecting its various implications. It also implies that intervention is there to be improved, not overcome.

David Chandler, by contrast, consistently refuses to open himself up to such ambivalence. While his positions have centred around two core themes – Empire and the autonomous subject – over time, they often come in definitive and strategic form. Chandler is one of the most prolific critics of IR intervention research. His acute meta-critical observations of intervention scholarship have shifted from 'faking democracy' (1999) to 'Empire in denial' (2006), 'hollow hegemony' (2009), 'post-liberal governance' (2010) to a 'world of attachment' (2013). The implications of Chandler's observations have oscillated between two poles: first, an implicit ontology of global order in which the West continues to be imperial or hegemonic or, second, the loss of purposeful political action because of the demise of the belief (or even a claim to the ontological impossibility of belief) in the autonomy of the subject.

On the face of it, Chandler's two positions are hard to reconcile, however they become entirely coherent when seen as 'strategic essentialisms'. Either Chandler essentializes the imperial West as a global capitalist and powerful force or he essentializes the autonomous subject as the only strategic hope in a world that is denying the potential of the liberal human subject (as is apparent in current debates on complexity and resilience) (2013). Chandler's strategy consists in either claiming a strong totality-like Empire or in positing a purposeful subject because these essentialisms are the best critical

strategy at a given time and given the reigning ontology of the world.

Sabaratnam's de-colonial approach

Let me bring in a third approach to pave the way for my proposed intervention critique. In her critique of the '*Avatars of Eurocentrism*' (2013) existing in the liberal peace debate, Meera Sabaratnam's 'de-colonial' approach to intervention critique contains a two-fold reorientation of intervention research. Firstly, in order to move beyond Eurocentric research, she argues – in a way akin to 'relational sensibility' – that the perspectives of the intervened-upon should be taken seriously. Rather than as participants or 'owners' (as postulated by the local ownership discourse), she suggests that the political vision and experiences of 'alienation' of the intervened-upon should be taken into account. This alienation stems not from their being alien or their 'cultural difference' but in large parts from the 'colonial difference' resulting from their experience of colonialism and their continuing situation of 'coloniality' (2013: 272). Secondly, she argues for issues of political economy to be examined in particular. These comprise factors such as 'differentials in aid salaries between internationals and nationals' or 'problems of chronic and deep public indebtedness in post-conflict states' (2013: 273).

I support this approach fully, apart from one aspect: Sabaratnam's critique shares a key feature of the 'relational sensibility' in intervention scholarship in that it advocates for internal critique only. According to Sabaratnam, even issues of political economy ought to be approached by looking at 'the interpretations given by people of their own situations' (2013: 273). Studying the world 'at arm's length' (2013: 273) is thus not allowed. The strategy here consists in essentializing the perspectives of those immediately concerned; they become the one and only source of intervention critique. While it is clearly important not to perpetuate the lack of attention to the perspectives of the people concerned (an attention that is important to Brigg as well), advocating for critique that *only* works through relationality limits the depth and breadth of that critique. If you are forced to see the world through the eyes of someone else, critique is policed. By presuming to enter critique from an internal perspective only, the political and performative power of external critique is foreclosed from the start. Despite its effective call to get rid of the 'avatars of Eurocentrism' Sabaratnam's de-colonial approach to intervention critique shares some of the problems of the relational approaches that have come to dominate intervention critique recently.

An alternative strategy: relating and totalizing

In the remainder of my contribution, I want to argue for a strategy of two-fold essentialism to undermine the self-evidence of intervention and peacebuilding. This critical strategy consists in taking empirical reality seriously by relating to the intervened upon anthropologically meanwhile complementing this relational and internal critique that is visible in Brigg and Sabaratnam with an explicit openness to social totality in the Critical Theory tradition (Adorno et al. 1972, Toscano 2012). This strategy thus consists in a reading of the experiences of the intervened and the location of peacebuilding and intervention in the structures of world society with its nation-state form and capitalist logic. This is obviously a challenging project and in no way sufficiently developed yet, however it offers a solution to some of the shortcomings of the approaches discussed thus far.

This strategy does not, for instance, take intervention as a given 'mechanism of inter-subjective enlargement of reflexivity, enabling an emancipation of both intervener and those intervened upon' which David Chandler has, I think, rightly identified in Brigg's contribution (Chandler, 24). Brigg does indeed see intervention as a given reality that we have no choice but to improve not to overcome. Yet Chandler's shifting strategic essentialism might not be the whole answer either. Sabaratnam's approach offers a step in the right direction. She does not take intervention as a given and is nevertheless interested in the experiences of those intervened upon, but her approach precludes the potential of external critique.

Putting the strategy to work

To highlight how this strategy might work, I will first engage in the relational step by drawing on a case study before moving on to the totalizing element of the strategy. When I was doing field research in eastern Congo in 2009, the provincial government attempted to pass a law which forced international NGOs to pay taxes and accept increased provincial government oversight. The provincial government tried to involve the UN and the foreign NGOs early in the process but these agencies did not respond. Only when the interveners realized that the government was serious did they start to act. Officially, they attempted to deflect the entire regulation by writing protest notes and exerting pressure. In addition, they invited the government to join 'their' coordination system instead. Informally, the views of most of those involved could be paraphrased as the exclamation: 'This is pure corruption, they simply want our money. How do they dare tax us and control us. We are doing free work for them.' In essence, they considered this democratic expression of political aims as illegitimate because of a perceived culture of corruption.

