

Peacebuilding

Assumptions, Practices and Critiques

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Peacebuilding has become a guiding principle of international intervention in the periphery since its inclusion in the United Nations' (UN) *Agenda for Peace* in 1992.¹ With the objective of creating the conditions for a self-sustaining peace in order to prevent a return to armed conflict, peacebuilding is directed towards the eradication of the root causes of violence and is necessarily a multifaceted project that involves political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions and security practices, which are understood as complementary and mutually reinforcing.

However, the transition from armed violence to lasting peace has not been easy or consensual. The conception of liberal peace proved particularly limited, and inevitably controversial, and the reality of war-torn societies far more complex than anticipated by international actors that assume activities in the promotion of peace in post-conflict contexts today. With a career full of contested successes and some glaring failures, the current model has been the target of harsh criticism and widespread skepticism.

This article critically examines the theoretical background and practicalities of peacebuilding, exploring its ambition as well as the weaknesses of the paradigm adopted by the international community since the 1990s. In this sense, it first addresses the intellectual origins of the concept to then focus on its co-optation as a canon for UN action. The exploration of peacebuilding with regards to the institutionalized pattern of international interventionism is divided into three parts: assumptions, institutional practice and critical assessment. Its principles and objectives are discussed,

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followed by a brief explanation of its implementation on the ground in terms of four dimensions—military and security, politico-constitutional, socio-economic, and psycho-social. The article finishes by reflecting on the recurrent and most damning criticisms of peacebuilding, highlighting the problems and limitations that have plagued this intervention model over the last twenty years.

Johan Galtung and the intellectual origins of peacebuilding

The concept of peacebuilding was introduced in the academic lexicon long before it became consensual in the world of policymaking. Johan Galtung, a Norwegian who is considered the founder of Peace Studies, first introduced this term in his 1976 article “Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking and Peacebuilding,” setting the tone for the theoretical and operational exploration that would follow a few years later and which still remains prolific today.²

To understand the origins of the concept in question, we have to, however, take a step back in relation to the theoretical contribution of this author. The three approaches to peace developed in the article are intimately and directly related to his innovative proposal to redefine peace and violence, presented in the 1960s.³ Galtung defines peace as the absence of violence; and defines violence as any situation in which human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential. This definition intended at the time to go beyond the dominant notion of violence as a deliberate act by an identifiable actor to incapacitate another, which the author considered too limited: “if this were all violence is about, and peace is seen as its negation, then too little is rejected when peace is held up as an ideal.”⁴ For conceptual clarification, Galtung begins by exploring a dual definition of peace: negative peace as the absence of violence and war and positive peace as the integration of human society.⁵ Research for peace would be, in this perspective, the study of the conditions that bring us close to both, which ultimately produce what Galtung calls “general and complete peace.”⁶

This conceptualization was not without criticism—particularly for being considered too vague and of no practical use—and, later, Galtung presents what can be considered as his greatest contribution to the theoretical assumptions of Peace Studies: the identification of the triangle of violence and the respective triangle of peace. In the triangle of violence the author distinguishes three aspects: direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence—the first two concepts presented in 1969 and the latter in 1990. For the author, direct violence is the intentional act of aggression with a subject, a visible action and an object. Structural violence is indirect, latent and deriving from the social structures that organize human beings and societies—for example, repression in its political form and exploitation in its economic form.⁷ And lastly, cultural violence is a system of norms and underlying behaviors of, and which

legitimize structural and direct violence; that is, the social cosmology that allows one to look at repression and exploitation as normal or natural and, therefore, more difficult to uproot.⁸ With this formulation, Galtung points out the problems and limitations of the definitions of violence that only cover social conflicts of a large scale (war), and encourages the understanding of peace in its broadest sense as a direct, structural and cultural peace, exposing and studying the global structural dynamics of repression and exploitation as well as the symbolic violence that exists in ideology, religion, language, art, science, law, the media and education.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the next step in the conceptual path of the Norwegian author was to confront this understanding with the concrete practice of international intervention, specifically in his article that develops the concepts of peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding. According to Galtung, peacekeeping constituted a “dissociative” approach, whose goal was the promotion of distance and a “social vacuum” between antagonists through the assistance of a third party.⁹ This strategy is sinned for understanding conflict as an interruption of the *status quo* and for prescribing the return to *status quo ante* as a solution. It did not question whether this *status quo ante* should effectively be regained and preserved; it merely aimed for the maintenance of the absence of direct violence between actors in conflict, and therefore inadvertently contributed to continued structural violence.¹⁰ Since the preservation of structural violence ultimately promotes direct violence—and thus the likely return to open conflict in the long term—this was not a satisfactory approach for Galtung.¹¹

