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# Analysis

## Civilian peacebuilding: peace by bureaucratic means?

Laurent Goetschel and Tobias Hagmann

*This article draws attention to the shortcomings of civilian peacebuilding, which donors, aid agencies and NGOs have adopted in their policies and projects in recent years. It argues that government-sponsored peacebuilding propagates a conception according to which peace can be achieved by bureaucratic means. Although peacebuilding is committed to what peace research considers positive peace, its discourses and practices tend to depoliticise peace. Hence, peacebuilding represents a top-down variant of liberal peace, the meanings, substance and causal beliefs of which are taken for granted and less and less debated among practitioners and policy-makers. Reviewing a growing body of literature that takes a critical stance towards peacebuilding, this article identifies some of the conceptual and ethical problems shared by contemporary peacebuilding activities. It calls upon policy-makers and peace researchers to pay more attention to the prescriptive and instrumentalist logic of peacebuilding and encourages academics to rejuvenate a critical peace research tradition that offers alternative and more participatory approaches to peace.*

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## *Introduction*

Only two decades ago talking about peace was a contested political act in many parts of Western Europe. Outside the peace research community, peace was either related to utopian thinking, religious views or seen as a subversive idea supporting socialism. With the end of the Cold War these ideological constraints to peace dissolved at amazing speed. Peace seemingly lost its contested meaning as the peacebuilding agenda became unchallenged within Western countries, where it was endorsed by conservatives, liberals and social-democrats alike.

Since the mid-1990s bilateral donors, multilateral institutions and NGOs have integrated a wide array of peacebuilding activities into their policies and programmes, thereby effectively beginning to 'implement' peace. This evolution gave way to a proliferation of peacebuilding projects, budgets and staff within foreign ministries and development agencies. In the course of the past decade peacebuilding became professionalised as conflict resolution specialists, peacebuilding advisors and conflict analysts were recruited to manage myriad projects devised to promote peace across the globe. In parallel, NGOs specialising in peacebuilding and conflict prevention, such as International Alert, Saferworld or the International Crisis Group, gained prominence.

Peace has forcefully entered contemporary discourses and practices of policy-makers, bureaucrats and development planners. It is tempting to consider Western governments' approval of the peacebuilding agenda as a major accomplishment. Although we do not deny the many positive aspects of this development, we argue that the triumph of the 'peacebuilding consensus' has brought about problematic outcomes, which have so far eschewed the attention of peace researchers.<sup>1</sup> What are the pitfalls of peacebuilding projects and policies designed and implemented by donors and NGOs?

First, these projects and policies rely on and propose technocratic and prescriptive interpretations of peace. In the case of government-sponsored civilian peacebuilding, Galtung's historic plea for 'peace by peaceful means' turned into 'peace by bureaucratic means'.<sup>2</sup> By promoting peace primarily by dint of a project management logic, mainstream peacebuilding fundamentally depoliticises peace for the sake of managerial rationality. Second, peacebuilding forwards a number of vaguely stated assumptions about how peace can be achieved. These 'causal beliefs' nurture blueprint recipes for building peace, institutions and communities without putting them to the test.<sup>3</sup> Third, rather than

an emancipatory ideal, peace by bureaucratic means privileges a top-down variant of liberal peace to the detriment of societal visions of peace, justice and co-existence.<sup>4</sup> Peacebuilding projects seldom involve local communities, the so-called beneficiaries, in the definition of what peace is or should be. Instead Western norms are transplanted to conflict-ridden societies in developing countries where they are either ignored, appropriated or reinterpreted by local actors according to prevailing values, interests and strategies.

Most authors assume that peacebuilding is fundamentally desirable and that peace—its proclaimed goal—is inherently uncontested. In a comparative review of peace operations, Paris observed that the literature ‘tends to take too much for granted’.<sup>5</sup> Observers tend to conceive peacebuilding as the benevolent response of Western countries faced with the task of pacifying conflict-ridden or post-conflict societies in developing countries. Many academics support the basic principles of liberal internationalism that inspire peacebuilding projects.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, a growing body of literature reflects upon how to improve the implementation, effectiveness and impacts of peacebuilding projects.<sup>7</sup> Other authors have drawn attention to the imposition of the economic liberalisation agenda that goes hand in hand with post-conflict peacebuilding.<sup>8</sup>

Few studies problematise the normative underpinnings and ethical dilemmas of the current ‘peacebuilding bandwagon’ or the distinct meanings that peacebuilding attaches to peace.<sup>9</sup> Since peace operates as a ‘regulative idea’ that orients human action,<sup>10</sup> it is necessary for peace researchers to engage with the ideas and meanings inherent in peacebuilding.<sup>11</sup> In this article we draw attention to these issues, which are relevant for both policy-makers and academics interested in peace promotion. Based on a review of a growing body of literature that takes a more critical look at peacebuilding, we discuss the institutionalisation of peacebuilding by governments and NGOs, how conceptually vague assumptions about peace gained prominence in development circles as well as some of the shortcomings of peacebuilding projects.