The provincial planning minister in charge of the regulation obviously had a different perspective on the issue. During an interview he told me about the objective and rationale of the proposed regulation:

> Ok. And now every organization has to announce itself when it arrives. Because at the time of which I told you I talked about jungle. [Previous interview passage: 'the internationals thought they were in a jungle']. An organization could come here and does not come see the authorities but it's like by chance when you are walking around that you realize that this particular organization has opened shop in that particular corner of the Province. When you ask for their papers, 'no, I have already arranged everything with Kinshasa'. And us at the local level, the local authorities you don't know them? I told them that, still, you are coming to me, I do not want to be surprised finding someone in my living room without knowing how he managed to enter. You must knock first, that is the minimum. You announce yourself. Once you have announced yourself someone will say 'come in'. And someone will show you where to sit down. You cannot come in ignoring that this house has an owner. You will sit down in the living room, even worse, go straight to the bedroom. No, it doesn't work like that.[3]

The result of this battle was that the taxation plan was watered down but still partly implemented. Furthermore, NGOs were from then on much more cautious about enjoying their operational leeway too openly.

The relational perspective on this episode tells us that Western intervention can still be a very neo-colonial and racist undertaking in the eyes of the intervened-upon. The imagery used by the minister is very evocative. Relating to the intervened-upon not only matters in terms of their 'cultural difference' but because they provide evidence of the overall legitimacy of the peacebuilding enterprise.

The totalizing perspective instead brings into view the structural and political economy components of intervention. This boils down to the role of humanitarianism in contemporary world society. Depending on the structuralist vocabulary used, this may mean scrutinizing the role of peacebuilding and intervention in processes of capital accumulation.[4] This would link the study of peacebuilding and intervention to the

[3] Author's interview in Goma on 9 October 2009

[4] Luhmannian or Parsonian structuralists would obviously seek a different entry into systemic processes.

various attempts in social theory to make sense of contemporary capitalism.

Klaus Dörre's understanding of 'Landnahme' (Dörre et al. 2009: Ch. 2) or David Harvey's take on spaces of intervention in terms of urbanization and accumulation (2006: Ch. 13) offer ways to go about such a structuralist, political economy perspective on intervention cognizant of the capitalist social totality it is situated in. This approach would capture peacebuilding as a 'glocal' mechanism to deal with those areas that are ripe for 'original accumulation'. Business takes place in a rather informal way and the formalization of some of the business taking place in areas like Eastern Congo provides opportunities to increase profits. The archipelagic political economy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, then, comes with an archipelago of intervention actors which create opportunities for profit among the local and national business elites (Buescher and Vlassenroot 2010). Goma, the intervention hub near the border of Rwanda, boasts numerous hotels and businesses operating regionally and even globally. It is also a market for Western security companies selling their services both to Western interveners and the Goma upper class (Koddenbrock and Schouten 2014). There is thus a potential to study the capitalist interaction of these processes and practices.

Another perspective still, would look at the flows of capital and people involved in intervention. Peacebuilding pays well; it provides a lot of jobs for a large number of well-educated, mobile, middle class citizens from the West. It provides livelihoods for hundreds of thousands of them. Looking at the exact nature of these dynamics would be an important component in examining the political economy of peacebuilding and locating it in the global structures and flows of capital.

The crucial strategic difference in this approach to that of Sabaratnam is that the political economy of peacebuilding and intervention is allowed to be critiqued in this way without hermeneutically adopting the view of the Congolese in Goma. The latter is very important, too, but not the only legitimate perspective on critique.

The strategic essentialisms employed throughout our discussion imply different politics. Chadwick, Debiel and Gadinger will be working analytically on bridging the gap between different cultures. Brigg will be active in improving the practice of peacebuilding although he is aware of the problematic discourses within which it is taking place. Chandler sees his role as providing relentless and constant meta-reflection in a contrapuntal fashion to the academic trends of the day.

A strategic essentialism that is relational and totalizing, one that is willing to accord a central role to processes and structures of political economy as well as relate to the alienated subjects of intervention, is what I defend. The nature of capitalism has again moved to the forefront of our attention and

there is a need to question its salience as much when talking about financial crises as about peacebuilding and intervention. The 'relational–totalizing' critique described here might be one step in that direction.

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Peacebuilding on Bougainville: International Intervention Meets Local Resilience

Volker Boege

Introduction

As Chadwick, Debiel and Gadinger point out in their editorial for this edition of *Global Dialogues,* a 'key issue' in the context of the 'critical debate on the relationship between international intervention and local legitimacy' is the 'changing nature of the interaction between the "international" and the "local" in discourses and practices of peacebuilding interventions'. By taking you to the island of Bougainville in the South Pacific, I'd like to explore an instructive case of such international–local interaction. In doing so, I try to link this case to what Morgan Brigg has to say about 'relational sensibility' in the lead article of this publication.

For almost ten years (1989 to 1998) Bougainville, which is part of the independent state of Papua New Guinea (PNG), was the theatre of a war of secession. Over the last decade and a half, it has undergone a comprehensive process of post-conflict peacebuilding, and currently it is in the phase of state formation.

An international military–civil intervention played a major role in the early stages of peacebuilding. The Truce Monitoring Group (TMG) and later Peace Monitoring Group (PMG) on Bougainville was an unarmed force, comprised of both military and civilian personnel (men and women) from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Vanuatu.

