Proceed with caution: Research production and uptake in conflict-affected countries

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Proceed with caution: Research production and uptake in conflict-affected countries[*]

Abstract

The effectiveness of (neo)liberal intervention in conflict zones remains ambiguous, with supportive and critical camps of scholars and practitioners embracing disparate viewpoints that are each propped up by rigorous empirical analysis. The consequences of this empirical ambiguity have deeply permeated international intervention organizations, who use these unsettled findings for decision- and policy-making. This article argues that the promotion of disparate intervention methodologies is entirely predictable given the existence of contested relationships between prominent underlying themes to the debates around peacebuilding and development intervention: globalization, development aid, inequality, and poverty, and their roles in inciting or preventing violence. These contested relationships justify the cautious selection and interpretation of research findings by decision and policymakers. The concluding discussions explore the impact of biased research production and uptake processes that bolster self-interested intervention practices and outline several recommendations for better aligning evidence-based decision- and policy-making with the needs of conflict-affected populations.

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Introduction

Pre-genocide Rwanda (before 1994), despite several historical cycles of ethnic violence rooted in Belgium's colonial divide and rule tactics, was widely considered as a development model by the international community and its observers (Uvin 1999, 11). The Rwandan case, along with numerous others including Angola, Liberia, Afghanistan, and Iraq that succumbed to or retained civil violence despite targeted international intervention has perplexed and intrigued conflict researchers (Bose 2007, 105-112; Chua 2003; Paris 2004; Wolff 2006, 31). These cases have captivated researchers and practitioners interested in exploring the efficacy of international development and peacebuilding interventions in terms of preventing civil violence and warfare in developing contexts (Özerdem & Lee 2016; Paris 2004; Richmond 2010). In fact, research and analysis on international intervention and its potential to prevent, curb, or terminate armed violence has produced multiple and disparate viewpoints – on a spectrum ranging from positive evaluations of the potential of liberal intervention (including occupation and trusteeship) to critical viewpoints that propose alternative solutions such as hybrid international/locally-derived or even post-liberal arrangements, or simply not intervening out of respect for national sovereignty (Call 2008; Chandler 2017; Mac Ginty 2011). Each camp of scholars calls upon rigorous empirical investigation and analysis to justify their propositions.

Unfortunately, the consequences of empirical ambiguity are not limited to the academic community, but have deeply permeated donor governments and international organizations such as UN agencies, the World Bank, and international NGOs, who build research-informed policies to guide the difficult and complex decisions that acutely affect the livelihoods and life-chances of large populations of vulnerable people in conflict zones. Many of these organizations seek the assistance of project designers and consultants who, because they have vested interests in sustaining intervention activity to feed their personal livelihoods and organizational preferences, conveniently select desirable research and analysis to build theories of change that purportedly connect intervention actions to outcomes that represent sustainable peace.[1] This chosen research is drawn from a rapidly expanding body of case study analysis that incorporates a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods to predict the outcomes of various modes of globalized influence in the society, economy, and politics of conflict-affected regions. These theories of change feed the design of peacebuilding and development projects. Thus, the empirical ambiguity we describe above has significant consequences for conflict-affected populations.

This article argues that the promotion of disparate intervention methodologies is entirely predictable since the foundational research that underpins intervention decision-making in conflict zones is contested on multiple fronts and can, thus, be considered unresolved and unsettled. Research to inform peacebuilding and development intervention should be selected with care, critically interpreted, and used in policy formation and project design with caution. Our aim is not to discourage the use of academic research for the design of intervention activities. Rather, we argue that policy and decision-making processes should guard against biased selection of convenient research results and embrace complex and inconvenient interpretations.

Complexity is critical in a field defined by contestation over foundational concepts. Here, we focus on four contested conceptual relationships: (1) globalization and inequality/poverty; (2)

globalization and violent conflict; (3) development aid and inequality/poverty; and (4) development aid and violent conflict. These contested relationships emerge from four foundational debates in the academic and policy literature and engage with one subset of variables that influence violence in developing contexts – globalized economic interventions. They have been purposely selected for analysis because of their evidenced and predicted impact on intervention practice, their relevance for peace and social justice for local populations in developing countries, the significant divergence of opinion within the debates themselves, and the perceived scale of the debates as judged by their relevance across a variety of peacebuilding and development sectors. In some cases, we have framed the contested relationships using a binary structure for clarity of argument, which follows traditions of debate in the literature we survey. This structure should not, however, give the impression that there are not nuanced middle-ground perspectives and a spectrum of opinion in each debate.