Since a wide range of activities are subsumed under the peacebuilding label, a number of clarifications are in order. Our observations relate primarily to so-called civilian peacebuilding funded by governments or what is often referred to as ‘bottom-up’ peacebuilding. Although United Nations and other multilateral peacekeeping missions backed by military force partly also operate under the peacebuilding banner we do not consider them in our argument.<sup>12</sup> Rather we seek to understand the meanings and causal beliefs that contemporary peacebuilding attaches to peace itself. We are thus concerned

with peacebuilding discourses and practices as manifest 'in the context of international organizations, institutions, agencies, NGOs, and liberal states'.<sup>13</sup> Although these different entities have partly dissimilar conceptions of peace and peacebuilding, we do not expound them in detail. While our argument is mostly based on personal observations of international peacebuilding practices as well as a review of the existing literature, we illustrate our critique with a number of empirical vignettes towards the end of our article.

### *The bureaucratisation of positive peace*

How was peacebuilding bureaucratised? The answer to this question requires a brief historic detour. During the Cold War international politics framed peace primarily in realist conceptions of 'negative peace'.<sup>14</sup> Positive peace was on the agenda of peace researchers and various national peace movements, but by and large not a declared foreign policy objective. Similarly, development aid was widely seen as apolitical and unrelated to peace policy. Governments' scepticism towards critical peace researchers' positive peace ideas eroded at quick speed after 1989.<sup>15</sup> The demise of the Soviet Union, the victory of US-championed (neo-)liberalism and the rise of intra-state conflicts gave momentum to new conceptualisations of peace framed in terms of 'preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping'.<sup>16</sup>

With the publication of the UN *Agenda for Peace*, post-conflict peacebuilding, defined as an 'action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict',<sup>17</sup> was for the first time recognised as a foreign policy goal. The UN *Agenda for Peace* originally aimed at propagating military peacekeeping and the principle of conflict prevention. It quickly became a founding reference for government-sponsored peacebuilding across the globe.

Throughout the 1990s the United Nations, Bretton Woods institutions, the European Union and foreign ministries of major donor countries developed a plethora of peacebuilding definitions. In their policies they assimilated interrelated concepts such as conflict prevention, peacekeeping, crisis management or post-conflict reconstruction.<sup>18</sup> In parallel, NGOs and humanitarian agencies elaborated their own interpretations of peacebuilding by conceptually linking peace to development and humanitarian relief.<sup>19</sup> The gradual rapprochement between civilian and military peacebuilding on the one hand and between development and security policy on the other hand motivated governments

to develop comprehensive and heterogeneous peacebuilding 'packages'.<sup>20</sup> These packages combine diverse activities ranging from trauma work, small arms control and legal reforms to infrastructure projects. To cite a representative example of this tendency, Japan's development agency lists the following tasks in its peacebuilding strategy: reconciliation, governance including democratisation, the 'promotion of legal systems' and 'support for administration', security sector reform, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants, small arms control, 'rehabilitation of social infrastructure', 'economic recovery', 'assistance for socially vulnerable people' and humanitarian emergency relief.<sup>21</sup> Recent peacebuilding definitions by governmental bodies echo this inclusive and wide-ranging approach to peace that is remindful of Galtung's positive peace as more or less all root causes of conflict are targeted by peacebuilding.<sup>22</sup>

Peacebuilding not only penetrated the policy agenda of major diplomatic and aid organisations, it also materialised in new funding schemes and administrative units. Already by the mid-1990s peacebuilding and reconciliation were considered as 'marketable items, assured of funding'.<sup>23</sup> A decade after the publication of the UN *Agenda for Peace* Bush observed a 'commodification' of peacebuilding within the development industry.<sup>24</sup> The bureaucratisation of positive peace occurred through two parallel processes: 1. Many foreign ministries created specialised administrative branches dedicated to peacebuilding, human security or conflict prevention; 2. Development agencies and NGOs mainstreamed peacebuilding activities and concepts into existing humanitarian and development programmes that were concerned by or with armed conflict.<sup>25</sup> In some cases the allocation of budgets for peacebuilding projects within foreign ministries led to a competition between diplomats, development workers and the peacebuilding newcomers. Peacebuilding eventually became professionalised as development experts, peace researchers, members of think tanks, diplomats and area studies specialists were recruited to consult, implement and evaluate projects of the 'peacebuilding infrastructure'.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout the 1990s OECD countries substantially augmented funding for peacebuilding in addition to existing budgets for overseas development assistance. As a result 'an entire industry of "peacebuilding" consultants, experts, and practitioners' emerged.<sup>27</sup> Given the absence of a shared definition of peacebuilding across national administrations and the multiplication of governmental bodies and NGOs involved in peacebuilding, donor peacebuilding budgets are not comparable.<sup>28</sup> Within the United Nations the rise of the peacebuilding agenda led to the creation of the UN Peacebuilding Commission at the UN World Summit in 2005. At budgetary level, the decision by the

OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) to include a number of peacebuilding activities, namely security sector reform, in its member states' official development assistance statistics represented a significant step in the bureaucratisation of the field.<sup>29</sup>

The adoption of seasoned administrative procedures of humanitarian and development aid was crucial in the expansion of peacebuilding activities within ministries and aid agencies. At the onset donors propagated conflict and crisis prevention, 'conflict sensitivity' and 'do no harm' principles in order to minimise unintended negative consequences of aid projects in conflict situations.<sup>30</sup> As the peacebuilding agenda gained momentum, peacebuilding was itself subjected to the project management logic that had so far been used to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate conventional development projects. Project cycle management effectively rationalised peacebuilding as it allowed for the 'planning, assessment and evaluation of peace'.<sup>31</sup> Since peacebuilding gradually evolved into an autonomous policy, the progress of individual projects needed to be reported, impacts had to be measured and lessons had to be learned. Practical tools that permitted implementers to analyse a given conflict, formulate a corresponding peacebuilding strategy, develop indicators of project success and measure project impacts rapidly gained popularity in the peacebuilding community.<sup>32</sup>

Given the need to equip their bureaucrats, project partners and consultants with a methodology to plan and evaluate peacebuilding projects, donor agencies like DFID, GTZ, Sida or USAID elaborated their own conflict analysis manuals.<sup>33</sup> Just as participatory rapid appraisal tools were invented to facilitate the implementation of rural development projects,<sup>34</sup> bureaucratic peacebuilding produced its own conflict analysis tools that allowed peacebuilders to follow a recipe-like approach to peace promotion. Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) tools illustrate best this technocratic approach to violent conflicts from a project management perspective.<sup>35</sup> As the following section demonstrates, these bureaucratic peacebuilding planning and conflict analysis templates are built on a selective and strongly under-theorised understanding of peace.

## *Peace orthodoxies*

From an academic viewpoint peacebuilding's substance is difficult to establish due to its definitional fuzziness and the many domains where peacebuilders are active.<sup>36</sup> David suggests that there are 'as many visions of peacebuilding as there are experts on the issue

and actors in the field'.<sup>37</sup> Barnett et al. reckon that this definitional fuzziness explains the success of the peacebuilding concept as it 'camouflage[s] divisions over how to handle the post-conflict challenge'.<sup>38</sup> Despite the existing diversity of peacebuilding definitions, we argue that bureaucratic peacebuilding forges and disseminates particular meanings of and assumptions about peace, which can be retraced empirically in policy documents and other official statements.

As a discourse, state-sponsored peacebuilding advances numerous interpretations about reality, which are presented as factual evidence. These causal beliefs in many ways resemble the 'environmental orthodoxies' that Forsyth observed in his analysis of contemporary environmental policy. According to Forsyth these orthodoxies are 'institutionalized, but highly criticized conceptualizations' of a problem that policy seeks to solve.<sup>39</sup> They represent 'vague statements or "received wisdoms" rather than a narrowly defined scientific theory or hypothesis'.<sup>40</sup> In the past two decades the institutionalisation of peacebuilding produced numerous such vague statements and received wisdoms about positive peace and the means to achieve it. Three of the most prominent 'peace orthodoxies' of civilian peacebuilding concern the tacit assumptions that peace is an uncontested idea, that peace can be achieved by dint of planned bureaucratic interventions and that liberal democracy equals peace.

