Pragmatic Peacebuilding:

Making Peace between Problem-solvers and Critical Thinkers

Paradigms and Generations

In a 2011 review article, Roger Mac Ginty dichotomises the current study of peace and conflict into two opposing camps, suggesting that ‘the most significant paradigmatic boundaries … lie between the problem-solving orthodox approach and the critical approach’ (Mac Ginty, 2011). Problem-solving theory ‘takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships, and the institutions into which they are organised, as the given framework for action’ and aims ‘to make these relationships and institutions work smoothly’, while critical theory calls institutions and social and power relations into question (Cox, 1981: 128-129). Broadly, Mac Ginty suggests that the former is ‘dominant by far’ and is itself dominated by thinkers from the global North who are ‘unable to see the politics of their position’. The other paradigm encompasses the more sceptical critical approach, which suggests that ‘the hand of neo-colonialism is rarely far away’ in peacebuilding interventions (Mac Ginty, 2011).

In a separate analysis, Oliver Richmond constructs a supposedly coherent progression of ‘generations’ of conflict interventions. He sees a development from first-generation ‘conflict management’ or peace-keeping, through second-generation ‘conflict resolution’ with a particular focus on civil society, to third-generation multidimensional ‘liberal peacebuilding’ with an imposed focus on governance, democratisation, market economics and human rights. Richmond allies himself with critiques of ‘peace-as-governance’ state-building, which have noted ‘its universal claims, its cultural assumptions, its top-down institutional, neo-liberal and neo-colonial overtones, and its secular and rationalist nature’ and proposes an emancipatory ‘fourth generation’ that recognises local perspectives (Richmond, 2008b: 97-117).
The coherence of Richmond’s ‘generational’ progression is questionable. Except in its narrow ‘liberal peace’ form a conflict transformation perspective is omitted. Furthermore, the conflict resolution activities of Richmond’s second generation cannot be thought only to have informed the third generation and then in some way disappeared. Summarised by Babbitt and Hampson (2011), they form part of the spectrum of available means of intervention.¹

The understandable focus on the most controversial interventions, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, provides a vehicle for healthy criticism. However, it may also lead to the unspoken and unjustified assumption that conflict mitigation, resolution and transformation can be equated with what has come to be known as post-conflict peacebuilding but is more accurately described as state-building. This provides a convenient strawman for criticism, for example, of inappropriate imposition of the hegemonic ‘liberal peace’ on societies whose culture and politics are only superficially understood. Conflict resolution theory and practice are not themselves above criticism, but critics may be relying on a shallow understanding of the field and failing to take account of developments in conflict resolution thinking (Woodhouse, 2000).

Both the division into the ‘problem-solving’ and ‘critical’ paradigms described above and to some extent the ‘generational’ approach, while providing useful frameworks for the present paper, draw battle lines between the two camps and obscure our vision of more constructive possibilities. There is no particular reason why critical thinkers should be obliged to provide alternatives superior to the approaches they criticise, although many have done so (Cox, 1981: 149-150). They may be justified in simply knocking down the house of cards. If, however, to achieve ‘positive peace’ or ‘emancipatory peace’² in a particular situation requires overturning the Westphalian state-based international order, as critical

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¹ On ‘nostalgia for conflict resolution’, see Jabri V. (2013) Peacebuilding, the local and the international: a colonial or a postcolonial rationality? *Peacebuilding* 1: 3-16.

² The term positive peace is widely used to denote a peace that goes beyond the cessation of direct violence, while ‘emancipatory peace’ is used by Richmond for peace that is founded on human freedoms and security. Richmond OP. (2008a) *Peace in international relations*, London: Routledge.
thinkers may suggest (Richmond, 2004: 186; Duffield, 1998) then that is a more ambitious project that gives little hope to those suffering in a particular violent conflict. It begs questions that reach far beyond the immediate concerns of practitioners whose goal is to improve the effectiveness of peacebuilding. For them, it is more important to seek cooperative ways of working towards peace and stability, ways that recognise justified criticism of neo-colonial state-building and seek to divert some part of the substantial resources committed to it into coherent approaches to reducing the risk and impact of armed conflict.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to identify pragmatic and constructive principles that may go some way towards resolving the differences between ‘problem-solvers’ and ‘critical thinkers’. In its practitioner focus, this differs from attempts to bring together different voices in the academic debate about the liberal peace (Campbell et al., 2011). It draws on a richness of research and practice in the field of conflict resolution and transformation that need not be left behind as a ‘forgotten’ second generation.