Some operational definitions for globalization, development aid, and peacebuilding are necessary to clarify our argument. A survey of the literature and research on globalization reveals a preoccupation with its economic aspects and, specifically, what some scholars are identifying as globalization theory's forced marriage to neoliberal economic policy and practice (Antonio 2007; Kiely 2005). We are particularly interested in globalization as experienced through (neo)liberal external interventions in conflict zones (Paris 2004) by the mostly Western international governmental and nongovernmental community including the military and donor representatives of nation states, the UN, international financial organizations including the World Bank, international NGOs, and a burgeoning set of new interveners such as for-profit groups. Conceived of as a process of promoting neoliberalism, globalized intervention programming champions free-market policies, deregulation, tax breaks, and global capitalism (Friedman 2005; Norberg 2003).[2] These intervention processes rely upon global economic development aid and, in our definition, envelope other human development initiatives to reduce poverty. We define poverty as lacking the economic resources to ensure fundamental human needs and freedom (Sen 1999). Development aid is traditionally viewed as delivering the services and resources that permit developing countries to realize the same industrialization processes as experienced by previously industrialized countries. Development interventions in countries affected by violence are typically components to broader peacebuilding interventions that are inspired by former U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali's 1992 *Agenda for Peace* (United Nations 1992) that incorporates a liberal peacebuilding model to reduce the odds of resumed political violence and war by promoting democracy through elections, human rights, rule of law, transitional justice and reconciliation, security sector reform, and the demobilization of combatants (Özerdem & Lee 2016).

This article addresses each of the four conceptual relationships listed above to build a case for the careful interpretation and cautious utilization of foundational research in decision and policymaking for international interventions in conflict zones. We propose that this exercise makes a meaningful contribution to the literature and research practice by illustrating the complexity of the relationship between globalized economic forces, inequality and poverty, and violence in developing countries and reminds us of the capabilities and limitations of academic research in these areas.[3] Our concluding discussion pays special attention to the consequences of our argument for future research production and uptake in conflict zones. We now turn to our four contested thematic relationships.

Globalization, Inequality, and Poverty

The contested nature of research on globalized economic interventions comes to light in the ongoing debates over the causal relationship between globalization and inequality and poverty; competing research outputs have given rise to a multitude of contradictory diagnoses and theoretical postulations as discussed below. Fundamentally, however, the debate's protagonists mostly begin from the same position and recognize that inequalities and poverty have become globalized. This is because social inequalities and poverty are increasingly observed in a transnational context – nation-state boundaries are inadequate to delineate between the variances in standards of living, power differentials, and status gradations (Pakulski 2004, 6). For example, numerous intractable conflicts involve oppressed populations that span multiple international borders (e.g. Kashmiris, Kurds, Palestinians, Tamils, and Uighurs). Further, the causes of social inequality and poverty are increasingly linked to the worldwide circulation of capital, people, information, and ideologies. As an example, international intervention in Afghanistan has served a powerful elite in Kabul who have economically benefitted from the injection of foreign resources, and purchased multi-million dollar condos in Dubai and other locations abroad, which stand in stark contrast to the ongoing grinding poverty suffered by a clear majority of Afghanistan's (especially) rural citizens. The consequences of social inequalities and poverty are also experienced at the global level (e.g., transnational terrorism and migration), the experience of which is not delimited by national borders.

What the protagonists in the debate do not agree upon are the implications of the relationship between globalization and inequality and, in turn, poverty. Arguments can be grouped into two camps. The first group ('supporters') propose that globalizing processes have instigated a decline in global inequality and spurred significant reductions in extreme poverty (Firebaugh & Goesling 2007; Mishkin 2009; World Bank 2016). The proponents of unfettered globalized capitalism and liberalization believe each is fundamentally beneficial for the world's low- and middle-income countries. Supporters argue for liberalization's apparent prosperity-building benefits such as integration into international trade networks, and the adoption of economic policies attractive to foreign financing (Mishkin 2009). They contend that statistical studies evidence a narrowing of the gap between rich and poor countries as real incomes per capita converge (Firebaugh & Goesling 2007). Further, supporters frequently reference World Bank claims that the number of people living in extreme poverty has fallen significantly since approximately 1990 (World Bank 2016, 35).