The most striking peace orthodoxy concerns peace itself as peacebuilders tend to take its internal nature for granted. While most peacebuilders concur with the idea that peace is or should be more than the absence of physical violence (i.e. positive and not negative peace), few of the existing peacebuilding programmes actually define what they mean by peace. A cursory review of representative policy and strategy documents evidences the fact that governments and NGOs conceptualise peace in either indistinct or tautological terms. For example, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentions 'lasting and sustainable peace within and between states' as the goal of peacebuilding.<sup>41</sup> The Swiss development agency describes peace as being 'built on solid economic, socio-cultural, and political institutions'.<sup>42</sup> The Canadian peacebuilding strategy equates peace to 'human security' while the German Government and the European Union circumscribe peace in terms of 'structural stability'.<sup>43</sup> Most of the peacebuilding documents and conflict analysis guidelines reviewed by the authors of this article simply abstain from defining peace. Consequently, the following paradox emerges: while donor countries institutionalised and standardised peacebuilding policies and programmes, they take the substance of peace as essentially given and uncontested. Peace is declared as a major objective, but its substance remains largely undefined. This makes it susceptible to misuse and manipulation

by powerful local and international actors who have their own interpretation of peace, which fits their particular interests.

A second orthodoxy emanating from peacebuilding discourse concerns its causal beliefs on how peace can be achieved. Heavily reliant on a project management philosophy, government-sponsored peacebuilding propagates the idea that peace can be externally engineered if one possesses the adequate knowledge, local partners and financial means. This assumption often translates into a 'toolbox' approach that has become common currency for peace promoters and the applied peacebuilding literature. Representative examples of such standardised peace methodologies are Lund's four page 'Toolbox for Responding to Conflicts and Building Peace' or a CD-ROM on 'Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding' produced by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.<sup>44</sup> The latter allows desk officers to match particular conflict scenarios with predefined peacebuilding strategies. In a study commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Smith uses the metaphor of a 'palette' from which peacebuilders choose and combine 'tools' as if they were 'mixing paint'.<sup>45</sup> Despite widespread declarations of considering local contexts, perceptions and participation, bureaucratic peacebuilding essentially follows a top-down agenda towards peace promotion. An instrumentalist understanding of social relations and target groups in conflict zones accompanies the orthodox belief in the appropriateness of a standard set of peacebuilding tools.

The third and most criticised orthodoxy of civilian peacebuilding concerns the assumed nexus between liberal democracy and peace. As Paris observed in his seminal contribution, peacebuilding has been 'guided by the single paradigm of "liberal internationalism"'.<sup>46</sup> The 'construction of a liberal society' is at the core of bureaucratic interpretations of positive peace, which associate violence with moral backwardness, democratic deficit and a lack of modernity.<sup>47</sup> By adopting market liberalisation, good governance and civil society promotion as universal recipes for peace, donor peacebuilding *de facto* and rather uncritically endorses democratic peace theory. Donor agencies propagate the idea that conflict is caused by 'poverty, economic inequality, ethnic discrimination or lack of democracy'.<sup>48</sup> For the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, peacebuilding and governance are 'two sides of the same coin'.<sup>49</sup> Major international organisations such as the OECD advocate good governance and civil society as foundational for peace.<sup>50</sup> While the scholarly literature offers controversial insights about the peaceful nature of democratic states with some authors affirming and others denying the soundness of democratic peace theory, civilian peacebuilding conceptually equates peace to liberal democracy and vice versa.<sup>51</sup>

The contested nature of these peace orthodoxies becomes fully apparent when contrasting them with insights from academic research. A good example is peacebuilding's belief in the need to strengthen and involve civil society in peace and post-conflict reconstruction processes. Civilian peacebuilding attributes key roles to civil society actors, which are seen as 'local capacities for peace' and 'peace constituencies'.<sup>52</sup> For instance, the German Government assumes that 'a well-developed civil society is of key importance for the non-violent settlement of conflicts'.<sup>53</sup> The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs subscribes to 'support civil society building in the South'.<sup>54</sup> For academics, civil society is a very much disputed concept and it remains often unclear which actors, practices and ideas it entails and which it does not and how civil society causally links to peace. Anthropologists have described civil society as a 'neo-modern myth' and an 'empty abstraction' rather than a meaningful analytical category to understand non-Western societies.<sup>55</sup> Peace researchers have concluded that civil society organisations are often urban based, operate in a top-down manner and are not necessarily democratically organised, nor do they always maintain cross-ethnic relations.<sup>56</sup> In many conflict and post-conflict contexts external actors have difficulties discerning who belongs to civil society and who does not. The nexus between externally-sponsored civil society organisations and peacebuilding is marked by numerous ambiguities at the programming level.<sup>57</sup> Similar ambiguities exist for other received wisdoms informing peacebuilding, such as the presumed correlation between peace and good governance, multi-party elections, security sector reform, economic liberalisation or human rights promotion.

### *Shortcomings of donor peace*

A growing number of case studies of peacebuilding activities in different regions of the world highlight the shortcomings of donor peace; the international community's approach to bottom-up peace promotion has often ignored local realities, imposed development models paternalistically, operated with an instrumentalist understanding of local actors or deliberately excluded local actors that do not share its geopolitical worldviews.<sup>58</sup> In different respects the bureaucratisation of peacebuilding and the proliferation of conceptually vague, but politically powerful, received wisdoms about peace is problematic.

