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Resilient peace: exploring the theory and practice of resilience in peacebuilding interventions

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Abstract

This introduction provides a conceptual and theoretical background to the more detailed analyses contained in the articles of the Special Section. The introduction firstly presents a critical overview of the rise of resilience and its increasing role in shaping the terms of international interventions. In this respect, resilience plays a prominent role in humanitarian intervention and development strategies. However, it has not, as yet, played such a key role in the development of peacebuilding perspectives, although this is clearly an area congruent with the resilience agenda. The introduction identifies a set of interrelated conceptual themes relevant to theorising the relationship between resilience and peacebuilding and evaluate how appropriate a resilience approach might be in promoting sustainable peace and what might be its main dangers and pitfalls.

Keywords: resilience, peacebuilding, adaptation, transformation, resistance

Introduction

Despite significant international efforts to build peace in the Global South, liberal peacebuilding strategies have had limited success. While international interventions have at times succeeded in establishing a 'negative peace'—that is, the cessation of warfighting (Galtung 1969), achieving a 'positive peace', whereby violence and discrimination are replaced by social justice for all, has proved more challenging, with an increase in so-called protracted conflicts around the world. International actors have often duplicated efforts and/or spent significant amounts of money to run programmes that are not locally applicable. Past initiatives have been ineffective at promoting sustainable peace at best or have served paradoxically to perpetuate conflict at worst.

Although resilience has been around for many years, its widespread use in international interventions is a recent phenomenon. While resilience is well established in disaster risk reduction initiatives and has played an increasingly prominent role in humanitarian intervention and development strategies, it has not, as yet, played such a key role in the development of peacebuilding perspectives. However, in the face of the failure of past liberal peacebuilding interventions and ever-decreasing international aid budgets, international actors are transforming their interventions, moving towards a new resilience approach to peacebuilding (see Chandler

2014; Chandler and Reid 2016; Joseph 2013) under such labels as 'pragmatic' peacebuilding (Goetschel 2011; Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018). This new approach is increasingly present in the policy documents of international organisations engaging in peacebuilding activities. Thus, the new focus on 'sustaining peace' at the UN level has resilience building at its core (de Coning 2018; UN 2016). In the EU's case, it emerged in work of ECHO, the EU's department for civil protection and overseas humanitarian aid. However, it has also been taken up by the European External Action Service and given a more strategic character. This is now reflected in the recent European Union Global Strategy and the new 'EU Joint Communication on Resilience' which identify resilience as one of the key priorities for the EU's external action, seeing it as a way of maintaining key principles for international intervention, while adopting a more flexible and pragmatic approach that better reflects the EU's priorities (High Representative 2016; Commission and High Representative 2017; Joseph and Juncos 2020; Juncos 2017). Despite this paradigm shift in international peacebuilding, we still know little about whether/how resilience building can contribute to promoting sustainable peace in practice. Little attention has been paid to how resilience operates on the ground and whether it can facilitate/obstruct strategies of adaptation, transformation and/or resistance by local actors and what kind of opportunities it might present.

This Special Section takes a multidisciplinary approach by examining resilience approaches in different areas (peace education, post-conflict reconstruction, transitional justice, gender) and in different geographical contexts in the Global South, including cases such as Cambodia, Central African Republic and Liberia. In mapping the promises and pitfalls of a resilience approach to peacebuilding, this set of contributions offers new conceptual and empirical insights into the dynamics and trends of such an approach. Importantly, as well as focusing on the impact of externally-led projects and initiatives (see Shah et al. 2020; Bargués-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro 2020), the articles also explore community-centred forms of resilience (e.g. Lee 2020). In doing so, this Special Section sheds light on whether a 'turn to resilience' can contribute to a better understanding of the conditions and processes that sustain peace.