By looking at this TMG/PMG I want to make the points that a) in the course of the processes of interaction and exchange a recalibration of relationships between internationals and people on the ground (the 'locals') took place, and that b) this in part reflected practices informed by a discourse of relational sensibility (as described by Morgan Brigg in his lead article) on the side of the internationals, and in part was the result of their unplanned and unintentional adjustments made when confronted with various forms of resistance by the local people, and that c) both were of major significance for the relative success of the intervention, but at the same time had obvious limits.[1]

Crucial dimensions of local–international peacebuilding exchanges

Let me address five aspects which turned out to be critical for the local–international interface on Bougainville: time, spirituality, gender, legitimacy and power relations. These aspects are of importance both for peacebuilding processes and for cross-cultural exchanges and communication. It is current conventional peacebuilding wisdom that to get the timing right is crucial for success; at the same time, culturally different concepts of time can severely impact peacebuilding processes.

[1] This short text only looks at the changes on the side of the internationals. Of course, the perceptions, attitudes and practices of the locals also changed in the course of the interactions, but this is beyond the scope of my reflections here. Moreover, it has to be taken into account that the topic/story is presented through the eyes of a Western academic. The internationals have documented this story in ways easily accessible for a Western academic like me (reports, books, other written material, or interviews that follow a shared understanding of rationality and reason and a shared horizon of meaning). So what is presented here is the internationals' side of the story, from the perspective of a specific research interest, namely the interest in changes to their intervention induced by the everyday international–local interface. The story/stories told by the Bougainvilleans would be different, as would a narrative focusing on changes on their side.

In a similar vein, concepts of legitimacy can be culturally different and even contradictory, and again, the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of peacebuilding actors and activities are crucial for success. While gender (sensitivity) now figures prominently at the conceptual and programmatic level of peacebuilding and often is used as a marker of cultural difference (with internationals often claiming superior gender sensitivity), practice on the ground shows things are much more messy and complicated. By contrast, the spiritual dimension of peacebuilding hardly has any traction in international peacebuilding concepts and programmes, but it only too often turns out to be of major importance in the local peacebuilding context. Finally, the importance of power cannot be overlooked. Power relations and imbalances, to a large extent, determine the scope and shape of relational sensibility.

By taking a closer look at these five aspects it might become clearer what relational sensibility means in a concrete peacebuilding context, to what extent it actually steers and imbues peacebuilding practice, and what its (material, cultural or epistemological) limitations are.

Time

The concepts of time of the interveners and of the locals in Bougainville differed considerably. Interveners tried to impose their own timeframes, but at the end of the day had to adjust to 'Melanesian time'. The Australian military commander of the PMG, for example, makes the point that 'Canberra' (that is, the Australian government) underestimated the complexity of the Bougainville situation and therefore presented the PMG with over-ambitious timetables. He says: 'But I learned that Melanesian clocks differ from other timepieces … I quickly adapted to the Melanesian approach … [and] although there was significant early pressure from Canberra to speed up the process, I learned that it had to progress at the pace' of the locals (Osborn 2001: 52–3). Nevertheless, 'many in the Australian system did not really understand why the peace process moved at what, to them, seemed a frustratingly slow pace' (Regan 2010: 79).

On the ground, the PMG initially 'concentrated on patrolling to as many villages as possible to hand out printed material. They convened peace awareness meetings, delivered their message and left' (Breen 2001: 45). This rushed approach met with disapproval and resistance from the locals. As a result, 'over time patrols spent longer in villages … Patrols took the time to listen to stories, appreciating the world of villagers and creating empathy and trust' (Breen 2001: 47). In short, in the everyday exchange of locals and interveners, the locals largely succeeded in imposing their pace of doing things on the interveners and in forcing the internationals to adjust their pre-planned timetables to local needs and customs.

The limits of that adjustment, however, are obvious: the PMG commander speaks about the difference between 'Melanesian clocks' and 'other timepieces'. This way of talking implies a shared universal concept of time. Perhaps Melanesian time is not clock-time at all, that is: linear, measurable time. A different cultural understanding of time can have profound impacts on peacebuilding, for instance if 'past'events of the linear clock-time are in fact still considered 'present'. In Bougainville the dead fighters of the war are still fighting today, because their bodies have not yet been laid to rest according to the appropriate customary burial and reconciliation ceremonies. Time is not a universal given – it is something different for peacekeepers, trees, villagers in the mountains of Bougainville and for men in suits in Canberra or at UN headquarters in New York.

Spirituality

One female Australian peace monitor reported: 'I experienced one healing ceremony, two crusades and a number of discussions with women who had just talked with Jesus' (Parry 2001: 106), and she was very moved by these experiences. Engaging with this spiritual dimension of peacebuilding was not initially planned for. However, sitting through five-hour long church services Sunday after Sunday, for example, a voluntary activity at the beginning, was made compulsory for peace monitors later. The internationals realized how useful this was for building and maintaining relationships with the devout locals. Again, the limits of that adjustment are obvious: it remained very much an instrumental approach. For internationals coming from a Western, secular, presumably enlightened and rational, background, it is difficult to earnestly engage with the spiritual, the sacred as a form of 'denied knowledge' (Homi Bhabha), to actually become open to emotional and spiritual sensation and intuition and appreciate the role of myth and ritual in peacebuilding.

The Ni-Vanuatu, the Fiji i-Taukei as well as the Maori in the NZ contingent had much less problems relating to this spiritual dimension; they share a common cultural background with the Bougainvilleans. A Fijian monitor said: 'We Fijians felt very much at home when operating in Bougainville because of our shared Melanesian heritage …We have the same kind of food in our villages and a similar sense of humour to the Bougainvilleans' (Sorby 2001: 117).[2] The i-Taukei, Ni-Vanuatu and Maori often felt uncomfortable with the way their white-skinned colleagues engaged with the Bougainvilleans, finding them 'vulgar, hedonistic and lacking cultural sensitivity' (Breen 2001: 44) – no 'relational sensibility' here.