First, peacebuilding 'black-boxes' peace into an empty shell that has become void of meaning.<sup>59</sup> Richmond points out that among peacebuilding practitioners 'very little effort is expended upon conceptualizing the essential qualities of peace, nor is devoted to the multiple interpretations of peace'.<sup>60</sup> The need to generate quick peacebuilding impacts within narrow project goals and timeframes runs counter to efforts to conceptualise peace more meaningfully. Instead peace and development planners implement 'mass-produced [initiatives] according to blueprints that meet Northern specifications and (short-term) interests'.<sup>61</sup> By espousing a managerial project logic, peacebuilders evade the thorny question of what peace means for different social groups in a particular place and time. Peacebuilding evades these important normative questions, which relate to popular identity, local and global power relations and contested conceptions of social justice. Although peacebuilding discourse circumvents the discussion of such fundamentals, its organisational structure is part of 'an enormous experiment in social engineering' that is deeply political.<sup>62</sup>

The international community's attempts to build peace in Afghanistan by dint of a top-down democratisation strategy forcefully illustrate these dynamics. In their analysis of Western attempts to transplant a 'liberal peace' to Afghanistan after the ousting of the Taliban in December 2001, Tadjbakhsh and Schoiswohl reveal the formalistic and paternalistic nature of donor driven state-building.<sup>63</sup> Despite claims of fostering participation and accountability, Afghans were largely considered as 'recipients of democracy' by the donor community. Little effort was invested in exploring and conceptualising local democratic mechanisms or adapting peacebuilding blueprints to local realities. Most of the internationally agreed upon governance objectives for Afghanistan did not take into account the existing informal, customary, religious and kinship institutions of Afghan civil society. Failing to produce visible progress in terms of socio-economic development and excluding a majority of the population from the definition of what peace, democracy and justice meant in the local context, popular dissatisfaction with the international community steadily grew. Despite impressive amounts of financial resources invested in the country, the political concepts preached by the international community have essentially remained without meaning for the local population.

Second, in contrast to the emancipatory meanings of peace as promoted by critical peace research, post-Cold War donor peace is highly prescriptive and instrumentalist. Bureaucratic peacebuilding reproduces a division of labour in which the global North—represented by international organisations, donor agencies and NGOs—defines

and finances peace, while the global South—local communities, NGOs and governments—is expected to absorb and implement these peace ideas and projects. Peacebuilding contradicts its own credo about the need to empower local constituencies, as implementing agencies force their ‘post-conflict reconstruction makeover fantas[ies]’ upon recipient countries and target groups.<sup>64</sup> As legal anthropology reminds us, ‘disputing is cultural behaviour’ and involves controversial beliefs about social harmony and conflict, which often have little in common with Western peace methodologies.<sup>65</sup> Customary conflict resolution mechanisms that enjoy great acceptance among rural dwellers in developing countries are often embedded in entirely non-liberal worldviews.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, peacebuilding undermines people’s elbow room to pursue their own conceptions of peace,<sup>67</sup> which peacebuilders wrongly assume to be identical to their own liberal values.

Bichsel’s in-depth empirical work underlines how participatory peacebuilding in Central Asia’s Ferghana Valley aims to reorder social relations and rewrite subjectivities on the premises of donor peace conceptions.<sup>68</sup> The author scrutinises three peacebuilding projects that sought to prevent conflict by developing water irrigation infrastructure, mobilising customary authorities, initiating community-based organisations and fostering inter-group relations. The project activities reviewed were strongly inspired by Western conflict transformation concepts and the assumption that competition over water leads to violent conflict. Since conventional policy wisdom portrays the Ferghana Valley as a hotbed of resource scarcity and ethnic polarisation, aid agencies prescribed water canal development and behavioural change of local communities as stepping stones for more peaceful coexistence. In doing so, they conceptually excluded power relations from their understanding of local dynamics. Instead, they framed inter-group conflict as an indicator of a moral and civilisational deficit on behalf of their beneficiaries. While the external peacebuilders involved customary elders known as *aksakal* in project implementation, they demonstrated an instrumentalist approach to elders, who were wrongly perceived as static and ahistoric entities.