The rise of resilience

Resilience is an idea that has been growing rapidly in influence and is particularly popular among international organisations, especially as they critically reflect on the nature of their interventions in different parts of the world. Indeed, while the definition of resilience has been contested,

international organisations have not been hesitant to offer their view of what it means and how this can enhance their activities. Perhaps the most encompassing definition comes from the European Union (EU) which writes that resilience 'is the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, to adapt, and to quickly recover from stresses and shocks' (EC 2012, 5). This suggests that resilience acts both at different levels and at different stages, something that appeals to the EU's desire for an 'integrated approach' to external crises and conflicts. Reading some of the EU's documents, and those of other organisations involved in overseas interventions – such as the World Bank, UNDP, OECD, DFID and USAID – resilience appears to offer a radical new approach that provides the answers to many of our contemporary problems. But why should this be the case and where has such an approach come from?

The rise of resilience has spanned across disciplines from engineering, ecology, psychology or political economy (Walker and Cooper 2011; Holling 1973; Seligman 2011). The most relevant conceptualisation of resilience in a peacebuilding context is that of ecological resilience, with its focus on complex and adaptive systems, and notably the work of CS Holling who defines ecological resilience as a 'measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables' (Holling 1973, 14). This view challenged the engineering view of resilience that understands it as a return to the same state of equilibrium. However, the earlier ecology approaches still retain some of this conservatism in their belief in maintaining the 'same relationships'. More radical approaches emerged at the interface of ecological and social systems approaches, with a view of societal resilience based on complexity, self-organisation, functional diversity and non-linearity (Gunderson et al. 2002, 530).

With the societal approach to resilience, emphasis is placed, initially, on the potential of institutions to absorb external shocks (Berkes et al. 2003). When applied to societies and organisations, resilience acknowledges uncertainty and complexity as a contemporary condition, but emphasises internal capacities and capabilities as the way to deal with these problems. Understood in this way, resilience can be defined as "the internal capacity of societies to cope with crises, with the emphasis on the development of self-organisation and internal capacities and capabilities rather than the external provision of aid, resources or policy solutions" (Chandler 2015b, 13). Adger talks of this in relation to community resilience, based on such qualities as

coping strategies, social learning and innovation (2006, 361). Others have linked community resilience to social capital and the abilities of individuals to form social networks that enhance access to resources, build social trust and facilitate better collective action (Aldrich and Meyer 2015, 259). According to many of these positions on societal resilience, crises may actually play a productive role in resource management insofar as they make us consider issues such as learning, adapting and renewal (Berkes et al. 2003, 20). This fits with the more radical, or transformative view of resilience. We can find this way of thinking about resilience, for instance, in the arguments of the OECD which sees resilience as the 'ability of individuals, communities and states and their institutions to absorb and recover from shocks, while positively adapting and transforming their structures and means for living in the face of long-term changes and uncertainty' (OECD 2013).

The radical view, opposing itself to resilience as simply returning to functioning or enhancing 'robustness', is an adaptive approach. Criticisms of this view would suggest that it takes uncertainty for granted and rejects the idea that we can intervene effectively to manage or control crises (Evans and Reid 2014). Instead the emphasis falls on our ability to adapt our behaviour to deal with the worst effects of crises, or even, as noted, to innovate in the face of crisis. Critics might note how resilience tends to be promoted by neoliberal approaches which seek innovation, adaptation and responsibilisation and encourage individualism and the private sector (Walker and Cooper 2011).

The discussion above raises questions about the resilience agenda, in particular, in relation to its added value and its application to the field of peacebuilding. First, is resilience even applicable to peacebuilding and if so, how should it apply? Second, what difference does it make? The next section addresses each of these questions in turn.