[2] Appreciating other cultures' food is on the one hand the most superficial way of engaging with cultural difference, the 'exotic other'. The Australian TV channels, for example, are overflowing with food programs, taking the viewers to the most exotic places of the world and showing them what is cooked there and how; multicultural events in Australia often revolve around the food the different ethnic groups put on the table. On the other hand, in a different cultural context – and definitely in Bougainville – offering and sharing of food has a deep social and spiritual meaning and thus is an important aspect of building and restoring relationships and hence of peacebuilding. The Fijian peace monitor most probably understood this dimension of 'food' – I'm not so sure about his Australian colleagues. A similar point can be made about humour – the second element in the quote.

Far from being a 'soft' issue, the spiritual dimension touches the fundamentals of peacebuilding interventions, not least the conceptualisation of peace itself. One peace monitor says:

> I began to realize that my understanding of 'peace' was too narrow to encompass its much more complex meaning for many Bougainvilleans. We peace monitors tended to define peace in terms of the formal truce and cease-fire agreements …. We went to villages with copies of the Burnham, Lincoln and Arawa agreements … We poorly grasped that peace meant dealing with … less tangible elements… On a more complex level, which I only glimpsed, Bougainvilleans seemed committed to 'spiritual rehabilitation'. Calls for 'spiritual rehabilitation' were linked to attempts to articulate the kind of society that they wanted to build… (Ruiz-Avila 2001: 98–9).

The last sentence of the quote indicates how misleading Western peacebuilding notions of 'local culture' as a-political are, and it hints at the fundamental political significance of culture, spirituality and emotion. God(s), spirits, the ancestors and the unborn, the holy bushes and trees and the totem animals of the clans on Bougainville are embedded in networks that transcend the culture–nature divide and the human–nonhuman divide; they are 'actors' in their own right with the capacity to make a difference. Peacebuilding has to take the nonhuman dimensions of the world, both material and spiritual, into account – a point that Morgan Brigg stresses when reflecting on a 'flatter ontology' linked to 'understanding peacebuilding practice in terms of a relational sensibility'.

Gender

Similar to spiritual rehabilitation, and despite increasing levels of awareness at programmatic levels, 'gender issues' are easily discredited as 'soft' and 'non-essential' by internationals. A female monitor explains that the peace intervention 'risked missing the boat with a key peace process resource – the women. We had applied our European attitudes to Bougainville and had not realized the role that women had customarily played' (Castell 2001: 121). In fact, given the strong societal status of women in the (mostly matrilineal) communities on Bougainville and given the decisive role the women had played in the transition from war to peace, engaging with the women was of utmost importance for the recalibration of exchanges between interveners and locals. Given that male and female spheres, both in the material and the spiritual dimension, are to a large extent separate in Bougainville society, male peace monitors could not have done what the females were able to do.

When presenting the success of the PMG to the outside world, the male political and military leadership of the intervention managed to bolster its image by stressing the gender and female component as an important aspect of proclaimed relational sensibility. However, this was not in the original plan and was initially met with ignorance and even resistance by the masculine and hierarchical military and by a male leadership that made a distinction between 'real' men's politics and 'soft' women's issues. Increasing 'gender-sensitivity', an integral aspect of relational sensibility, can be seen as an appreciation of formerly marginalized voices and as an expression of a more participatory and inclusive approach (and hence as a positive effect of the relational sensibility discourse). On the other hand, it also can be seen as a means to fill a gap in the intervention so as to reconfigure and expand the interveners' overall control and power (and hence as instrumentalising the relational sensibility discourse for anti-emancipatory ends).

Legitimacy

The internationals thought of themselves, their presence on the ground and their activities as legitimate from the outset. They were on Bougainville at the invitation of the PNG government and the secessionist leadership, in accordance with the laws of host and home countries and international norms and on the basis of written agreements between governments. This bestowed upon them a normative and international legitimacy, but not domestic empirical legitimacy, that is, legitimacy in the eyes of the locals.

Understandings of legitimacy of internationals and locals can differ widely, with the locals' concept of legitimacy reaching far beyond rational–legal legitimacy in the sphere of anthropocentric governance – spirits, totem animals and trees, for instance, can also play a role in creating or recognising legitimacy. Again, it was only in everyday exchanges with the locals that the internationals learned that they cannot take their own legitimacy for granted and that for the locals it was not only (and at times not even primarily) the rational–legal legitimacy of the formal state institutions that counted, but that other dimensions of legitimacy (e.g. traditional and charismatic legitimacy in the Weberian sense) also figure prominently.

There was thus a gulf between what the internationals thought the locals should see as legitimate and what, for the locals, actually was legitimate. This forced the internationals to change how and with whom they engaged (village chiefs,

clan elders, prophets of so-called cargo cults, healers, warlords, God(s), spirits, trees assumed new significance with respect to legitimacy). This was crucial for the recalibration of exchanges, but only went so far – relational sensibility had its limits, both with regard to improving capacities to understanding 'the other' and in terms of creating a willingness to engage with legitimate authorities of 'alien' origins.

Power

Local actors were successful in their insistence on having an unarmed intervention, despite considerable initial concerns expressed by the interveners (the Australian military in particular) who were uneasy about being unarmed in a volatile, post-conflict situation. It meant that the interveners were dependent on the locals for their security and protection. Reluctantly, however, the internationals learned to appreciate the advantages of this arrangement. It put them in the position of invited guests and the locals in the position of caring hosts in a network of emerging relationships. In Bougainville, as in many other societies, the hosts' responsibility for the security and wellbeing of their guests is taken very seriously. Hence this arrangement provided a fairly robust security guarantee for the internationals who became part of the local context.[3]

On the other hand, this host–guest power dynamic impacted on the power relations between the internationals and the locals in the latter's favour. This is a strong reminder of the fact that power does not disappear in the world of complexity, fluidity, emergence and flatter ontology; some actors necessarily have more potential to make a difference in certain situations than others – contrast, for instance, armed militias and unarmed peacekeepers, or donors with coffers of money and subsistence farmers in need of cash to pay school fees.