Firebaugh and Goesling (2007) propose that spurring this worldwide progress is the inevitable spread of industrialization through processes of globalization. Industrialization, in turn, motivates the modernization of poorer countries, resulting in localized economic gains and reduced global inequality. Thus, supporters tend to be primarily concerned with the level of modernization that individual countries have achieved. They propose that globalization provokes increased world productivity, which allows greater world surplus, which 'trickles down' to the poorest areas of the globe.

Their theoretical opponents ('critics'), however, view globalization as related to the continuing salience or worsening of global inequality and extreme poverty (Boatcă 2015; Kiely 2007; Korzeniewicz & Moran 2007; Lere 2014; Milanovic 2016; Murshed 2004; Wade 2004). Critics, too, use empirical evidence to illustrate their argument – that many developing countries are being increasingly marginalized and excluded from the globalized economic benefits that

industrialized countries are enjoying. Frank (1969) argues that this divergence of experience between developing and industrialized countries is likely due to a failure to consider the historical experience of colonialism, especially on the African continent. Korzeniewicz and Moran (2007, 566) conclude, 'the available empirical data on inequality between countries unequivocally shows that the global expansion of markets and/or capitalism over the past two centuries has been accompanied by a significant rise of such inequality'. These massive inequalities can be viewed more poignantly with the increased flow of migrants into Europe since 2015. Relatedly, Saskia Sassen (2014, 43) also argues that claims about reduced poverty and globalization must be inspected critically since standard measures such as GDP growth do not capture the situation behind the numbers where the expulsion and displacement of large populations of impoverished people sometimes skews these measures upward.

The above survey of supportive and critical research on globalization illustrates our central argument. Research on globalized influence in developing countries is producing divergent results, which allow decision and policymakers in violence-affected contexts to conveniently select and interpret research results according to their interests. For example, building upon Sassen's (2014, 43) assertion above, (neo)liberal interventionism may be justified by GDP growth, despite the fact that this GDP growth exists alongside growing poverty and inequality. In this example, the motivations to evidence GDP growth are significant since the IMF, investors, and other global financial markets consider this growth to be a fundamental variable in assessing the quality of the national economy. As another example, the utilization of globalization-friendly research that is not critical of growing inequality in post-conflict contexts may permit the disproportionate extraction of profits from local economies by transnational corporations.

Globalization and Violent Conflict

The effect of foreign economic liberalization on violent inter/intrastate conflict is a second contested pillar of research on globalized economic interventions. Two competing and, perhaps, idealized positions exist in the scholarly literature – the 'commercial liberalism' camp that accentuates the universal pacifying effects of the exchange of goods and services across states, and the 'sceptical' camp that proposes that this exchange often leads to conflict, particularly when inter-state relationships are asymmetrical and defined by dominance and dependence (Barbieri & Schneider 1999, 388; Schneider 2007).

The commercial liberalism camp proposes the indirect pacifying effect of exchange on inter/intrastate conflict through economic growth and political stability (Bussmann et al. 2005, 552). They argue that as countries liberalize and open up their economies they avoid economic stagnation and evade political crisis (Sachs 2005, 281). These scholars argue that the empirical data reveals that economically integrated developing countries are experiencing fewer civil wars, interstate wars, and genocides (Bussmann et al. 2005, 552). Further, as developing countries become increasingly democratic, economically integrated and solidify a middle class, and gain membership in international organizations, peace will follow (Friedman 1996; Schneider 2007, 630).

Conversely, sceptical camp scholars propose that economic liberalization has destabilized fragile developing countries (Barbieri 1996; Chua 2003; Paris 2004). These critics reject the liberal view that international exchange will always be more desirable than military force in the search for resources and markets. Critics cite evidence from the histories of colonialism and imperialism

where trade and military force were used in conjunction to create asymmetrical and inequitable economic relationships (Barbieri 1996, 32; Harvey 2007; Rodney 2005). Chua (2003) provides evidence of conflict-inducing liberalization processes in Rwanda, Israel, Russia, Philippines, Cameroon, amongst several others. Another critique from the economist Joseph Stiglitz (2002, xiv) focuses on destructive policies such the International Monetary Fund's reliance on the market alone to address societal problems (as opposed to local government intervention) when intervening in financial crises in the developing world.