Resilient peacebuilding: potential and challenges

International peace interventions, and peacebuilding more generally, have been said to be 'in crisis' (Auseterre 2019; Debiel et al. 2017). Hence, resilience has found a particularly fertile ground in the field of peacebuilding as both policy-makers and academics increasingly turn to resilience as a way to address the past failures of the liberal peace. As noted in a UK's Department for International Development (DFID 2016, 6) report 'its recent prominence is largely due to

increasing concerns over the inadequacy of recurring humanitarian responses to address underlying vulnerabilities and the need to shift thinking towards achieving lasting impact'. As a result, new forms of pragmatic peacebuilding practices have emerged in recent years (Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018), with resilience claiming to offer a more flexible, pragmatic, 'best-fit' solution to existing protracted crises. For instance, Haldrup and Rosén have noted how United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiatives have moved from a focus on largescale institution building to a more pragmatic approach, 'making whatever structures do exist resilient through propping up the individual capacities of the people running them', that is, working with what is already there through a 'coaching and mentoring approach' (Haldrup and Rosén 2013, 140). This has been accompanied by a change in vocabulary from institution building to 'capacity development'. More recently, this shift has been symbolized by the new UN concept of 'sustaining peace' and its focus on identifying and strengthening the political and social capacities that sustain peace at the local level (UN 2016). Similar development is also apparent in field of education in emergencies as noted by Shah et al. (2020).

Resilience approaches have also emerged in the context of a scholarly shift towards the local dimensions of peace – the so-called 'local turn' – which have placed the emphasis on 'understanding the critical and resistant agencies that have a stake in a subaltern view of peace' (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, 764). In this regard, critical scholars have put forward the idea of post-liberal peace– how local populations might adapt external peacebuilding efforts for their own ends (Richmond 2010) –and hybrid peace– the concept of peace as one formed by local and international actors alike (Mac Ginty 2011) – to explain the contemporary transformation of peacebuilding practice. In his discussion of 'everyday peace', Mac Ginty (2014) focuses specifically on the bottom-up, informal and routinized 'coping mechanisms' that actors deployed in deeply divided societies. He defines everyday peace as 'the practices and norms deployed by individuals and groups in deeply divided societies to avoid and minimize conflict and awkward situations at both inter- and intragroup levels' (Mac Ginty 2014, 553).

Mac Ginty's approach rests on an understanding of social reality as fluid and groups as heterogenous. While this suggests something similar to the notions of complexity and uncertainty that underpin thinking on resilience, Mac Ginty eschews the term itself which he sees as connected with the agendas of neoliberalism and communitarism, instead preferring the notion of everyday

peace (or ‘everyday diplomacy’). Other authors have drawn more explicitly on resilience and its focus on complexity, uncertainty and local capacities as a way to reframe international peacebuilding interventions (de Coning 2018; Chandler 2014). Specifically, Cedric de Coning (2018) calls for a new approach to sustaining peace, which he coins ‘adaptive peacebuilding’. This approach sees international peacebuilders working with local communities to engage in peace processes that take complexity seriously by promoting iterative learning and adaptation. Adaptive peacebuilding acknowledges the failure of the liberal peace, embracing instead uncertainty, while promoting ownership at the local level. In other words, the adaptive peacebuilding approach seeks to help ‘societies to develop the resilience and robustness they need to cope with and adapt to change by helping them to develop greater levels of complexity in their social institutions’ (de Coning 2018, 317).

Critical scholarship on this phenomenon also tends to interpret the diffusion of resilience approaches at the international level as a form of neoliberal governmentality—a method of ensuring that individuals conform with the model of the advanced liberal democracy and free markets (Foucault 2008) – see in this Special Section, Shah et al. (2020) or Kastner (2020).Critical authors have noted a proliferation in the use of the term resilience in international organisations like the World Bank and OECD, linked to an understanding of a changed world – post economic crisis (Felli 2016). Some, like MacKinnon and Derickson, argue that resilience is a requirement placed on local actors and communities to ‘further adapt to the logics and implications of global capitalism’ (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 266). There is both an inevitability about this and a feeling that local people have to take responsibility for themselves (for instance, see contributions by Bargués-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro 2020; Kastner 2020). This literature has considered resilience to be an indication of the exhaustion of international actors engaging in peacebuilding activities, rejecting liberal universalism in favour of more pragmatic interests (see Chandler 2014; Duffield, 2011; Joseph 2013). Resilience has thus been described as a new form of governance (Joseph 2014) or risk management strategy in peacebuilding (Juncos 2018). Some, like Chandler, have called this a postliberal peace. He believes that this reflects the defeat of liberalism as a universal mode of intervention and its exhaustion as an emancipatory project (Chandler and Richmond 2015, 20). However, this pessimism is challenged by Oliver Richmond who agrees with the view that postliberalism represents a crisis of modernist liberal understandings of subjects, rights, law, sovereignty and intervention, but believes that this still offers emancipatory potential.