Conclusion

It should have become clear from elaborating on the five points above that international actors were not able to impose their way of doing things on the locals – who were far from being just 'recipients' of the internationals' peacebuilding agenda. In the course of the everyday local–international exchange, this agenda was re-articulated and re-shaped, and so were attitudes, perceptions, understandings and behaviours (of all actors involved), leading to a recalibration of relationships. It can be argued that in this context, demonstrating relational sensibility was both an expression of the internationals' relative weakness and a strategy to regain and reconfigure control and power.

[3] Note that the boundaries of 'the international' and 'the local' are blurred. 'The international' is always embedded locally; it is constituted by the connections between different locales. Such an understanding which 'flattens' 'the international' challenges the conventional view of the 'international' as being independent from and of a 'higher' level than the local.

[4] It would be interesting to find out to what extent 'success stories' like Bougainville peacebuilding instigated the rise of the 'relational sensibility' discourse – given that in fact a strong case for 'relational sensibility' can be built on the Bougainville experience. In other words: Is it not only 'frustrations and failures' of conventional peacebuilding interventions which have triggered a 'new way of thinking' about the 'roles of the interveners and intervened' and which gave prominence to the 'relational sensibility' approach, as Morgan Brigg points out, but also rather positive experiences with more unconventional interventions like the one on Bougainville?

One might conclude that, in the Bougainville case, the internationals were prudent – and weak! – enough to (be forced to) engage with cultural difference and show (at least some) relational sensibility. This contributed to the relative success of the intervention, and even, one might argue, to the progression of the 'relational sensibility' discourse.[4] At the same time, however, this engagement remained within the internationals' own cultural and epistemological comfort zone and confines, with 'the other', the local ways of being, doing and knowing (conflict, peace, culture…) merely seen as challenging and/or enriching Western ways. In other words: relational sensibility had its limits. Moreover, relational sensibility was also used in an instrumental way so as to reconfigure the internationals' control and power in the international–local relationship. To explore the reasons for the limitations of relational sensibility and to disentangle its (potential) positive and negative aspects, its 'promise and pitfalls' for peacebuilding (Chadwick, Debiel and Gadinger, 10), would make interesting research.

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Relationality and Pragmatism in Peacebuilding: Reflections on Somaliland

Louise Wiuff Moe

'Relational sensibility', as described by Morgan Brigg in the lead piece, provides an alternative angle to prevailing critiques of liberal peace governance. The account of 'relational sensibility' also reveals points of – and possibilities for – connection and exchange between peace analysis and other streams of thought, theory and practice (global governance, social sciences, the humanities, ethnomethodology etc.).

In this piece I am interested in how a focus on relationships and relationality (i.e. one aspect of the 'relational sensibility' discourse), combined with a pragmatist focus on everyday context, may help to think about international engagement beyond the problematic of 'liberal thought vs. local practice/custom'. First, I briefly reflect on the conceptual aspects of this proposition, then I elaborate and illustrate these thoughts through a case study of peace and justice initiatives in Somaliland.

From abstract frameworks to everyday practice – conceptual reflections

Most current critical peace studies draw on conceptual frameworks that work on a post-colonial logic aiming to show 'how 'centers' grudgingly remain the centers (that is, the West) but also to de-center – to expose or celebrate the narratives and stories elsewhere, the non-Western accounts of history' (Hawittmeyer 2012). This maintains a focus on the meeting between the hegemonic liberal peace strategy and the localized everyday reality.

The 'relational sensibility' outlook instead seems to suggest that the centers have already been moved, for better or worse: local practices, capacities and norms have become key targets for peace interventions. Consequently, interventions now often operate through complex and hybrid micro-engagement rather than only through top-down, macro-strategy. 'Relational sensibility' is, then, presented as a 'shift to the local' in intervention approaches and is associated with increased sensitivity to local dynamics and agency or, on the flipside, with new ways of governmentalizing hybridity, or, apparently, both.

As such, the notion of 'relational sensibility' sounds somewhat whimsical. Yet it may in fact hold possibilities for practical anchoring. In particular, the foregrounding of relationships and relationality in how we think about peacebuilding could be combined with a pragmatist focus on addressing concrete context (Chandler, forthcoming). This may assist in moving beyond the abstract problematic of 'liberal thought vs. local custom/culture' that shape current debates on liberal peace and its limits.

Overarching, strategic liberal peace frameworks, based on universalist notions of the individual/the self and the state, are criticized for being unsuited to local, pluralistic realities. These critiques are commonly made on the basis of cultural

difference – i.e. cultural difference, and the failure of liberal frameworks to mediate cultural difference, is seen as a central obstacle to peace. Yet, while universalism is critiqued, the focus of this critique tends to remain on the meeting between different 'communities' and 'cultures' (state/custom, liberal/local etc.) that are ultimately treated as relatively discreet, co-existing or interacting communities and institutions.[1] Consequently, the framings of socio-cultural pluralism risk simply transposing the problem of the 'separative self' (and entity-thinking more generally) to a different level and, moreover, risk reproducing 'dead end' policy approaches that seek to adapt 'the local' to liberal frameworks, or ineffectively bending liberal frameworks in order to adapt them to the local. Liberal peace and its critiques, in brief, appear to remain stuck on the problem of the apparent gap between universalist liberal frameworks and the 'local everyday' (Chandler, forthcoming; see also Cowan et al. 2001).