Peacemaking, on the other hand, represented a more comprehensive approach, anchored in conflict resolution, whose aim went beyond the cessation of hostilities to focus on ways to transcend inconsistencies and contradictions between parties.¹² However, while recognizing the potential “radicality” of the conflict resolution approach, Galtung claims that this is usually directed toward preservation, and not at the dispute of, the (violent) *status quo*, and oriented towards actors, and not necessarily to the system (structure), that (re)produces violence.¹³ Peacemaking and conflict resolution are thus primarily understood as residing in the “minds of the conflicting parties” and achieved as soon as an agreement is signed and ratified—a conception that Galtung denounces as “narrow,” “elitist,” and negligent when considering the structural factors that are essential in building a sustainable peace.¹⁴

Galtung’s understanding of peacekeeping and peacemaking leads him to develop a new concept: peacebuilding. Unlike the other two approaches, peacebuilding is *necessarily* an associative approach to conflict, able to cope with the direct, structural and cultural causes of violence in their broadest sense—and hence in line with his concept of positive peace. The removal of the root causes of violence would focus on principles such as “equity” (as opposed to domination/exploitation and towards horizontal interaction); “entropy” (as opposed to elitism and towards a sense of inclusion);

and “symbiosis” (as opposed to isolation and towards a sense of interdependence).¹⁵ While acknowledging the difficulty and complexity above, Galtung’s conception of peacebuilding is undoubtedly maximalist, ambitious and anchored in the idea of the struggle for peace as comprehensively covering “several fronts.”¹⁶

This theoretical discussion proposed by Galtung on different ways of understanding violence and peace went far beyond a mere academic exercise—having had clear practical implications, especially once it was adopted by the UN in 1992, as we shall see below.

The theoretical assumptions of the model

Galtung’s reflection inspired Boutros-Ghali, a United Nations Secretary-General enthusiastic about the prospect of a more dynamic and interventionist world organization, following the profound change in global affairs. It was essentially a combination of three factors that prompted a strong reaction from the international community and, in particular, the UN in the early 1990s. First, the end of the Cold War resulted in the easing of relations between the major powers within the Security Council and a renewed commitment to the founding principles of the organization, as well as the triumph of liberalism and its emphasis on human rights and democracy.¹⁷ Second, the dramatic increase in the number of violent conflicts in the periphery, which affected 50 countries on different continents in 1991, finally gained visibility and prominence on the international agenda.¹⁸ And lastly, the nature of these same conflicts—particularly devastating civil wars that challenged centralized state power, considered immoral and destabilizing for the regional and international system—created, mainly in the West, a public opinion favorable to interventionism.¹⁹

Taking advantage of this historic moment of “multilateral optimism” and facing these wars of the 1990s as “wars of the international community” that required the organization to respond with determination, Boutros-Ghali presented an ambitious proposal to address the challenges to international peace and security in the post-Cold War period, embodied in the *Agenda for Peace*.²⁰ This document practices an institutionalized model of peace that gives the UN a more consistent, dynamic and bolder remit, as well as a considerable increase in international importance in relation to previous decades.

There are four interrelated strategies proposed by the Secretary-General: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and, ultimately, peacebuilding.²¹ Preventive diplomacy has two goals: first, to prevent a situation of latent conflict developing into a *de facto* violent situation; and, second, to contain the potential spread of a *de facto* situation of violent struggle to other regions and social groups. Peacemaking aims to support conflicting parties in peace negotiations toward an agreement, making use of the peaceful means contained in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United

Nations.²² Peacekeeping involves sending UN forces—so-called peacekeepers—to the ground, after an agreement between parties and with their expressed consent, to stabilize volatile areas and ensure that the peace process is effectively fulfilled. Novelty is undoubtedly in the concept of “post-conflict peacebuilding,” announced then as a new priority of the organization.