The potential for peace will emerge through local capacities and agency, something consistent with Richmond's views on hybridity and indicating the potential of resilience as an alternative to existing hierarchies of power (Chandler and Richmond 2015, 20).

Returning to the questions posed earlier, first, how should we then understand resilience in the context of peacebuilding? In this regard, resilience can be seen as the ability of a community or society to cope with or adapt to external violent shocks in order to foster a more sustainable peace. It is easy to see how resilience might have an intuitive appeal for humanitarians and peacebuilders because of – or in spite of – the malleability of the concept, it enables conversations and collaboration across disciplinary and professional fields. In other words, resilience can act as a 'boundary object' (Brand and Jax 2007), facilitating cooperation between security, humanitarian and development actors involved in protracted crisis as demonstrated by the EU case (Juncos 2018). Resilience also puts forward a constructive narrative, focused on capacities, rather than fragilities or 'failed states' and this has been more positively received by partner countries, but also by emerging economies such as China, which have traditionally been more critical of the externally-led liberal peace (Pospisil and Kühn 2016).

Second, what can resilience contribute to peacebuilding? Here we argue that resilience can be a useful conceptual tool to reframe interventions as well as to understand locally-driven peace processes. It embraces some of the lessons of past international interventions. In particular, resilience is 'a powerful metaphor to remind peacebuilders that successful outcomes for peace depend on local actors, to encourage the peacebuilding community to value prevention more, and to focus them on the long term and on peacebuilding at the local and not just national level' (Milliken 2013, 11). In place of past, failed attempts at intervention resilience seems to offer a number of things: 1) a focus on complexity; 2) puts forward a systems approach; 3) a shift towards local capacities; and 4) an emphasis on human agency. Let's examine each of these four contributions in turn.

The first contribution of resilience thinking to peacebuilding is that it sees people as embedded in complex relations, with structures, causes, and processes seen as nonlinear. This approach embraces complexity and the view that societies are in a constant state of flux. A key implication of nonlinearity and complexity is that we cannot identify general laws and hence, predicting events and future patters of system transformation becomes impossible. It is noted that

this is something that is particular pertinent to conflict-ridden societies (USIP n.d.). Under conditions of complexity, it might not only be difficult to resolve the root causes of a conflict; it might even be problematic to diagnose them in the first place (Chandler 2014; de Coning 2018, 305). Hence, the focus of resilience approaches is on preparedness, absorption, adaptation and transformation of complex social systems (see Lee 2020). From this perspective, crises and conflicts might also be seen not only as something normal, but also as something positive, enabling change, self-organisation and transformation - see for instance, the notion of resilience as a personal resource in the Education in Emergencies literature (Shah et al. 2020). Complexity and diversity are also relevant in conflict affected situations from another perspective. Just like in ecological systems, increasing diversity and flexibility within communities is seen as a way to promote better responses to shocks and crises (Van Metre and Jason Calder 2016, 6). This also implies the need to foster/strengthen formal and informal networks rather than hierarchical structures as they tend to be more resilient when maintaining communal peace (Menkhaus 2013). Finally, complexity and non-linearity mean that multiple equilibria are possible and that there is no end goal, unlike in the liberal peace model. Resilience is agnostic regarding the normative values underpinning the system. Both peaceful and violent systems can be resilient from this perspective. Linked to this is the idea that resilience should be seen a process rather than an end in itself (Bourbeau and Ryan 2018). For instance, as noted by Lee (2020), in Cambodia, there was no confirmed substance of resilience. Instead, different types of resilience were developed through local communities' interaction with the changing social contexts to meet local communities' needs.