To return to our central argument, we see in this survey of the contested relationship between globalization and violent conflict reasons for caution as decision and policymakers interpret this research to shape international interventions in conflict zones. International intervention organizations have mostly adopted a 'commercial liberalism' stance and work to expose conflict-affected economies to foreign influence and external investment. However, Klein (2007) warns that intervening nations may be fundamentally self-interested in altering local economic conditions to enable greater profits for investing companies (often through resource extraction) within their home constituency. In neo-colonial fashion, these nations use the destabilizing effect of violence and reduced capacity for resistance to outside influence to push through difficult structural revisions in local economies that open up opportunities for external exchange. For example, the use of external technical assistance and cooperation within the Afghan government, often through foreign embedded consultants and advisors, has been used extensively to chart the course of Afghanistan's economy and international relations.

Development Aid, Inequality, and Poverty

Our third avenue of exploration considers whether research can confirm that international development assistance is transcending the asymmetric status quo of international relations and reducing inequality and localized impoverishment. Pro-development theorists contend that international development (e.g., investments in childhood development, nutrition, healthcare, and education; utilizing conditional cash transfers; and investing in rural infrastructure) ensures freedom and life-chances for more individuals across the globe (Sachs 2005; Sen 1999; World Bank 2016; Yunus 2017). To contrast, the critical school purports that development aid, as part of the neoliberal development agenda, opens up poor countries in the developing world to economic exploitation by industrialized nations (Wilson 2014). Critics point to the fierce opposition by industrialized countries to the development of a Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development (SUNFED) in the 1950s (Mason & Asher 2010) or to the New International Economic Order (NIEO) debate in the 1970s (Cox 1979).

Critical scholars question the underlying aims of international development; is it really aimed at reducing inequality and levels of poverty? For example, Arturo Escobar (1995a) insists that international development processes have been fundamentally destructive to developing societies and economies, are inherently Eurocentric, and are a tool of the North for imperialistic capitalist ventures across the globe (see also Cowen & Shenton 1995, 29; Watts 1995, 47). It is important to note that the disagreement surveyed here has predicted and largely mirrored current debates within the peacebuilding literature regarding the efficacy of liberal peacebuilding interventionism (Paris 2010).

Critics accuse the Western development enterprise of propagating the discourses of international development to shape and construct the developing world for its own purposes (Crush 1995;

Escobar 1995b, 213). Underdevelopment theorists such as Andre Gunder Frank (1969) argue that the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America have not always defined their contexts as 'developed' or not (see also Cowen & Shenton 1995, 35; Seligson et al. 1998); critical scholars believe that 'development has become reality' as dictated by external influence (Escobar 1995b, 214; Rodney 2005), and has taken over where colonialism left off (Watts 1995, 55). 'People who were once simply the objects of development now came to see and define themselves in its terms' (Crush 1995, 10). Explained in another way, development advances by creating abnormalities within its recipients that it can then treat or reform (Roy 2016).

Intervention decision and policymakers inside liberal interventions have, apparently, largely ignored the critical research and commentary featured above. Rigorous engagement with these critics may constrain and delegitimize the Western development and peacebuilding enterprise in conflict-affected contexts. As evidenced above, the contestations in this area of research are particularly piercing. For example, globalized intervention approaches have struggled to conceive of intervention strategies that might reduce social and economic inequality. Richmond (2014) argues that inequality is at the root of many conflicts as it threatens the linkages between civil society, democracy, human rights, and social justice with ethnic groups questioning the legitimacy of the state. He proposes that neoliberal states and their development and peacebuilding ventures are ill-equipped to regulate social and economic inequality or prevent inequality from causing violence (Richmond 2014, 462). Instead, liberal intervention models emphasize Western models of political and economic development as opposed to reviewing fundamental drivers that tolerated inequality and poverty in the first place (Creary & Byrne 2014, 65).