The anti-foundationalist approaches of pragmatism and relationality, in contrast, do not engage the problem of liberal universalism versus local socio-cultural pluralism. Instead these approaches posit a reality in which there are no 'tightly bounded subjects and objects, and therefore no gap to be bridged, but which yet does not fall into undifferentiated wholeness' (Nelson 2001: 145). Rather, 'separation and connection' are in dynamic 'co-creation and … tension with each other' (Ibid: 143). Through this lens the everyday is understood as made up by contestations, cooperation and experiences through which people and institutions are constitutively linked in complex ways (Brigg 2008; Englund 2004; Albrecht & Moe, forthcoming).

In sum, pragmatism directs attention to the everyday practices, strategies and institutions as the basis for addressing concrete problems at hand. Relationality provides clues about the dynamism and processes of the everyday. Through this lens, then, problems and solutions are 'no longer debated in the formal framings of the export of liberal institutions, laws and rights'; instead approaches and engagement are based on 'how practices work in a particular context' (Chandler, forthcoming: 2).

The following section grounds the discussion in a case study of an international NGO working with local approaches to enhancing security, peace and justice in Somaliland. The case study illustrates both the practical possibilities of working with everyday practices and relationships, and the futility of seeking to impact practice through revising legal frameworks.

A case study of a peace and justice initiative[2]

During the early 2000s, following an escalation of conflicts and revenge killings in the region of Toghdeer in Somaliland,[3] a small group of traditional authorities from the region got together to discuss the issue. They reached the conclusion that strengthening the cooperation among the different security providers (in particular traditional leaders and state providers) was necessary to deal with this increasing insecurity. They approached an international NGO (INGO), working with local security and protection, and requested support for convening dialogues among leading clan elders from the different clans and sub-clans of the region, and between the elders and other security actors (state providers and also religious leaders). At the time the INGO was in the process of developing an approach to enhancing local security and access to justice, and was looking for local partners. An agreement was reached that the traditional leaders would get support for the peace building dialogues, and in addition to peace/security they would address the issue of access to justice – especially for people holding weaker positions within the linage system (women, IDPs and minority clan members).

As the partnership got up and running, the first dialogue in the Toghdeer region brought together over 100 traditional authorities from five clans in the region, as well as religious leaders and state security providers. This generated wider interest and the initiative spontaneously spread: the Toghdeer dialogue was followed by regional dialogue meetings in Sahel, Awdal, Maroodi Jeex, Sool and Sanag Regions. In some districts in the Sool and Sanag regions peace committees consisting of Aquils[4] representing the clans and sub-clans inhabiting the districts were later established to provide more permanent forums for interaction and experience-sharing among Aquils from different sub-clans, and between them and the district authorities.

Following the dialogues, a number of longstanding regional conflicts (in particular conflicts over water, grazing and land) were addressed through mediation efforts led by traditional authorities and supported by religious leaders and local state officials. There was, moreover, a decrease in revenge killings and a corresponding increase in the number of murder cases being handed over to, and processed by, the courts. Both traditional authorities and authorities from the judiciary, confirmed that the practice of shielding the perpetrators of murder from the courts had been considerably reduced. The traditional authorities – for the sake of the common interest in security – had reached greater consensus (across districts/regions) to disapprove of this practice and had managed to mobilize their constituency more effectively in putting concerted pressure on conflicting parties to refrain from hiding perpetrators of revenge killing from the courts. The police would, in turn, occasionally assist in enabling *Xeer*[5] negotiations by arresting suspects for the duration of the negotiation process – to in this way avoid disruptions and revenge killings during the process.[6]

[1] This tendency is apparent, for example, in the hybridity discourse— one of the current key streams of critiques of top-down liberal peace—when hybrid orders are represented as socio-political formations 'where formal and informal elements co-exist' (Kraushaar and Lambach 2009: 1), or, in the post-colonial sense, when the conceptual and analytical focus remains on the two defined subjects of the external/colonial power and the local/colonized subject (Peterson 2012).

[2] The case study draws substantially on the article 'Custom, contestation and co-operation: peace and justice promotion in Somaliland'. Moe, L. & M. Vargas 2013, in *Conflict, Security & development* 13 (4): 393-416. The article provides information regarding the field data and interviews substantiating the analysis of the case.

[3] Revenge killings typically happen when a clan or sub-clan, involved in a conflict, is unable or unwilling to pay compensation as required by the Xeer, and the aggrieved clan responds by killing the perpetrator or other members of his clan. This may set off spirals of revenge killings, which can be infinite. Revenge killings often escalate as a result of the clan hiding the perpetrator/accused clan member, and refusing to hand him over to the courts (state or customary).

[4] The Aquil institution is a hybrid rather than a purely traditional institution, through which the British exercised indirect rule. In contemporary Somaliland the Aquils are the category of traditional authorities who are most actively and directly involved (as mediators, peacemakers and judges).

[5] Somali customary law.

[6] No claim is made here that the dialogues, or the INGO support, was the only factor in initiating these changes. As noted, this reflection piece builds on qualitative data and field observations as the basis for discussing the ways in which INGO support interacted with local dynamics of ordering in the realms of peace, security and justice.