Second, drawing on ecological understandings, resilience adopts a systemic view. The complex nature of contemporary conflicts requires a systemic understanding that goes beyond the project-driven and silo approaches of the past towards the transformation of entire systems or regimes. According to Van Metre and Calder (2016, 21), '[t]he key question becomes what intervention or accumulation of interventions will tip the conflict system to a nonviolent system that is improving over time; this requires a systems-level, not a project-level, theory of change'. Resilience thus encourages an integrated or comprehensive approach to crisis. For instance, in the words of the EU, what is required is a multidimensional, multiphased, multilevel, and multilateral approach (High Representative of the EU 2016). Resilience means bridging short-term humanitarian intervention and longer-term capacity building. New approaches thus seek to include humanitarian, developmental, security, economic and environmental into international

peacebuilding responses (hence the continuing prevalence of the discourses on the security-development nexus and, more recently, the humanitarian-development nexus). Resilience has the potential of moving the field of peacebuilding from a series of one-off, technical and project-driven interventions to a more systemic approach to addressing the roots causes of conflicts.

Thirdly, drawing on insights from the ‘local turn’ and ‘local ownership’, resilience encourages a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding. According to this, the focus should be placed on internal (locally-owned) capacities and not externally imposed or engineered solutions. Since resilience cannot be built from the outside external actors should act, at best, as facilitators. The resilience turn thus seeks to achieve the localization of peacebuilding ‘on a scaler not attempted today’ (de Coning 2018, 317). Local communities, and their capacities, should be the focal point; this should be the driver of external actors’ strategies, rather than the other way round. Internal capacities of societies such as social capital, networks and leadership have been mentioned as key in fostering the resilience of communities to communal violence. According to Menkhaus (2013, 6),

> The qualities that make up resilience are deeply embedded, not virtues that can be quickly transferred in a workshop. They involve dense patterns of trust networks, hybrid coalitions forged across a wide range of actors, shared narratives, common interests, multiple lines of communication, good leadership, and a commitment by local leaders to take risks for peace – whether this includes negotiating with or confronting potential armed spoilers.

For instance, in this Special Section, Kastner (2020) shows how a shift to resilience in transitional justice approaches has also sought to promote bottom-up approaches and to empower local actors. He argues that ‘a resilience approach to transitional justice hence also shifts the focus from short-term objectives, such as obtaining a certain number of convictions before a criminal tribunal, to gradually (re)building relationships and social capital.’ (Kastner, 2020, page). Yet, he also notes that such trends might also be driven by the desire of international actors to scale down their interventions.

Linked to the previous point, the fourth contribution of resilience thinking consists of a more human-centred perspective. Distinctively, the focus of capacity building initiatives is now the individual, rather than the institution (see Haldrup and Rosén 2013). Despite the pessimism in

relation to the possible causes of conflicts, human agency is now understood in more positive terms, with an emphasis on the ability of individuals and communities to adapt and learn from external shocks and crises (see Bargués-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro 2020; Lee 2020; Shah et al. 2020). Accordingly, resilience 'has challenged the terminology and semantics around conflict from a language of weakness, failure and fragility to a discussion of a community's innate strength, the power and value of its existing social ties and networks that have held communities together in the most venal conditions, and its adaptive capacity' (USIP n.d.). Resilience brings to the fore 'endogenous strengths' possessed by people at the local level rather than 'the more conventional focus on the obstacles to peace' (McCandless and Simpson in de Coning 2018, 317). Recently resilience thinking has moved to the view that the poor are not simply victims, but possess the resources and knowledge to survive in dangerous conditions (see Shah et al. 2020). This has led resilience approaches to embrace notions of indigeneity, for example, in relation to populations managing to cope in extreme conditions such as in the Arctic. Here, local populations, perceived as the custodians of nature, are lauded for their ability to cope with such conditions, but are also expected to accept the changing nature of their environment and show enterprise in response to the precariousness of their nature-based livelihoods (Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2013). Such a view is reflected in a World Bank comment that 'the poor are already resilient, both by nature as well as by necessity' (World Bank 2013, 9). The focus on human agency also highlights the possibility for resistance, which can take different forms: in the form of adaptation, transformation, but also as resistance to social change.