**Complex Causation and Comprehensive Intervention**

The shift from inter-state to intra–state warfare has been widely analysed (Holsti, 1996: 13-18; Smith, 2005). Although such a trend is not clear-cut, warfare since the end of the Cold War has been characterised by an asymmetric battle for power and for control of resources within a state, potentially involving neighbours and more distant states. Ideology and religious identity may play a significant role, including in the competition for popular support, but real or perceived unequal access to livelihoods and control of economic resources are likely to be significant drivers of conflict (Stewart, 2008; Wolff, 2007).

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3 The term ‘peacebuilding’ is understood here in a very broad, inclusive and not exclusively post-conflict sense.

Notwithstanding the social and economic cost of intra-state conflict (World Bank, 2011), whether and how outsiders should intervene to prevent, terminate, manage, resolve or transform these complex conflicts has been the subject of often heated controversy for decades, particularly with respect to specific cases like Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina, East Timor and Darfur. Improved global communication has made the suffering of the poor and vulnerable obvious in more privileged societies and increased the pressure on governments to prevent or terminate it. Global networks and movements have reinforced calls for ‘humanitarian intervention’. Yet even the most powerful states and IGOs are faced with limited options for intervention and there is little international consensus either on desired ends or on how to achieve them. Despite its relative hegemony, even the US Government faces ‘resource deficit’, ‘sustainable attention deficit’ and ‘crisis overload’ (Carson, 2014).

As the UN and others have responded to complex post-Cold War civil war crises, recognition has grown that a comprehensive, coordinated approach in post-war consolidation would reduce wasted effort and improve the prospects of success. However, the coordination envisaged has been primarily inter-governmental and focused on crisis response. Cooperation between a broader range of actors has been less widely accepted as necessary, while cooperation in preventing or resolving conflict is less easily defined.

However, conflict resolution research suggests that a lasting and just peace ‘depends on a wide array of actors and activities, at all levels of society and between societies, oriented toward the past, the present and the future’ (Philpott and Powers, 2010: 9). Thus a peace process may be considered comprehensive in relation to both breadth of activity and timing of intervention. In terms of the types of external activity, a comprehensive approach

would allow for a range of inputs from military or civilian, official or non-official interveners. Regarding non-military responses, Lederach’s concept of the need for peacebuilding at three interconnected levels of society - the higher political leadership, the grassroots level and, between the two, a middle level in each constituency that holds the confidence of the political leadership and the respect of communities – is helpful (Lederach, 1997: 44-53). External intervention is needed from those best suited to supporting a process at these three levels and as early as possible in the conflict ‘cycle’. Controversy between problem-solvers and their various critics, considered in the next two sections, may detract from achievement of this goal.

The ‘Problem-solving’ Approach

The most obvious and visible forms of intervention are military peacekeeping or peace enforcement operations. Moreover, a general public bias remains towards military options in the face of crisis (Lanz, 2011). Yet the military – on the one hand available, disciplined and deployable but on the other trained and culturally conditioned for ‘war-fighting’ – may not be the most appropriate instrument for peacebuilding. Moreover, costly and controversial military intervention is often committed at a late stage in a conflict’s development.

Military force is a blunt instrument and unintended consequences are almost inevitable. However, even if the three key elements of so-called ‘conflict termination’ - cessation of hostilities, a political settlement and some form of stabilising third-party presence – are successful, the ‘negative peace’ so attained is unlikely to last unless attention is paid to longer-term issues. A view gained increasing influence in the 1990s, particularly in the UN, that military interventions to subdue direct violence may be necessary but are not sufficient, that ‘underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems’ need to be dealt with (Boutros-Ghali, 1992) and that international intervention ‘must include the promotion of national reconciliation and the re-establishment of effective government’ (Boutros-Ghali, 1995).
Reconciliation is difficult to define, plan and implement. It is therefore understandable that interventions backed or led by the UN have focused predominantly on the rebuilding of state structures and institutions, especially as UN agencies are constrained by mandate to deal with recognised governments. Thus the popular usage of the term ‘peacebuilding’ has effectively equated it with post-conflict state-building by external inter-governmental organisations like the UN or coalitions of external governments. In this context the greatest priority for the restoration of peace is generally thought to be security, but even more holistic approaches focus on state-building priorities: good governance, establishment of the rule of law, reconstruction of infrastructure, provision of basic services, economic regeneration and the replacement of corruption, patronage and impunity by accountability (Ashdown, 2007; Serwer and Thomson, 2007).