In the Somaliland context the basic security architecture has from the outset been multi-layered, with state, traditional and Islamic providers being mutually dependent in co-enacting basic public order. The multi-layered or hybrid arrangements have been known to provide impressive levels of order but are typically locally confined in the way they operate. The challenge in addressing the issue of revenge killings was approached as a challenge of expanding upon and strengthening existing practices and relationships by aiding providers to meet across localities and districts. In this context, the role and approach of the INGO in the dialogue processes and the subsequent activities was to facilitate, and provide support and funding for the logistics, such as transportation, food and planning.[7]

Although local security and peacebuilding was strengthened, the second aim of enhancing justice (for women, IDPs, minority groups) was not met. On this matter, the approach worked on a legalist logic of 'changing law systems': the focus was to revise/reformulate aspects of customary law to make it more in line with international human rights standards, and agreements were made between the traditional courts and the state courts specifying that the former committed to transferring cases of rape and gender-based violence to the latter (as state law is perceived as better suited than *Xeer* for providing justice for the individual). These revisions and agreements had been written down in declarations – called 'the *Elders Declarations*'[8] – and this had been followed up with human rights training and dissemination of the declarations.

This did not, however, have much effect in terms of changing the practice of how cases of rape, violence or marginalization were dealt with. Even when the traditional authorities, in principle, were prepared to refer cases to the state court, community members and relatives would assert social pressure to reach settlement through the *Xeer*. This preference is not surprising given the longstanding role of *Xeer* as the primary functional source of security and social regulation, particularly in a context where many years of civil war have left the state judiciary severely underdeveloped and unfit for addressing many contemporary crimes, conflicts and interests.

The few cases that did reach the state courts were, moreover, in most instances sent back to the traditional system – in particular because evidentiary requirements make the prosecution of such cases in the state courts extremely difficult (due to the low capacity of the police to collect evidence). While state courts often return cases to the customary system, the courts, in turn, often register and ratify the rulings made through the *Xeer*. Justice processes operate, in brief, as 'conglomerations of different legal orders' (Chopra & Isser 2011: 34) rather than closed and distinct 'state' and 'customary' law systems.

[7] Lack of resources for hosting peace meetings (including food, accommodation and transport) tends to be a key barrier to convening local peace meetings. Support for logistics can therefore provide a basic yet significant form of assistance. However, direct payment—including the infamous 'per diems'—is often disruptive and can create incentives to let meetings drag on.

[8] Notwithstanding this name, the transforming of oral commitments to written agreements resonates primarily with a rational-legal notion of commitment/agreement linked with legality and contractual obligation, whereas Xeer historically resides in oral forms.

Against this backdrop, it became apparent that a revision of law, and the 'goodwill' of the traditional authorities involved, did not produce a corresponding change in practice. It also did not address socio-political structural issues to improve conditions for individuals and groups who are marginalized within multiple co-constitutive systems.

When I visited in 2011 some new developments were underway. The security and conflict resolution work had been broadened to include not only established security providers (state and traditional) but also ordinary people/community members. There were indications that these engagements – somewhat circuitously – had had an impact on issues of justice. Engagement with community members below the level of established authorities (state, customary, religious) included providing assistance to facilitate existing women's groups getting together and strengthening wider women's networks for peace/conflict resolution. Customarily, and in everyday life, Somali women play important roles in conflict resolution – for example as actors who can bridge across clan divides (given their affiliation to both their own clan and their husband's clan), and as mediators in micro-scale conflicts and disputes. The support to women's groups assisted in further mobilizing and organizing existing capacities, for example through arranging meeting rooms for the women, helping to organize women's dialogues, and bringing together and coordinating the different groups. 'Women's Peace Platforms' were developed in a few communities, and came to function as established bodies to be called upon to mediate, for example, in neighborhood conflicts or family fights.

The process of connecting different actors working for peace and security was extended to community policing activities. Community policing committees had been established in several locations. These committees were run by a mix of community members (men as well as women) and traditional authorities. Smaller cases were often brought to the committees rather than directly to the police. Hence, the committees functioned as mediating institutions between the police and local people. This enabled members of the community policing committees to put pressure on both the traditional authorities and the police to be accountable and to push them to comply with agreed upon principles of justice, while at the same time helping to strengthen the linkages between the different security providers and enhancing their effectiveness.

These activities were complemented by conflict management 'trainings', bringing a mix of actors together (including women, youth, elders, local state officials) to discuss existing sources of conflict and capacities for conflict management in the community. Interviewees indicated that beyond the intended 'learning outcomes', a key function of these 'trainings' – as well as of the Women's Peace Platforms and community

policing committees – was that different members of the communities got a chance to access the multi-layered justice and security architecture, and become part of the processes of negotiation that shape and reshape this architecture. At times they became directly involved – through 'bridging forums'– in finding resolution to disputes or instances of crime within the communities, and in defining how the cases should be interpreted, judged and solved. This entailed contestations of the established security and justice providers (elders and local state officials) – yet remained within a broader shared objective of mobilizing the community as a whole to organize and strengthen its capacities for peaceful solutions to conflicts across all levels (family/neighbourhood, intra-community and inter-community/clan).

In these processes the *Elders' Declarations* in some instances came to serve as 'tools for contestation' – i.e. they were used as reference points for challenging discriminatory practices. They thus acquired a more contingent and interactional – yet no less significant – role than is commonly assumed to be the function and status of 'articles of law' in the legalist tradition. The Somaliland women's umbrella organisation NAGAAD moreover used the *Elders' Declarations* as the reference point for promoting the passing of new laws on women's and minority rights within the formal legal system.

Concluding reflections

The significance of everyday practices and relationships stands out in the case study. Relationships (spanning different local actors and institutions) were central: to the effects and limits of the initiative; to how solutions were found to a local security problem (revenge killings); to how processes of justice played out; and, in extension, to the limitations of a legalist approach.