Objectives and principles

Defined as “action to identify and support structures to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a return to conflict,”²³ peacebuilding thus encompasses two different but simultaneously complementary tasks: on the one hand, the negative task of preventing the resumption of hostilities; and on the other, the positive task of “addressing the root causes of the conflict.”²⁴ This articulation closely follows Galtung’s theoretical proposal on peace and violence discussed above that promotes a maximalist agenda for positive peace as essential to a lasting negative peace—that is the end of direct violence.²⁵ Boutros-Ghali is indeed clear in his ambition: the model he proposes ultimately wishes to deal with “economic despair, social injustice and political oppression” as sources of the violence plaguing the system.²⁶ And to achieve this goal, the UN stands ready and willing to be involved as an “external guarantee” at all stages of conflict situations.

The four strategies contained in the *Agenda for Peace* are therefore seen as complementary, where the various stages of the transition from violent conflict to peace share common goals that require an integrated approach. Peacebuilding begins to take shape within the framework of peacekeeping operations that are, in turn, sent to the ground as a result of negotiated peace agreements. Progressively, the responsibility of peacebuilding moves to nationals of countries emerging from conflict, with the help of external actors, so that foundations are built for a self-sustaining peace and, thus, new conflicts are prevented.

Reflections in individual reports that followed—among them, *Supplement to the Agenda for Peace*, 1995; the *Brahimi Report*, 2000; *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*, 2008; and *Peacebuilding: an orientation*, 2010—continued to emphasize this idea of interconnection:

peace operations are rarely limited to a single type of activity, and the boundaries between conflict prevention, peace-making, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and peace enforcement have become increasingly diffuse, highlights the 2008 report.²⁷

Peacebuilding is understood as a preventive tool,²⁸ essential to “heal the wounds” of conflict²⁹ and significantly reduce the risk of return to hostilities.³⁰ Peacekeeping and peacebuilding are dubbed “inseparable partners”³¹ and peacekeepers as “early peacebuilders,”³² since peacebuilding cannot act without peacekeeping and the latter does not have an exit strategy without the first. In other words, the central idea, then,

is of *continuum*: between negative peace and positive peace, between stabilization and development, and between structural prevention and consolidation.

Liberal peace

If the adoption of a *maximalist* vision of peace—coinciding with Galtung’s theoretical proposal—was clearly due to the intellectual and political environment triggered by the end of the Cold War, the specific *conception* of the model to implement in conflict zones also reflected those who emerged triumphant from the bipolar confrontation.

In fact, the approach that gave shape to this new ambition to promote peace in the periphery, and was subsequently integrated in the new collective security instruments, was the Western approach of so-called liberal peace.³³ As explained by Christopher Clapham, the winners of the bipolar conflict—not only capitalist, liberal democracies but also their civil societies, and the great mass of non-governmental organizations and international institutions that they control—sought to restructure the international system in accordance with the values that emerged victorious at that time³⁴ and presented liberal democracy and the market economy as the “global recipe for development, peace and stability.”³⁵

In relation to this, Roland Paris states that peace building is effectively “an enormous experiment in social engineering—an experiment that involves transplanting Western models of social, political and economic organization into war-shattered states in order to control civil conflict: in other words, pacification through political and economic liberalization.”³⁶ The fall of the Communist Bloc and its alternative model meant that this interventionist approach was readily encouraged, and it was imposed without rival in the four corners of the world—something Pierre Lizée calls the “end of history syndrome.”³⁷ By introducing political and economic conditionalities through peace operations and development assistance programs, the model of market democracies spread throughout the Third World.³⁸

The great potential for opening the concept of peacebuilding to numerous definitions based on different understandings and approaches—which could have gained a multitude of concrete forms in post-conflict contexts—was instead reduced to the specificity of the Western and liberal worldview, and therefore closed to other experiences and alternatives.

The model in practice

There was, since its beginning, a convergence around what Miles Kahler called the “New York Consensus,”³⁹ despite the absence of a central organ for all peacebuilding activities within the UN during the first decade, on the one hand, and the

constant presence of several other international actors who arrogated responsibilities under international interventions on the other. The “New York Consensus” reflected the *liberal dream* of creating multiparty democracies with market economies and strong civil societies, as well as promoting Western liberal practices and values, such as secular authority, centralized governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights.⁴⁰

As Oliver Richmond explains, peace is thought by the Western international community as an “achievable ideal form, the result of top-down and bottom-up actions, resting on liberal social, political and economic regimes, structures and norms.”⁴¹ To think of “peace as governance”⁴² also involves looking at peacebuilding as a means to an end: that is, as an institutionalized model embodied in a set of steps needed to build liberal peace. No wonder, therefore, that the practice of peacebuilding has involved a standardized framework for action that sought to take on a universal and hegemonic character.