Third, the peaceful transformation of ‘social order’ necessitates contextual knowledge about peace that is shared with local stakeholders.<sup>69</sup> Peacebuilding’s fundamental assumptions about peace are seldom subject to discussion as target groups are only consulted to determine the modalities of project implementation. Peacebuilding thus disseminates uniform and formalised types of technical knowledge, which confront localised, contextualised and empirical types of popular knowledge about conflict transformation.<sup>70</sup>

A good example of this tendency is the human security debate, which has largely been conceptualised in northern and western policy arenas without integrating local communities.<sup>71</sup> Outsiders' technical peacebuilding knowledge cannot hide the fact that implementers often lack an in-depth understanding of local conflict contexts and established meanings and discourses of peace.<sup>72</sup> Instead peacebuilders substitute their lack of contextual knowledge by referring to peace orthodoxies. Since external 'expert' knowledge primes popular and indigenous conceptions of peace, peacebuilding risks a lukewarm reception as target groups may be more interested in appropriating a project's material resources than its actual goals.

In a biting critique of international NGOs' attempts to pacify the Karamoja region in the Kenyan–Ugandan borderlands, Eaton argues that peace groups 'have little choice but to pursue the aims set by their donors'.<sup>73</sup> The latter uncritically propagate the idea that recurrent cattle raids are the result of a conjunction of resource scarcity, small arms proliferation and intergenerational conflict. The author forcefully dissects this explanation of raids and counter-raids between the Pokot, Turkana and different Karimojong sub-groups as a short-sighted and politically correct conflict analysis, which tells more about peacebuilders' causal beliefs than reality on the ground. Essentially the product of asymmetrical retaliation strategies, cattle raiding cannot be stopped by the plethora of peacebuilding NGOs who lack an in-depth understanding of conflict dynamics in Karamoja. Consequently, the local 'peace industry' repeatedly organised poorly-timed peace meetings between warring parties. In most cases these meetings produced short-lived peace agreements, which failed to address the root causes of the conflict and reinforced participants' cynicism in regard to externally engineered peacemaking.<sup>74</sup>

## *Conclusions*

This article has highlighted how the triumph of the peacebuilding agenda promotes a conception according to which peace can be achieved by bureaucratic means. Although peacebuilding is committed to positive peace, its discourses and practices tend to depoliticise peace. Peacebuilding transformed peace into an apolitical concept the meanings, substance and causal beliefs of which are taken for granted and less and less debated among practitioners and policy-makers. The gap between donors' benevolent peacebuilding rhetoric and the reality of their interventionist and top-down character gives donor peace a bad name. The ascendancy of state-sponsored peacebuilding, the peace

orthodoxies it produced and peacebuilding's empirical shortcomings have serious implications for both peace practice and peace research.

First, the under-theorised status of civilian peacebuilding undermines peace practitioners' methodology and modes of intervention. Peace theories are not only of academic value, but permit policy-makers to make sense of their actions in regard to the bigger picture of the political and societal transformations in which they are embedded. They are helpful in establishing causalities and fixing benchmarks. They should allow for methodological reflection on peace practices that go beyond the self-referential lessons learnt of a bureaucratised liberal peace. A more refined conceptual understanding of peace should also provide a point of departure for designing more meaningful ways to include local actors in defining peace, peace processes and peace instruments. Re-conceptualising peace is not a guarantee for peacebuilding success. But it would allow evaluation of peacebuilding on the basis of explicitly stated political objectives rather than on the basis of managerial project indicators that depoliticise peace.<sup>75</sup>

Second, there is a need for peace researchers to engage more fruitfully with the overly technocratic, prescriptive and instrumentalist conceptions of contemporary peacebuilding by contributing to alternative conceptions of peace, by problematising peacebuilding's ethical and normative shortcomings and by proposing avenues for reconciling indigenous and expert-based knowledge about peace. How can peace research engage more seriously with these issues? Within the realm of qualitative research, we see two different and equally promising avenues for engagement:<sup>76</sup>

The first one consists of rejuvenating the critical peace research tradition, which produced 'substantively significant, theoretically-informed, historically-oriented, and self-reflective' contributions to former peace research.<sup>77</sup> Patomäki has recently outlined the tenets of a contemporary critical peace research agenda that combines a realist ontology with relativism in regard to truth judgements and the reliance on peace theories.<sup>78</sup> If peacebuilding has 'depoliticise[d] social transformation' critical peace research needs to conceptually re-politicise peace and social transformation.<sup>79</sup> Critical peace researchers could document the plurality of peace meanings that exist in both developed and developing countries, and explore how the bargaining power of weaker social groups can be increased in the formulation and implementation of donor-funded peace projects. Social justice, power differentials and economic welfare, three crucial yet often neglected dimensions of post-conflict rebuilding, should be given more attention. Researchers could also scrutinise the dialectical relationship and co-production of peace

discourse—both by policy-makers and researchers—and peace practices. Finally, critical peace research raises awareness of the fact that peace cannot be achieved by gearing interventions solely to changing the ‘other’ in foreign contexts, but that the very international order in which peacebuilding is embedded, must eventually be transformed. As such it allows intellectual confrontation of the predominance of liberal internationalism in global politics and its underlying belief in scientific and intellectual modernisation.<sup>80</sup>