Development Aid and Violent Conflict

A fourth avenue of contestation concerns the relationship between development aid (and relatedly, international peacebuilding) and violence in developing contexts. As evident in most project documents sponsored by international development institutions such as UN agencies and international development NGOs, common theories of change link the economic development of local populations to the prevention or reduction in intra-state violence. However, some conflict scholars have identified how international development processes can sometimes induce violent conflict as opposed to creating a path towards sustainable peace in developing and post-war contexts (Anderson 1999; Duffield 2007, 2010; Keen 1998, 2005; Mac Ginty & Williams 2009; Marriage 2008; Uvin 1999, 2001). For example, processes of international development have been able to unsettle communal norms, advantage and empower certain social groups while ignoring others, loosen the communal restraints on violent conflict, and act in the self-serving interests of global capitalism at the expense of local populations (Mac Ginty & Williams 2009, 33). Some research has investigated the manner in which international development practices fuel violence in a country or region, while other commentary addresses the deeper motivations behind international development – in particular its complicity with global capitalism (Yunus 2017) and its inherent reliance upon violent reformation processes in developing regions (Mac Ginty & Williams 2009).

Anderson's (1999, 39) 'do no harm' research explores the relationships between practices of international aid and violent conflict, and points out how imprudent aid activities can adversely affect conflict dynamics and enable violence. Because Anderson views the provision of aid as imperative in many conflict-prone contexts, she avoids calling into question the underlying

philosophies of international development, per se. To contrast, Peter Uvin (1999, 2001) is much more critical of development aid's ability to promote sustainable peace. He asks, 'What does "development" mean if a country that is seemingly succeeding so well at it can descend so rapidly into such tragedy' (Uvin 1999, 49)? He recounts how pre-genocide Rwanda was characterized by alarming levels of structural violence; inequality of both assets and income were acute, particularly between recipients of development assistance and rural farmers. This inequality appears to correlate with ethnic (Hutu/Tutsi) and urban ('educated') / rural ('illiterate') divisions, discrimination, and social exclusion (Uvin 1999, 51).

Given social exclusion and ethnic prejudice in pre-genocide Rwanda, Uvin contends that the development aid system was negligent in its actions in this case. He observes that the aid system largely neglected 'most of the non-economic aspects of development in favour of a narrow economic-technical approach' (Uvin 1999, 55). Obvious inequality, humiliation, impunity, and authoritarianism did not deter the aid system from its trajectory and narrow mission. Rather, international assistance served to lay the groundwork for deepening inequality and structural violence.

Interestingly, Uvin avoids a direct critique of the underlying motivations for international development intervention in Rwanda, including embedding free-market capitalism. Others take a slightly different tack. Critical scholars such as Mark Duffield (2007, 2010) and David Keen (2005) examine the foundations of the development industry. Keen (2005) directly links violence with international financial institution-led development processes in Sierra Leone. He argues that international development processes have accelerated inflation, led to monopolistic and oligopolistic market structures, and created grievances that would fuel eventual violence. For example, a dearth of government investment in transport, agriculture, education, and health can foster resentment and accelerate rebel recruitment. Keen (2005) concludes that liberal development goals exacerbated violence in Sierra Leone, and have struggled to inspire meaningful solutions to local poverty.

Duffield (2007, 2010) asserts that the Northern international development enterprise is both unwilling and unable to prevent violence in developing contexts. He proposes that security and development discourses have merged inside liberal development interventions. This merger is required since the security agenda of the industrialized world has increasingly viewed development aid provision as necessary for securing the interests of capitalism and maintaining Northern consumerist lifestyles. Thus, development actors serve as security actors, with obvious operational consequences, including dramatically escalating the risk faced by humanitarian actors. Conversely, but certainly related, Western military interveners have often adopted humanitarian and development activities as central to their missions in locations such as Afghanistan (Thiessen 2014). This development-security nexus is designed to manage and regulate the maintenance of mass consumer society in the industrialized world as it leverages underdevelopment in other unfortunate areas. For example, underdevelopment is viewed as a security threat, which justifies more invasive and violent forms of intervention to curb the export of refugees, terrorists, and drugs to protect Northern countries and their interests abroad (Marriage 2008, 4). Popularization of the security threats of underdevelopment has been enabled by the 'war on terror' discourse as utilized by governments across the globe. In this way, Duffield (2010) sees international development as 'part of a deepening and ultimately unwinnable global civil war' (57).