Since ‘An Agenda for Peace’, UN-led or UN-authorised interventions and other coalitions have been implemented in a more comprehensive way founded on the assumption that the development of liberal democratic institutions will secure a peaceful future. This is effectively the progression from Richmond’s first to his third generation. Richmond’s second generation, conflict resolution, is recognised in the problem-solving paradigm only in terms of measures to bring hostile parties to agreement, a very narrow and state-based component of the wide range of activities that may be necessary to prevent, resolve or transform armed conflict. Conflict resolution research points to a much broader understanding of peacebuilding, encompassing a wide range of activities by different agents over an extended period (Lederach, 1997; Ricigliano, 2012). A helpfully succinct definition is ‘the set of initiatives by diverse actors in government and civil society to address the root causes of violence and protect civilians before, during, and after violent conflict’ (Dambach, 2011) [emphasis added].

Given this need for broad-based peacebuilding, the UN - its apparent legitimacy notwithstanding - is not the only organisation that can play a role. Moreover, it has some disadvantages. Its intervention can be blocked by the veto of a permanent member of the
Security Council and, even if intervention is authorised, the time between decision and effective action can be long. Other actors, less powerful but more flexible and significantly less expensive, may be more effective. There have been several descriptions and analyses of the role of these other actors, often under the blanket heading of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) sometimes without sufficient disaggregation of their disparate goals and roles, spanning *inter alia* humanitarian service delivery, human rights advocacy and ‘direct’ peacebuilding (Richmond and Carey, 2005: 19-33, 247-250; Natsios, 1997; Goodhand, 2006). One danger is that the dominant human security discourse may be so overwhelming that it leads to a commonly held assumption that advocacy is what NGOs are about. Yet a broader view suggests three post-Cold War developments in conflict resolution: ‘an expansion from a focus on superpower negotiating strategies to a wider peacebuilding agenda, an increase in the role of nongovernmental actors as both disputants and third parties in international conflicts, and a growing concern about human security in addition to state security’ (Babbitt, 2009).

Notwithstanding the increasing role of NGOs, the problem-solving paradigm and, importantly, the associated resource allocation focus primarily on rebuilding or building internationally legitimate state structures. Even if philosophical and political criticism of this ‘liberal peace’ is not accepted, it is clear that implementation has fallen short of full effectiveness.

The framework established by international consensus for this form of state-building involves some form of international administration temporarily to ‘hold the ring’ in what have been called the ‘new protectorates’ (Mayall and Oliveira, 2011). Caplan (2004) raises salient questions about the legitimacy and accountability of such international authorities and highlights the gap between intention and implementation in terms of capacity-building of local authorities. These difficulties are exacerbated by rapid personnel turnover in international missions and the lack of contact with and understanding of local cultures (Duffield, 2010).
Key longer-term elements are the contribution of the educational system and culturally appropriate solutions to issues of post-conflict justice and reconciliation. No one pattern of transitional justice is suitable for all contexts, but ‘for reconciliation to take place and wholeness and harmony to be approached, then some degree of truth, mercy (or forgiveness), justice, and peace must be woven into the process’ (Rigby, 2001: 13).

Overall, then, a comprehensive picture of what is needed for effectiveness – perhaps uncomfortable to swallow for official planners tasked with ‘solving the problem’, if possible before the next domestic election - is a sometimes confusing one of third-party interventions of different forms, implemented by official and non-official actors in support of local initiatives, occurring at different phases of the conflict cycle but in a sustained fashion. Not surprisingly, the actuality in many interventions falls far short of such an ideal.