A second and complementary approach consists of elaborating more detailed *in situ* and *ex post* empirical descriptions of operational peacebuilding projects, either on the basis of a comparative research design or as an ‘ethnography of peacebuilding’. Policy debates have mostly focussed on how to improve peacebuilding rather than asking whether particular measures contribute to peace, what this peace looks like and if external interventions are endorsed by beneficiaries.<sup>81</sup> A more empirical approach to peacebuilding, which makes use of established qualitative social science techniques, including participant observation, can address this gap. Authors of the ‘ethnography of aid’ school have drawn attention to the contradictory interests, power relations and practices accompanying the implementation of aid policies and projects.<sup>82</sup> The idea is thus not to determine whether or not peacebuilding works, but to understand how peacebuilding operates as a system of rules, how it is organised institutionally and how it is reproduced socially.

Whichever strategy peace researchers adopt, the bureaucratisation of peace requires that academics position themselves more explicitly towards government-sponsored peacebuilding. Before the institutionalisation of peacebuilding, critical peace researchers mostly played roles of ‘issue advocates’ who lobbied for positive peace conceptions and strategies within foreign policy.<sup>83</sup> While their impact on policy was limited, critical peace research produced original conceptualisations of peace and coexistence. With the institutional and ideational bureaucratisation of liberal peace, peace research was overtaken by depoliticised conceptions of peace diffused by powerful international organisations. Many peace researchers abandoned their critical stance to power, which was partially overtaken by critical security studies.<sup>84</sup> Crucial questions about the underlying norms and legitimacy of bureaucratic peace strategies remained largely unasked or confined to small academic circles. This poses a major challenge for both peacebuilding practice and research.

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## Endnotes

1. Richmond, 'Globalization of Responses to Conflict'.
2. Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means*.
3. Goldstein and Keohane define causal beliefs as 'beliefs about cause-effect relationships which derive authority from the shared consensus of recognized elites'. See Goldstein and Keohane, 'Ideas and Foreign Policy', 10.
4. Richmond, 'Problem of Peace'.
5. Paris, 'International Peacebuilding and the "Mission Civilisatrice"', 655.
6. Paris, *At War's End*.
7. See for instance Anderson and Olson, *Confronting War*; Austin et al., *Transforming Ethnopolitical Conflict*; Reychler and Paffenholz, *Peacebuilding*; and Smith, 'Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding'.
8. Pugh, 'Political Economy of Peacebuilding'.
9. Barnett et al., 'Peacebuilding', 36.
10. Goetschel, 'Frieden als Utopie', 12.
11. For an overview of historically evolving meanings of peace in the international relations and peace research literature since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century see Richmond, 'Critical Research Agendas for Peace'.
12. Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace*.
13. Richmond, 'Globalization of Responses to Conflict', 132.
14. Galtung, 'An Editorial'; Galtung, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research'.
15. Different interpretations exist about what 'critical peace research' consists of and who its major protagonists are. We use the label 'critical' to refer to peace researchers with a declared value-commitment to peace and who assume 'that human ideas and concepts are significant from the point of view of reproducing or changing social relations'. See Patomäki, 'Challenge of Critical Theories', 727.
16. Boutros-Ghali, *Agenda for Peace*.
17. *Ibid.*: Article 21.
18. Barnett et al., 'Peacebuilding: What Is in a Name?'.
19. Lewer, 'International Non-Governmental Organisations and Peacebuilding'.
20. Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars*.
21. Japan International Cooperation Agency, *JICA Thematic Guidelines on Peacebuilding Assistance*.
22. For example, the OECD provides the following definition: 'Peacebuilding and reconciliation focuses on long-term support to, and establishment of, viable political and socio-economic and cultural institutions capable of addressing the root causes of conflicts, as well as other initiatives aimed at creating the necessary conditions for sustained peace and stability. These activities also seek to promote the integration of competing or marginalised groups within mainstream society, through providing equitable access to political decision-making, social networks, economic resources and information, and can be implemented in all phases of conflict'. OECD, *DAC Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation*, 86.
23. Bennett and Kayitesi-Blewitt, 'Beyond "Working in Conflict"', 39. Canada pioneered the institutionalisation of peacebuilding by establishing in 1996 an annual fund of 10 million Canadian dollars earmarked for peacebuilding and jointly managed by its foreign ministry and development agency. Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Evaluation of the Peacebuilding and Human Security Program*, 17.
24. Bush, 'PCIA Five Years On', 49.
25. Goodhand, *Aiding Peace?*
26. Dress, *Designing a Peacebuilding Infrastructure*.
27. Denskus, 'Peacebuilding Does Not Build Peace', 657.
28. Center for Security Studies, *Zivile Friedensförderung als Tätigkeitsfeld der Aussenpolitik*, 142.
29. OECD, 'Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding'.
30. Africa Peace Forum et al., *Resource Pack on Conflict Sensitive Approaches*; Anderson, *Do No Harm*.
31. Paffenholz, 'Third-generation PCIA', 2.
32. Bush, *A Measure of Peace*; Fisher et al., *Working with Conflict*.