Multidimensionality

It is the involvement of the UN in Namibia in 1989 that represents the first attempt to implement this paradigm. This peace operation goes far beyond the traditional supervision of ceasefires and is mandated to assist the establishment of democratic political institutions as well as monitor elections that would ensure the country’s independence. The relative success of the mission attested the organization’s capacity and willingness to undertake more ambitious and large-scale peace operations, with activities going far beyond those until then undertaken, and in a variety of countries emerging from armed conflicts in Asia, Africa, Europe and Central America.⁴³ We therefore witnessed, during the nineties, a dramatic expansion of the liberal peace model that Oliver Ramsbotham calls the “UN’s post-settlement peacebuilding standard operating procedure,”⁴⁴ which is embodied, on the ground, by four interdependent dimensions: (1) military and security, (2) politico-constitutional, (3) socio-economic and (4) psycho-social.

The military and security dimension

The security dilemma that assaults groups involved in intrastate conflicts is considerably higher than among countries involved in interstate conflicts, to the extent that the strengthening of state authority involves the recovery of the monopoly of the legitimate use of force and control of the entire territory; that is, it entails precisely the reconstitution of a central political power with the capacity to impose itself over the remaining political and military powers. It is therefore necessary to institutionalize safeguards to neutralize the understandable feeling of insecurity that pervades the various actors who fear exclusion and fear that the centralization of political and

military power favors the opposing group to their detriment. The military and security dimension of the peacebuilding model therefore has two objectives: to establish a balance between the warring parties and to restrict the ability of combatants to return to hostilities. There is, accordingly, a program specifically aimed at soldiers, which includes the standardized phases known as “DDR”: (1) demobilization, (2) disarmament and (3) reintegration into civilian life or the national armed forces.⁴⁵

The international community’s attention is later focused on security sector reform (SSR), which covers military, police and intelligence services, and seeks to establish more transparent, efficient and democratic control.⁴⁶ Pointing to a generic notion of good governance and the rule of law, SSR is a long-term, comprehensive approach, concerned not only with the *capacity* to provide security to citizens but also *accountability* through civil and democratic supervision.⁴⁷

The politico-constitutional dimension

This dimension seeks to carry out a political transition that involves the legitimation of government authority; reform of the State’s administration dismantled during the conflict; and the transfer of tensions among conflicting groups to the institutional level—that is the idea of politics as a continuation of the conflict through non-violent means, a notion which comes from Michel Foucault and that Ramsbotham calls “Clausewitz in reverse.”⁴⁸

The political regime that underlies these changes is liberal democracy, which is considered more prone to peace both internally and internationally.⁴⁹ As the “dominant political philosophy”⁵⁰ of the international post-Cold War community, it was successively promoted and imposed on intervened societies, focusing primarily on reform and promotion of the rule of law and of those elements with the most impact on the process of democratization and the creation of a democratic culture: political parties, media and civil society.

The introduction of this democratic model in post-conflict scenarios can, however, take different forms. A first approach was to hold short-term multi-party elections, which symbolized the immediate responsibility of national actors and the legitimacy of new political power (such as in Angola in 1992). The winner-takes-all logic of the zero-sum game in highly unstable contexts led, however, to the emergence of a second approach considered less destabilizing: coalition governments, which aimed to socialize actors in terms of sharing negotiated power and the practice of consensus before holding first elections (e.g., in Afghanistan in 2002). One last way—only for cases where there is a large commitment from the international community in terms of financial provisions, human resources and time—is the “international protectorate,” in which the transitional administration is upheld by an external actor (e.g., East Timor with the UN between 1999 and 2002).