Critical Approaches

A coherent body of thought that could be defined as ‘the critical approach’ to peacebuilding is difficult to identify. David Chandler suggests two main forms of critique of the liberal peace, a ‘power-based’ one suggesting that the liberal peace discourse is instrumentalised to further Western political and security interests and an ‘ideas-based’ critique that questions the ‘universalising assumptions of the liberal policy discourse itself’ (Chandler, 2011). However, a continuum of other critiques, considered below, exists.

Critiques of intervention grounded in critical security studies are exemplified by Michael Pugh’s assertion that the ‘received view of peacekeeping in global governance is not neutral but serves the purpose of an existing order within which problem-solving adjustments can occur’ (Pugh, 2004: 141). Also in this camp, alongside Richmond’s and Mac Ginty’s contributions, is Mark Duffield’s implication of a cynical neo-imperialism in international conflict interventions. He suggests that they represent a part of the public-private partnership of development activity used by the metropolitan states to maintain their
influence in the internal affairs of weak or failing states in the zones of instability he terms the ‘borderlands’ (Duffield, 2001: 308-320). Criticism of international-local ‘hybrid peace’ (Mac Ginty, 2010) follows a similar line, suggesting that it is ‘perfectly given over to the consecration of hegemony’ (Nadarajah and Rampton, 2015; Richmond, 2014).

Insofar as they highlight Northern hubris, these critiques are justified. Even in pragmatic terms, a patronising and instrumental approach to intervention is ultimately self-defeating (Eriksson and Kostić, 2013; Curtis, 2013). Inclusive ownership of peace processes by the members of the conflictual society themselves goes some way towards answering these objections. Nevertheless, a society’s engagement in building its own peace can be inadvertently excluded even by well-meaning, thoughtful and competent outsiders (Autesserre, 2014).

Critical approaches of this form share conclusions, albeit as strange bedfellows, with an extreme realist view that on the grounds of state sovereignty, national interest or social Darwinism - proposes leaving opponents in civil wars to fight it out (Luttwak, 1999; Walton, 2009). Reaching similar conclusions by a different route, Paul Salem criticises the Western assumptions that, he claims, suffuse the work of the conflict resolution community. He draws together disparate Western religious and philosophical developments such as the Christian ‘overvaluation’ of peace, Bentham’s utilitarianism and post-modern moral relativism to suggest that the macro-political context within which they operate colours the attitudes and values of Western conflict resolution practitioners. He points out that all successful empires develop an inherent interest in peace. In contrast, ‘in the major ideological currents that have defined political thinking in the modern Arab world – nationalism, Marxism and Islamic fundamentalism – struggle has been held in high regard’ (Salem, 1993: 361-369).

Some more nuanced forms of criticism exist, seeking modification of international intervention rather than suggesting that it should cease entirely. Several writers suggest that international intermediaries can unintentionally favour one side over the other, prolong violent conflict or destabilise a society. David Shearer (2000) claims that both mediation and
the delivery of humanitarian aid can serve to extend the duration of violent conflict. Christopher Clapham (1998) uses the example of Rwanda to describe how a shift in peacemaking practice has given all parties to a conflict equivalent moral status, increased the international standing of resistance movements and therefore strengthened secessionism Sharath Srinivasan (2013). provides a more recent example of the perpetuation of political violence through peace negotiations in his treatment of the links between the North-South Sudanese negotiations and the Darfur conflict.

Roland Paris (1997: 57) suggests that war-shattered states ‘are typically ill-equipped to manage societal competition induced by political and economic liberalization’. Although fundamentally he does not see viable alternatives to liberal peacebuilding (Paris and Sisk, 2009; Paris, 2010), he argues that the ‘pathologies of liberalization’ undermine the effectiveness of the ‘Wilsonian liberal peace’ (Paris, 2004). Similarly, Stein Sundstal Eriksen suggests that international intervention in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been unsuccessful because resources were insufficient, local context was not taken sufficiently into account, state-building has not served the interests of key local actors and ‘the policy has been based on a fixed, non-negotiable conception of what the state eventually should look like’ (Eriksen, 2009). This is in line with the critique that peacebuilding has been increasingly conflated with state-building based on ‘active, muscular and humanitarian liberal internationalism’ that needs to be replaced with a post-liberal understanding of peacebuilding ‘focused on individual political agency, everyday care, human security and a social contract’ (Richmond and Franks, 2009). Nevertheless, Séverine Autesserre’s detailed ethnography of the everyday practices of the expatriate community she calls ‘Peaceland’ demonstrates how the external peacebuilding community isolates itself from local populations (Autesserre, 2014).