However, the move towards individual agency promoted by resilience thinking can also have perverse consequences. As noted earlier by critical scholars, the focus on the individual might also privilege neoliberal responses to crises. From this perspective, the focus that resilience places on the human legitimises individual responses versus the collective (collective responsibility, societal resilience). For instance, Kastner (2020) points at such risks when it comes to transitional justice responses, which traditionally have been heavily influenced by individual accountability discourses. Given the current skepticism towards our ability to deal with underlying conditions, resilience approaches favour short term, pragmatic, responses over longer term solutions, undermining the potential of resilience to offer a more systematic approach to addressing the root causes of conflict. For Bargués-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro 2020, gender interventions in Liberia can be understood as much as an effort to equip vulnerable populations to manage the

effects of poverty, conflict and gender inequalities than as an opportunity for the international community to prolong their interventions and sustain hope. Thus, we must be careful not to equate the potential of resilience in its various aspects with its actual implementation in peacebuilding. Indeed, in practice, the most likely outcome is currently a contradictory combination of ideals and pragmatism – neither a form of post-liberal governance (Chandler 2010), nor an outright break with liberalism as shown by the embrace of resilience at the EU level (Joseph and Juncos 2020).

Thus, having reviewed the potential of resilience approaches in theory, as well as exploring some of the tensions present in the arguments for resilience, the following section further elaborates on how resilience building might contribute to sustainable peace in practice by drawing on the different insights from the contributions to this Special Section.

Resilient peacebuilding: strategies of adaptation, transformation and resistance

This Special Section seeks to advance our knowledge of resilience in peacebuilding by providing a conceptually and empirically rich account of how local resilience is understood and mobilized within local communities. Going back to the question raised above – how does resilience apply in conflict affected situations and what difference does it make? – it is important to note that while resilience might be increasingly part of the terminology used by peacebuilders, in practice, resilience is not usually in the vocabulary of the local communities. As noted by Milliken (2013, 4-5), 'often resilience will not be a meaningful term for local actors for their aims and goals and capacities to achieve these. Rather, resilience might be a helpful metaphor in peacebuilders' vocabulary to make sense of what they observe.' Focusing on different areas (education, transitional justice, post-war reconstruction, gender), the articles illustrate how local actors cope with the consequences of conflict in deeply divided societies and shed light on which internal and external obstacles might prevent them from doing so. In particular, these contributions provide an in-depth examination of the different manifestations of resilience in conflict affected areas. We term these strategies as adaptation, transformation and resistance.

Adaptation is a key theme of resilience and this is emphasized in the contributions to this Special Section. Communities and individuals adapt to their changed circumstances as they seek to rebuild social and cultural cohesion. However, how adaptation is understood is a matter for discussion and not all approaches equate everyday adaptation with more radical forms of transformation (Lee 2020). Indeed, sometimes strategies of adaptation can be seen as a form of

maintenance of the status quo, especially, in the case of peaceful communities that are facing external communal violence (Krause 2018; Milliken 2013). As put by Menkhaus (2013, 4): ‘efforts to support this type of resilience are best described as akin to the public health goal of “inoculation”’. Lee’s contribution (2020) seeks to incorporate these different understandings and proposes three forms of resilience as the central analytical framework: recovery, maintenance, transformation. In his study of resilience of Buddhist communities in post-conflict Cambodia, he concludes that there is evidence of these three forms of resilience. Interestingly, however, even recovery and maintenance are inherently transformative as it becomes practically impossible to return to or maintain the properties of the pre-conflict period, such as in the aftermath of the conflict in Cambodia. As Menkhaus (2013, 5) notes the goal of returning to the pre-war situation ‘is usually both unobtainable and undesirable. Conflicts create new political dynamics, heighten grievances, erode trust, undermine credibility of authorities, and damage networks’. In the case of Cambodia, efforts were influenced by the post-war conditions and could only draw on the memories of survivors. Thus, maintenance strategies, heavily influenced by the existing socio-political context, also led to social change (Lee 2020).