The socio-economic dimension

This dimension aims to reverse the particularly devastating impact of armed conflict on a country's socio-economic fabric, drawing upon international financial aid. Following a *continuum* between relief, recovery and development,⁵¹ the international community usually begins with humanitarian aid and also has a crucial role in medium- to long-term support for the reconstruction of basic infrastructure and the application of macroeconomic stabilization policies. It should be noted that the understanding of this economic recovery, as well as monetary and fiscal (im)balances, has been guided by neoliberal ideology.⁵² During the eighties and nineties, this economic philosophy materialized in the so-called structural adjustment programs, applied all over the developing world by international financial institutions loyal to the so-called "Washington Consensus."⁵³ These economic policies advocated liberalization, privatization and deregulation of countries' economies, opening them to the market; they were accompanied by weakening and concomitant cutbacks in the interventionist role of the State in a context of strict fiscal discipline and tax reform aimed at attracting foreign investment.

Devastating criticism of this neoliberal model related to difficulties in favorably integrating these post-conflict economies into the world market and in a sustainable manner led to strong calls for the easing of economic practices, the regaining of the State as a development agent and the need to reconcile the imperatives of short-term stabilization and long-term imperatives of growth and development.⁵⁴ In general, however, the reforms of the "post-Washington Consensus" that followed, mainly in the late 1990s, were towards a "neoliberal-light package" rather than a real challenge to the model's assumptions.

The psycho-social dimension

One of the most serious costs of war is the enduring nature of the impact of the culture of rooted violence in societies plagued by conflicts over a long period.⁵⁵ The restoration of the social fabric of war-torn countries depends on the deconstruction of stereotypes and the conditions that fueled the conflict and polarized communities, requiring, therefore, a change of individual attitudes and, more generally, the behavior of society as a whole towards reconciliation.

Different societies have dealt with their psycho-social trauma resulting from conflicts in different ways. Some opted for what we call here the "Amnesia formula," that is burying the past, through amnesties lest to cause instability. This path is difficult to follow since sufferers are normally cursed with good memory. There are fundamentally three other recurring practices in dealing with the past in these contexts (which may exist simultaneously or even be associated with amnesty laws): through (1) truth and reconciliation commissions, as in El Salvador; (2) the courts (judicial

settlement, either domestically or internationally), such as in Rwanda; and (3) traditional reconciliation practices (rituals entirely dependent on local cultural resources), as in East Timor. This is, ultimately, a painful and slow process that involves readapting to each other and rebuilding peaceful relations. Reconciliation in its broadest sense is thus ultimately the end goal of a transition to peace.

Consensus on peacebuilding's institutional practice was generalized. The global organization sought to strengthen it and streamline monitoring missions through administrative reforms such as the creation of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations as early as 1992, and also through the more systematic use of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General. In particular, the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission in 2005 intended to fill an institutional gap with regards to the UN's capacity to act in contexts of violence and state fragility, as well as to learn from its mistakes and best practices within a framework of liberal peace.

Given the growing complexity of threats to international peace and security, the logic of complementarity between the work of the UN and multiple regional organizations and civil society also gained momentum. Putting into practice what had been envisaged by Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, partnerships with regional organizations—considered a privileged space for crisis resolution and peace promotion—became stronger. Institutions such as the OECD, the EU, NATO and the African Union began to play an increasing role in peacebuilding, following, in general, the institutionalized model. In particular, the enlargement of both NATO and the EU on the European continent and, subsequently, the expansion of their operations beyond Europe intensified the application of the paradigm and further legitimized the liberal peace model as a standard action. Simultaneously, the prominence on the international agenda of the concept of human security and subsequent appeals for intervention provided more space for civil society organizations in the discourse and practice of peace and conflict.⁵⁶ Viewed as more focused on individuals and tending to be bottom-up in their approaches, these organizations gained momentum and their participation in the various stages of the promotion of peace have become regarded as essential to the success of a sustainable peace process. As pointed out by Edward Newman et al., this understanding of both the challenge and the most appropriate response, which quickly spread to other organizations, reflects not only the dominant consensus but also normative progress towards weakening the inviolability of territorial integrity and, concomitantly, the growing acceptance of international interventionism.⁵⁷

Criticism of the model

Expectations for this new era of global interventionism were high and soon dashed, giving rise to widespread pessimism, in large part because of the dramatic and

newsworthy failures of missions in Angola, Bosnia, Somalia and Rwanda. Statistics on the recurrence of violent conflicts in societies previously ravaged by war—about 50 per cent in the first five years following the signing of peace agreements—led to the favored model being openly questioned.⁵⁸ But even where there was no blatant return to hostilities, the materialization of formal peace faced serious difficulties and, in many cases, the initial effusive statements of *success* proved premature.⁵⁹

The main protagonist of this ambitious interventionist project attracted much of the responsibility for the setbacks and failures. In fact, the complexity of the problems faced in peace and security with the end of the Cold War egregiously defied the institutional capacity of UN missions of this scale on several levels: financial resources; qualified and experienced staff; information gathering and planning; communication; coordination; and operational knowhow.⁶⁰ The undeniable difficulty of operationalization of the UN proposal—evident right from the start—confirmed glaring weaknesses and difficult dilemmas that were undermining the credibility, legitimacy, and intervention capacity of the organization.