A critique of non-partisanship from within the peacebuilding ‘community’ comes from Simon Fisher and Lada Zimina, who suggest that traditional impartial conflict resolution perpetuates injustice. They distinguish between ‘technical’ and ‘transformative’
peacebuilding, the latter focusing on societal transformation through advocacy and other means. The aim should be to campaign for transformation of society through, for instance, human rights activism and the strengthening of supra-national institutions. (Fisher and Zimina, 2009). Often assuming a situation where inequity and repression have caused a justifiable protest movement, this spillover into normative human rights theory does not necessarily lead to a reduction of violence.

To summarize, most of the above critiques point to the need for a better understanding of national politics together with greater local ownership and cultural appropriateness of peace processes, an approach widely recognised in comparative politics (Verhoeven, 2013: 118-140) and in conflict resolution theory (Avruch, 1998; Lederach, 1997; Fisher, 2005; Paffenholz, 2014) that can be encouraged by involving a broad range of stakeholders in developing policies, rather than imposing democratization and liberalization. This is to some extent recognised by ‘resilience’ approaches based on philosophical pragmatism that use local ‘everyday life’ as a practical resource rather than a source of resistance; Chandler (2015) suggests, however, that they ‘remove the possibility of external accountability’ and construct a ‘much more problematic paradigm’ than liberal peace.

Such criticisms are far from undermining the fundamental rationale of attempting to deal with societal differences peaceably where possible, not least for the benefit of the victims of armed conflict. The impact of civil war falls disproportionately on civilians, while violent actions on all sides can harden political positions and leave a legacy of hatred and suspicion that can take generations to correct. This is one area where the conflict resolution field of study and practice has much to offer and cannot be relegated to a superseded ‘second generation’.

**Principles for Intervention**

Whilst consultancy expertise is often bought in, official resources allocated to non-official peacebuilding activity are small and official-unofficial operational cooperation is rare.
Supporting societies in establishing sustainable peace, however, requires a combination of disparate activities. Some of these may be best performed by the powerful; others may require the in-depth knowledge and non-threatening face of weaker actors. Recognition of the complex interactions between factors influencing cooperation between such disparate actors may assist in making this possible.

Empirical research (Dixon, 2015) suggests that barriers to such cooperation may be rooted primarily in differences between theories of change, whereby the overall goals of intervening agencies are essentially similar, but their organisational cultures and identities lead them along separate ideational paths, broadly aligned with: ‘liberal peace’ stabilisation through institutional reform; human rights advocacy; poverty reduction through development; and conflict resolution/transformation processes. The political and social consequences of intervention by powerful states and IGOs may be counterproductive, other less instrumental and more responsive interventions may make a more effective contribution to supporting conflict-affected societies and – most importantly – powerful and resource-rich external agencies may most effectively contribute to sustained peace and stability by enabling and cooperating with such less intrusive activities, in order to create a comprehensive range of cooperative interventions.

Attempts by officials to coordinate and control NGOs are understandable but unlikely to succeed. A more promising approach is to ensure, through information exchange and loose coordination, that the different talents of a range of interveners are enabled and are working towards the same broad goals in ‘chaordic networks’ (Ricigliano, 2003). Fields of activities may include, inter alia: participatory conflict analysis; preventive diplomacy; mediation; spoiler management; policy dialogue; support of local peacebuilders; and post-conflict justice and reconciliation.

If such disparate activities are to take place without mutual interference and competition and if the predominant barriers to cooperation - at least for unofficial actors - are in the area of principled and causal beliefs (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993), then a more
cooperative form of intervention requires ideas at this level around which interveners can agree. It is therefore important that some fundamental principles are broadly shared.