MacGinty and Williams (2009) raise a related point – they explore the fundamental necessity of violence to development itself. Violence was required for the development of Western capitalist politics, economies, power, and advantage (e.g., the violence of colonial conquest or brutal work conditions with low wages), and it might be a central component to the capitalist development of low- and middle-income countries. In this view, humanitarian and development aid bandages and obscures the pain of necessary violence-induced suffering (Mac Ginty & Williams 2009, 172).

The literature surveyed above supports our advocacy for careful thoughtfulness when designing external development assistance due to the potential violence of these interventions. Our survey legitimizes a growing recognition that (neo)liberal development and peacebuilding approaches, as broadly conceived of and practiced by the Western intervention architecture, may be ethically deficient in our globalized world and have, in neo-colonial fashion, promoted and maintained unbalanced North-South competition and exclusion, limited vulnerable people's agency, normalized uncertainty, and coerced ethnic groups towards violent conflict to achieve local aspirations and needs (Thiessen 2011). This disagreement, alongside the three before it, raises the difficult dilemma of making decisions and building policy in the face of radical disagreements while not leaving struggling populations to whither in violence and grinding poverty. We now turn to addressing this dilemma in our concluding discussion.

Discussion and Conclusion

We have argued in this article that research results on globalized influence in developing conflict zones are ambiguous and complex, as evidenced through a series of debates, each of which supports our proposition that foundational research feeding development and peacebuilding interventions is contested and should be utilized with caution by decision and policymakers. We have constructed a picture of the contested nature of foundational research, which helps to explain why the disparate interpretations by academics and practitioners alike have resulted in a diverse assortment of intervention strategies ranging from occupation to hybrid governance to avoiding intervention altogether. In conclusion, we will discuss the consequences of our argument for research production in conflict-affected contexts and for intervention practitioners who use this research for decision- and policy-making.

Consequences for research production

The apparent struggle of research on external intervention to transcend the self-interests of its commissioners and users suggests that a fundamental shift in vantage point on the themes of inequality, poverty, and violence in a globalized world is necessary. Put simply, the research that feeds the debates surveyed in this article is, perhaps, falling short of initiating fundamental changes in developing contexts. For example, Ulrich Beck (2007, 168) asks 'How can one explain the contradiction between the growing poverty of ever-increasing sections of the population and the growing ignorance about this problem'?

Beck's question should motivate researchers to carefully reflect upon the possibility that their methods and data might be blind and impervious to the obvious and incontestable – massive and alarming inequalities exist across the globe's populations, and billions of people continue to live in poverty. To clarify, we propose that this inequality is likely indisputable for most Western travellers in developing countries, as they adopt a new frame of reference for inequality that is not confined to the borders of their home country. By viewing inequality through an 'international' lens (as opposed to 'national'), these travellers can observe and confirm

disturbing levels of global inequality, without the need for complex statistical analysis procedures. This perspective might serve to shape the design of academic research, whereby the reality of massive global inequality forms an overarching framework that guides the choice of methods utilized. For example, the research community must critically engage with and supplement quantitative methods that can often neglect the necessary and difficult structural transformations required to rectify global inequalities and poverty levels. Has the Western-driven research enterprise perhaps been satisfied with exploring and debating minute and inconsequential changes within developing countries that are struggling in the face of oppressive global structural disadvantages?

Academic researchers have been wary of exploring how their evidence gathering can instigate change for peace and justice. One exception is Charmaz (2005, 2011), who argues that constructivist research methodologies allow the integration of critical theories of change with policy practice and realities when working to level inequality and reduce violent conflict. She proposes that critical constructivist evidence-based policy formation can 'anchor agendas for future action, practice, and policies' in critical research analysis, which allows meaningful change to emerge out of research investigations (Charmaz 2005, 512).