As for the latter, it turned out that the approach of focusing on 'reforming systems' did not lead to change in justice practices. This justice approach did intend to adapt to 'local conditions' by engaging not just with state institutions/actors, but also with traditional authorities and *Xeer*. Yet the key aim was to put 'acceptable laws' in place locally. The underlying assumptions at work were: that law regulates practice; that providing a better understanding of international human rights norms can address problems associated with 'local norms'/ customary law; that state law and customary law are relatively discrete systems (separate and distinct from each other – operationally as well as normatively – and working above society); and that state law is better able to protect individual human rights. This illustrates how approaches of working at the 'grass roots' level, as advocated in the 'relational sensibility'

approach, can be apparently pluralist and contextually accommodated, and yet replicate logics of 'justice in the abstract'.

Resonating with findings from studies elsewhere, the above case study illustrates that rather than operating as closed and distinct 'state' and 'customary' law systems, 'both systems are just players in the much larger theatre of social and political processes and power dynamics' (Chopra & Isser 2011: 33). Issues of social power and socio-political inequality that shape access to justice were not, therefore, changeable by merely revising the law or motivating the traditional authorities involved.

The initial approach to justice was based on the (INGO's) assumptions that local cultural norms and practice were the obstacle, and a revision of legal frameworks and systems was the solution. The approach to peacebuilding and security, in turn, operated on a different logic. Instead of focusing on predefined frameworks, local practice and relationality were engaged as the key resources for addressing local security concerns related to revenge killing. This part of the initiative focused on facilitating existing everyday practices and strategies to solve a concrete problem and led to an expansion of co-operation across state and customary arrangements and actors. This indicates a process of 'coordination-by-doing' in which solutions and organization occur 'in relationships rather than through the actions of a superordinate and overarching coordinating entity' (Brigg 2008: 8).

More widely, such trajectories of emergence and relationality, underpinned by local institutions and socio-political norms of negotiation and compromise, have been central in the on-going processes of reconstruction and order-making in Somaliland. The prevailing popular narrative on Somaliland is that this process succeeded because of the lack of external engagement. Yet other accounts point out that 'Somaliland has in fact long been the recipient of growing levels of aid' … and 'despite mythologies to the contrary, continues to rely on external inputs' (Walls & Elmi 2011: 72).[9] Walls and Elmi (2011: 73) review a number of key cases of both negative and positive roles played by various external actors, and conclude that Somaliland provides examples of how 'the pragmatism of customary norms' can permit and define a space for external actors to engage constructively.

One example of particular relevance here is the low key facilitative and logistical roles played by a number of external actors (including foreign governments, NGOs, embassies, UNDP) assisting the five month long negotiations at the 1993 national clan-conference in Borama (known as the conference which lay the foundations for Somaliland's political and institutional reconstruction). Similar to the roles played by external actors in the dialogues discussed in the case study above, the external support during the Borama conference included

[9] Contrasting Somaliland's 'success' and South Somalia's 'failure' has become the favorite case for generalized arguments against aid, recently including in particular in the media (Daily Mail, the Economist, the Guardian).

facilitation, organizational support, transport (including air transport) and small funds for conference preparation (Bradbury 2008; Elmi & Walls 2011). The common features of the 'successful cases' discussed by Walls and Elmi (2011: 83) are that 'external funding did not disproportionally dominate', that 'outsiders did not establish frameworks and deadlines beyond the immediate release of funds', and that the form of engagement was 'smaller in scale and [built] actively on local initiatives'. Resonating with the peace dialogues discussed in the case study, this indicates the possibility of 'relational sensibility' operating along the lines of pragmatic concern for working with and addressing context – where context is understood as 'processes of practical relations and outcomes' (Chandler, forthcoming: 16).

Similarly, with regards to justice processes, it became apparent that when the approach shifted from a legalist logic of 'putting acceptable laws in place' to a focus on facilitating and strengthening greater involvement and participation of ordinary community members in justice and security arrangements – and on enhancing their existing institutions, roles and capacities – this contributed to increasing local connections (below the level of 'established' security/justice providers). This increased connectivity, in turn, assisted in widening the space for processes of contestation over how justice is provided and, practically, how and by whom cases are interpreted and judged in specific local contexts. It was, in other words, at the level of 'human resources' (Chopra & Isser 2011) and relationships – rather than on the level of systems and frameworks of law – that contestation and gradual change started to take place. This is not to pitch 'practices' against 'institutions', but, conversely, to stress their interaction. Moreover, in this context, the complexity and inter-linkages of multiple legal orders turned out to not simply be a drawback; developments and changes within one legal order could be used to push for advancing rights within another legal order (see also Chopra & Isser 2011). This illustrates how 'relationality is a dynamic tension, … a dialectic', and, further, it presents a reality where subjects and institutions are both 'distinct *and* exist in intimate relation and co-creation with their social [and political] worlds' (Nelson 2001: 142).

In sum, focusing on relationships reveals power struggles and constellations forming and reforming in and across local, state and international spheres. Relational complexes also indicate collaboration, interdependence and attempts to address everyday challenges and to contest established power structures. As illustrated by the case study 'subjects are situated in their particular political and economic positions and are engaged in attempts to overcome and cope with those positions *through relations with others* [emphasis added]' (Englund 2004: 14) Drawing more attention to relationships and relationality (or 'relational sensibility´), then, provides one avenue for shifting focus from the abstract and ideational problematic of liberal thought vs. local custom, or formal vs. informal, to instead reach out into the everyday, and pragmatically support local practices in addressing context-specific challenges.

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