This section suggests a set of broad, mutually supportive principles, which may resonate both with ‘problem-solvers’ and with their critics, whose pragmatic application would achieve more effective peacebuilding. The principles are rooted in conflict resolution theory, but they are only rarely applied by policymakers in crisis or, more importantly, in conflict prevention (Zartman, 2005). Except the first, which engages with the complex conflict causation mentioned above, each principle derives conceptually and logically from its predecessor. The section focuses on the level of principles because, as the first principle and many of the critiques above imply, one size rarely fits all. Nevertheless, when applied to real cases, conflict resolution theory recognises the need for clear determination of objectives and techniques and for rigorous monitoring and evaluation of processes (Lederach et al., 2007).

Recognise and engage with complexity

Understandably, policy-makers, both in decision-making and in explanations to the public, would like to reduce complex problems to a series of straightforward issues. However, depth of complexity is particularly evident in intra-state conflict, in terms of the shifting interests and number of combatant parties and other stakeholders, both internal and external, the historical factors impacting the conflict and the fluidity of current events and developments. Diplomats in embassies and delegations find their ability fully to understand contexts severely constrained by short-duration postings, security constraints and intensive demands on their limited time and capacity. Officials and politicians in capitals are even more distant from the cultural complexities of the local situation and their views and decisions are likely to be influenced by a wide range of factors, including home and

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international public opinion, itself potentially conditioned by effective advocacy through international networks (Bob, 2001).

Conflict analyses in common use are unable to capture such complexity, often being based on different ‘theories of change’, depending on external consultants, taking a ‘snapshot’ of a dynamic situation and failing to involve those affected by the conflict in the analysis. Bousquet and Curtis analyse the role of complexity in the ontology and therefore the epistemology of international relations. Particularly helpful in the present context are concepts of non-linearity, where systems ‘do not display proportionality between input and output’; open systems which ‘have boundaries that are porous and shifting, and exchange information and energy with their environment’; self-organization ‘by which the autonomous interaction of individual entities results in the bottom-up emergence of complex systems’; and emergence ‘by which complex structures or patterns arise on the basis of simple interactions’ (Bousquet and Curtis, 2011: 47). Each of these concepts is likely to strike a chord with those familiar with the reality of intra-state conflict.

Borrowing the tools of systems thinking from scientific fields, participatory conflict analysis and a reflective systems approach both to conflict and intervention may permit the identification of points of leverage towards ‘more peace’ (Woodrow, 2006; Ricigliano, 2012).

Practise genuine realism

A liberal peace agenda, rooted in neoliberal theory and suggesting that a society in conflict can be transformed by the erection of liberal democratic institutions, can approach a utopianism founded in liberal humanism and an underlying confidence in the perfectibility of human society. This is not borne out by experience and a more realistic view of human nature seems appropriate (Elshtain, 2008). It consists in recognition that observers and actors have to deal with real interests, attitudes, emotions and actions, both in others and themselves, that may be self-centred and even evil. Such recognition is familiar to strands of conflict resolution theory and practice that derive from religious and particularly Christian traditions. Practitioners in such traditions recognise that their engagement will not be
sufficient to overcome the weaknesses of human nature, but they nevertheless persevere.
Examples include the strategic role of the Sant’Egidio Community, following sustained
involvement in Mozambique (Bartoli, 2005), in mediating a settlement there in 1992 and the
broad range of grassroots inter-community peacebuilding over more than a decade that
underpinned the August 2008 peace accord in Mindanao (Lederach and Appleby, 2010: 19-
21, 28-32).

Commit to a holistic concept of peace

A fundamental response to complexity and apparent intractability is to recognize that
peace is more than just the cessation of armed conflict or ‘negative peace’, which was
contrasted with a more comprehensive ‘positive peace’ by Galtung (Galtung, 1990: 291-
305).6 Researchers and practitioners in conflict resolution and transformation have for
decades grappled with the potential moral and practical contradictions involved in strategic
investment in peace underpinned by justice (Lederach and Appleby, 2010).. A corollary of the holistic peace principle is that achieving a positive outcome
requires a broad range of interventions, including action earlier in the conflict cycle than
‘post-conflict’ if any element of prevention is to be possible, confirming a central assumption
of this paper.