It would, however, be criticism of the model of peacebuilding itself, advocated both by the UN and by other more interventionist actors of the international system; that would prove to be more forceful. Of these, it is possible to distinguish two groups of critics through their analytical positions: (1) reformist critiques (the problem-solvers)⁶¹—who, while recognizing relevant defects in the model, advocate its continuation, refining the process without challenging its ideological foundation; and (2) structural critics—who question the legitimacy of the model itself, its values, interests and the reproduction of hegemonic relations, challenging, thus, the order accepted as an immutable reality.

More and better interventionism: the reformist critiques

Both in terms of numbers and influence in the world of policymaking, most authors who focus on the theme of promoting peace in peripheral States belong to the so called mainstream and may be labelled problem-solvers. They are authors who advocate the existing order and whose concern is to increase the practical relevance and efficiency of the liberal peace model.⁶² Believing ultimately that, despite the disappointing results, external intervention is more beneficial than harmful and that the alternative is the abandonment of millions of people from the periphery to a condition of insecurity and violence, this line of thinking accuses the “hyper-critics” of widespread skepticism and focuses on the improvement of the model in order to minimize its destabilizing effects and improve its capabilities.⁶³

Roland Paris and Timothy Sisk generally represent this position and point to five contradictions inherent in the model that hinder its applicability: (1) external

intervention is used to promote self-government; (2) international control is required to create local ownership; (3) universal values are promoted to tackle local problems; (4) the break with the past is concomitant with the affirmation of history; and (5) short- and long-term imperatives often conflict.⁶⁴ These tensions materialize in practical challenges to peacebuilding in the field of: (1) international presence (i.e. the degree of interference in the internal affairs of the host State—size of the mission, nature of the tasks, consent versus compliance/enforcement, combination of violent and/or non-violent means); (2) duration of the mission (post-war reconstruction as necessarily a long-term activity versus accountability of national actors); (3) local participation (elites versus population, international priorities versus local priorities); (4) dependence (on international actors versus self-sustaining peace); and (5) consistency (organizational coordination and normative clout).⁶⁵

The realization of these dilemmas does not lead to rejection of this kind of response from the international community; on the contrary, this analysis is seen as a “realistic” way of trying to *manage* contradictory imperatives in order to improve performance and efficiency of missions, adjust expectations and thus “save” the liberal peace project.⁶⁶ The ideological foundations of liberal peace in transforming countries devastated by civil wars into liberal market democracies are therefore not questioned. Over the years, the incorporation of reformist critiques entailed only some adaptation in terms of methodology, with the adoption of more gradual reforms—“institutionalization before liberalization”—in order to build and strengthen autonomous governance institutions that are effective and legitimate before the introduction of winner-takes-all elections and drastic reforms to open up markets.⁶⁷ This strategy, more sensitive to the adverse effects of “shock therapy,” maintained, however, the two global goals governing the implementation of the paradigm since the early nineties: (1) the reproduction of the Western Weberian State in the periphery—with the strengthening of the SSR, the rule of law and good governance (the three most prominent pillars of the model in its second decade); and (2) the integration of these spaces in the world capitalist economy—generally preserving the neoliberal framework, while safeguarding against its most devastating socio-economic impact by supporting development and poverty reduction programs.⁶⁸

The challenge to the global power structure: structural critiques

Structural critiques are mainly concerned with the ideology behind the thought and practice of peacebuilding and what this (re)produces in terms of the functioning of the international system. Unlike the perspective analyzed above, the aim of the authors is transformative, looking to explicitly resist hegemonic forms of power.⁶⁹ This normative commitment aims to transform the model itself—as opposed to an

adjustment in line with the preservation of the dominant paradigm of liberal peace (as well as the broader system of power relations)—as opposed to the preservation of the *status quo*.