33. Department for International Development, *Conducting Conflict Assessments*; Leonhardt, *Konfliktanalyse für die Projektplanung und—steuerung*; Swedish International Development Agency, *Manual for Conflict Analysis*; United States Agency for International Development, *Conducting a Conflict Assessment*.
34. Chambers, 'Origins and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal'.
35. Korf, 'Die Ordnung der Entwicklung'.
36. Chetail, *Post-conflict Peacebuilding*.
37. David, 'Does Peacebuilding Build Peace?', 20.
38. Barnett et al., 'Peacebuilding: What Is in a Name?', 44.
39. Forsyth, *Critical Political Ecology*, 37.
40. Ibid.
41. Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Peacebuilding—A Development Perspective*, 15.
42. Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, *SDC Guidelines on Peacebuilding*, 6.
43. Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Evaluation of the Peacebuilding and Human Security Program*, 14; Leonhardt, *Konfliktanalyse für die Projektplanung und—steuerung*.
44. Lund, 'A Toolbox for Responding to Conflicts and Building Peace'; Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, *Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding*.
45. Smith, 'Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding', 32.
46. Paris, 'Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism', 56.
47. Biersteker, 'Prospects for the UN Peacebuilding Commission', 39; Cramer, *Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing*.
48. Swedish International Development Agency, *Manual for Conflict Analysis*, 33.
49. Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, *SDC Guidelines on Peacebuilding*, 20.
50. OECD, *Helping Prevent Violent Conflict*.
51. Hegre et al., 'Toward a Democratic Civil Peace?'; Rosato, 'Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory'.
52. Anderson, *Do No Harm*; Lederach, *Building Peace*.
53. Deutsche Bundesregierung, *Action Plan Civilian Crisis Prevention*, 66.
54. Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Peacebuilding—A Development Perspective*, 27.
55. Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Introduction', 4–7.
56. Orjuela, 'Building Peace in Sri Lanka'.
57. Pouligny, 'Civil Society and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding'.
58. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, see Belloni, 'Civil Society and Peacebuilding'; for Cambodia, see Richmond and Franks, 'Liberal Hubris?'; and for Lebanon, see Mac Ginty, 'Reconstructing Post-war Lebanon'.
59. Latour, *Science in Action*.
60. Richmond, 'Globalization of Responses to Conflict', 136.
61. Bush, 'PCIA Five Years On', 49.
62. Paris, 'Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism', 56; Pugh, 'Peacebuilding as Developmentalism'.
63. Tadjbakhsh and Schoiswohl, 'Playing with Fire?', 253.
64. Cramer, *Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing*, 227.
65. Merry, 'Disputing Without Culture', 2063.
66. Hagmann, 'Bringing the Sultan Back in'.
67. Mac Ginty, 'Indigenous Peace-Making Versus the Liberal Peace'.
68. Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*.
69. Senghaas, *Frieden Machen*.
70. Olivier de Sardan, *Anthropology and Development*.
71. Goetschel, 'The Need for a Contextualized and Transdisciplinary Approach'.
72. Heathershaw, 'Peacebuilding as Practice'.
73. Eaton, 'Business of Peace (Part I)', 92.
74. Eaton, 'Business of Peace (Part II)', 243–253.
75. On the need for popular consensus-building see Chandler, 'Back to the Future?', 490.
76. Quantitative research offers equally promising avenues for testing some of the taken for granted assumptions of peacebuilding on the basis of large samples.
77. Reid and Yanarella, 'Toward a Critical Theory of Peace Research', 317.
78. Patomäki, 'Challenge of Critical Theories', 733–734.
79. Daley, 'Challenges to Peace', 305.
80. Zacher and Matthew, 'Liberal International Theory'.
81. Pearce, 'Sustainable Peacebuilding in the South'.
82. Mosse, 'Is Good Policy Unimplementable?'
83. Pielke, *Honest Broker*.
84. Eriksson, 'Observers or Advocates?'

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