Ensure broad societal ownership

A peace settlement that does not take into account all significant issues is likely to fail. Expert external consultants may be employed to write reports, but a process that brings
a range of perspectives from within the conflict system is much more likely to enjoy
ownership on all sides, and can best be facilitated by those who have invested time in the
particular country or region. Sustainable peace depends on a broad and inclusive process;
the mode of inclusion will depend on the specific context, but cannot be simply ‘token’

6 This is to some extent a secularised form of the deeper meaning of peace encompassed by the
Hebrew work shalom, involving concepts like wholeness, integrity, well-being, health, healing, peace,
Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press..
presence of representatives at a conference or public briefings on a settlement that has already been finalised (Barnes, 2002; Wonis-St.John and Kew, 2006).

Moreover, this principle carries the implication that viewing a conflict through a state-based lens may fatally omit the regional dimension. The colonial construction of states with borders that do not match existing ethnicity has often led to shared cross-border ethnic identity and associated regional rivalries, including support or hosting of rebel groups (Ramsbotham and Zartman, 2011).

Commit for the long term

It is a truism that reconciliation can take generations to achieve. There is little sign, for instance, that the former warring parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina have approached it. Although in the context of expensive military and civilian deployments it may be adequate to accept a ‘good-enough’ outcome, this cannot be assumed to be an acceptable ‘end state’. There may be a practical time limit on continued investment of money and people in a situation, but this does not mean that all involvement must cease. Those best placed to determine how best to build the institutions, frameworks and relationships that will sustain peaceful settlement of difference, the members of the society themselves, may need sustained outside support from those who are willing to serve their interests. The type of support required is unlikely to be military and perhaps not even official, but may require official funding, albeit at a significantly lower level than that required for major deployments.

Aspire to humility

What Tarak Barkawi calls ‘assumptions of Western superiority in the face of more or less successful armed resistance by non-European others’ reads across to many kinds of interventions, military or otherwise (Barkawi, 2008: 60). The extent to which such hubris lies behind the valuation of ‘thematic expertise over local knowledge’ (Autesserre, 2014: 249) by otherwise well-meaning peacebuilding interveners can be argued. However, it is crucial to the development of sustained stability that outsiders come into a conflict situation to serve
rather than to dominate. Evidence abounds of the failure of hubristic interventions, so the need is clear for an element of humility, recognising not only that outsiders can at best provide a part of the solution but also that knowledge of another culture can only be gained over years or decades and then only imperfectly (Avruch, 1998). Taking such an attitude is perhaps more difficult for a powerful state than a small and weak organisation, one way in which the powerful may be less effective in peacebuilding than the weak.

**Conclusion**

The international political imperative to intervene and ‘solve problems’ in the face of uncontrolled violence is understandable, particularly in the face of public pressure. Moreover, despite its human and financial benefits, conflict prevention is in practice an aspiration. Often it is only when a crisis has fully developed that public interest rises and the political will to act builds sufficiently. The research interest of ‘problem-solvers’ and their critics therefore focuses on post-conflict peace-building and state-building.

Policymakers increasingly recognise the need to ‘do’ intervention better and, in particular, more cooperatively. Unified UN missions are one sign of this aspiration. On the other hand, the powerful criticisms of the way the outside world has gone about its mostly self-appointed task of bringing stability in conflict zones hold much validity. Yet the existence of these two ‘paradigms’, by problematically failing to do justice to conflict resolution research and practice, may prevent cooperation and work to the detriment of those affected by violent conflict. Those at different poles of opinion may be talking past each other rather than engaging in constructive debate that can improve practice.

A more productive area of research might be to identify concepts based on conflict resolution theory and grounded in practice, which might resonate with both problem-solvers and critical thinkers. Multiple aspects of conflict causation imply that interveners need to understand and engage with complexity. The principles suggested in this paper could lead
to interventions that avoid imposing simplistic solutions, actively seek the perspectives of local people and those who know them well, assume that results will not be forthcoming within the timescale of any one tour of duty, expect to be disappointed by unintended consequences and plan for a number of different agencies to work cooperatively together. Not only would they answer some criticisms of current peacebuilding practice, they are also a basis for common ground on which comprehensive cooperative interventions might be founded.

REFERENCES


Jabri V. (2013) Peacebuilding, the local and the international: a colonial or a postcolonial rationality? *Peacebuilding* 1: 3-16.