Charmaz promotes the use of qualitative methods to explore global inequality, poverty, and violence and expose the necessary economic reforms and policy revisions that might dislodge the status quo of power and wealth in our globalized world. These reforms and revisions can be inspired by uncovering local-level creativity in the research process. For example, local ethnographic case studies that explore local resiliency in the face of globalization are more than adequate to evidence systemic failures in global power and wealth distribution (Lundy 2012; Millar 2014; Nordstrom 2007). Ethnographic local-level studies also have the potential to grant voice to those typically on the margins and integrate their epistemologies into mainstream thinking (Millar 2014; Tuhwai Smith 2012). How do local populations perceive and engage with the national and global dimensions to their unfortunate state of affairs (Mac Ginty 2011)?

Consequences for research uptake

Likewise, intervention decision and policymakers in developing conflict-affected contexts should critically consider whether, and how, their biased selection and interpretation of unsettled research to build intervention initiatives may prolong the impotency of weaker populations and sustain asymmetric power relations by enabling economic and political benefits for 'the powerful'. Our survey has clarified the manner in which the uptake of contested research findings by intervention organizations has the potential to bolster self-interested intervention including the tendentious selection of research results for self-interested gain or organizational purposes and the self-interested drive to ignore research that would delegitimize organizational or personal mandates. Other broad considerations include vetting relevant research results to justify the manipulation of developing economies for self-interested gain (i.e., profits); side-lining research that justifies the disruptive task of structuring interventions to reduce social and economic inequalities; carrying faulty assumptions that ignore the divergent histories of developing and industrialized countries (e.g., the effects of being colonized); ignorance of the potential violence of external interventions in favour of short term justifications for action to address pressing self-interests; a self-interested harbouring of the predominant hierarchy of power in international relations through interventions in pivotal locations; and finally, the expansion and further entrenchment of current versions of global capitalism to the benefit of

small groups of elite (and sometimes corrupt) leaders in developing countries as well as the powerful and wealthy Western intervening nations.

However, our argument is not against the utilization of rigorous research for formation of policy or in intervention decision-making – ignorance can be disastrous for local populations. Similarly, we are not necessarily arguing for unreasonable international hesitation or 'intervention agnosticism' because of competing research results - an international community trapped in indecision and unable to act can create and prolong the suffering of vulnerable populations inside emergencies. However, the underlying dilemma is that the foundations of intervention decision- and policy-making are contested and, thus, will potentially lead to unintended and destructive consequences. Thus, proceeding with caution is well advised.

We have argued here that both the producers and users of research - international research commissioners, researchers, policymakers, project designers, and other decision-making practitioners - should engage critically and honestly with their personal and corporate missions and self-interests. Research production that is faithful to the plight of developing conflict-affected populations will vitally involve local populations in the design of research initiatives and utilize qualitative methods of inquiry capable of critically penetrating the status quo of power and wealth in globalized contexts. Research uptake that is complex in nature is cognizant of incorporating research findings that are inconvenient, counter-intuitive, or have the potential to delegitimize the mission of the organization using the research. The creative integration of competing opinions can lead to novel solutions that were difficult to envision without the stimulus of dissonant viewpoints (Buytendijk 2010, xv). For example, there (arguably) exists a paucity of socially, economically, and politically viable alternatives to current versions of liberal intervention put forward by the public, policymakers, and intervention project designers. The promotion of novel alternatives inside intervening organizations may be resisted, and grit will be required to contribute to necessary changes in organizational decision-making cultures to permit the betrayal of institutional self-interests in favour of ensuring structural justice for conflict-affected populations. Also, the producers and users of research might together explore how to deepen engagement with local stakeholders, initiate platforms for active and ongoing discussion on the consequences of competing research results, synthesize, translate and communicate research findings between research producers, intervening organizations, and local populations, and develop the capacity of intervention decision-makers to engage with unsettled research findings.

Acknowledgements

Endnotes

[1] We have purposely made a firm assertion of vested interests to clarify our argument, all the while recognizing that some (especially smaller volunteer-based) organizations operate with a more robust sense of altruism. See also Thiessen (2013).

<superscript>2</superscript> Some critical globalization scholars object to restricting globalization theory (conceptually and practically) to neoliberal ends and interpret globalization discourses in alternative ways. See Antonio (2007), de Sousa Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito (2005) and Kiely (2005).

<superscript>3</superscript> Compare with conflict analysis tools that embrace complexity such as the social cubism analytical model (Byrne & Carter 1996).

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