Among the sharpest critiques are those who emphasize the Western hegemonic model of peacebuilding and its hierarchical, centralized and elitist nature. From a postcolonial perspective, liberal peace is understood as promoting Western culture, identity and norms over others.⁷⁰ The analogies between the peacebuilding and colonialism are therefore recurrent, considering both as contributing to power asymmetries between the Global North and the Global South. The structural problems of the design and implementation of peacebuilding models are thus seen in their relationship with the inequality of the international system: interventions impose a top-down model, create and reinforce a clear hierarchy between interveners and the intervened and act as an instrument of global governance of the West in the periphery, consolidating its hegemony, defending its geostrategic interests and promoting its values.⁷¹ Its function is then the legitimacy of the world order which followed the victory of the Western Bloc in the Cold War, while serving the interests of Western states and international financial institutions controlled by them. Furthermore, the supposed *technical* solutions proposed and imposed by the Global North, such as the neoliberal strategies of post-war reconstruction, reproduce the conditions of conflict and cause the very violence they intend to solve, ultimately contributing to the system's instability.⁷²

Looking to overcome this logic of the international imposing on the local, several authors have more recently explored the idea of a “post-liberal peace” model. The contribution, for example, of Oliver Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty focuses mainly on the theory of hybrid peace, where peace is a cumulative and long-term hybrid of endogenous and exogenous forces.⁷³ Refusing both the universality of liberal peace (as a principle and practice) as well as the romanticized “purity” of the local, the hybrid perspective notes local agency in resisting, subverting, renegotiating, ignoring, delaying and producing alternatives to the current paradigm. Recognition of this heterogeneity opens the way to think about Southern epistemologies and, in particular, about forms of State-building and societal governance that are distinct from those proposed by the hegemonic model.⁷⁴ The central idea is that, paying attention to worldviews that are culturally different from the Western; is it possible to recognize and create a multiplicity of “peaces” that are not exhausted by the overwhelming hegemony of liberal peace?

Notwithstanding their different characteristics and intentions, these critiques effectively put in question: (1) the *goodwill* of the intervention model—drawing attention to the imperialist features of the paradigm and the way it serves the interests and particular agendas of Northern countries in the South; (2) its nature—challenging the centrality of security (which favors order and stability at the expense of emancipation) and its elitist, technocratic and standardized essence; (3) its legitimacy—

questioning the presumption of the universality of Western liberalism as well as its Eurocentric, imposing and curtailing approach to local participation; and (4) its efficacy—stressing the maintenance of conflicting relationships, dependency on external actors and the adverse consequences of downplaying endogenous contributions.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the model of peacebuilding undertaken by the various actors who today take the lead in international interventionism is a particularly ambitious project. From the mere freezing of armed conflicts, we have moved rapidly to attempt to settle their root causes through an institutionalized paradigm that dramatically changed the objectives and traditional functions of promoting peace in the periphery.

The results of this interventionist project were, however, far short of the desired, particularly for those who enthusiastically foresaw a new era able to solve the challenges to international peace and security of the post-Cold War. Two decades of internal and external criticism of the peacebuilding model did produce some reforms towards a *modus operandi* that is occasionally more flexible and more sensitive to other approaches. These adjustments did not, however, truly question the cultural and ideological assumptions of this paradigm, neither the global North's interests underlying the international action in conflict and post-conflict contexts. In fact, they could not even suitably solve most of the problems identified by the problem-solvers, as shown by the successive reports and assessments of peace operations led by international actors themselves. Indeed most of the criticism over the past twenty years remains valid today.

The appreciation of peacebuilding as a response to extreme levels of violence plaguing the system cannot, in this sense, fail to reveal an impact that is at least disappointing and often counterproductive. Although praising the will to go beyond the militarized model of negative peace—as well as how the fact translates into a renewed commitment of the international community towards the periphery devastated by violence and in need of help—skepticism about international efforts have clearly been justified. Serious limitations in the way the concept has been conceived and materialized on the ground—to which complaints can be added regarding the agendas and interests that are truly served with these interventions—are particularly serious problems that are still, in fact, far from being resolved.

Notes

1. United Nations, "An Agenda For Peace," 31 January 1992, <http://www.un-documents.net/a47-277.htm>.
2. Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 168.

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