In looking at post-conflict outcomes, Philipp Kastner (2020) provides one of the few comparisons of resilience and transitional justice seeing them both as responses to intractable problems. They share common features like the need to adapt to changes, find coping strategies and survive significant stress. Whether this is a good thing for the communities involved is an open question. Kastner himself uses the expression ‘double edged sword’ to describe such strategies insofar as they might positively encourage local communities to find their own solutions, but they could also just be a way for the international community to disengage from peacebuilding by shifting responsibility onto locals. Such a theme is also present in the contribution of Shah, Paulson and Couch (2020). They likewise focus on the resilience of communities, this time through the role of education. A focus on education policy suggests that fragility is not just a product of weak institutions, but a lack of social cohesion. Education can operate at different levels, for example, at the community level, or through nurturing or encouraging certain dispositions in individuals. As with other contributors (Bargués-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro, 2020), they see a danger of this leading to neoliberal form of governmentality that uses education to encourage self-reliance and shifting responsibility for managing learning onto local stakeholders as a cheap alternative in an age of austerity. In short, the danger of linking education with resilience is that the approach

becomes too individualized and psychologised. However, the authors argue that there is room for a more progressive transformational approach if education is taken to mean advancing the rights of children rather than the usual bouncing back. Hence, both articles note some possible linkages to neoliberal approaches that emphasise the individual and by shifting responsibilities, encourage acceptance that we live with constant danger and threat. But this does not mean that resilience is intrinsically neoliberal, and indeed, a resilience approach might help us to better understand neoliberal practices and discourse and encourage alternative local discourses and solutions, perhaps even transforming standard neoliberal practices.

For Bargués-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro (2020), sustainable peace is more about sustaining than it is about peace. They look at how resilience sustains a process of continuous revision and adaptation. This draws on de Coning's (2018) argument that sustaining peace is an infinite game rather than a matter of success or failure. For de Coning, moving away from a focus on problems and solutions allows peacebuilding to focus on sustained engagement with the community. While sharing this argument about sustaining peace, Bargués-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro have a more pessimistic interpretation**.** They do not see retreat from intervention as a plausible option, yet complexity, hybridity and uncertainty make the building of liberal institutions an impossibility. Resilience allows for a 'fragile peace' without the prospect of a 'happy ending'. They explore this through the case study of post-UNMIL Liberia and the UN and EU's 'Spotlight Initiative' that seeks the complete elimination of violence against women and girls. This initiative is seen as part of a general tendency that assumes the process is more important than the outcome. With a set of tasks that seem almost impossible to achieve, such interventions perhaps say more about the desire for a more comprehensive and integrated approach than it does about what actually happens in Liberia (see also Joseph and Juncos 2020). Nevertheless, with resilience as the new sustaining peace paradigm, there might still be opportunities for vulnerable populations to acquire some tools to mitigate the effects of poverty, discrimination and lack of opportunities.

From the previous discussion it also becomes clear that resilience cannot and should not be seen as opposed to resistance. While resilience can sometimes lead to depoliticization (Evans and Reid 2014), it is still possible to find instances where political agency is exercised through resilience strategies or, to paraphrase Bourbeau and Ryan (2018: 223), resilience might lead to resistance to either governmental or international initiatives. Resistance strategies might seek to

maintain the status quo or to transform it in alternative ways that are perceived to be more just. For instance, Lee (2020) argues that 'since such attempts for transformation challenge the prevalent notion and norms of society, they may face various forms of resistance from other social groups. The process of transformation can gradually experience major backlashes.' Examining resilience discourses can reveal how situations can be politically debunked and contested (Borbeau and Ryan 2018: 227). While strategies of resistance can entail organised actions such as strikes and protests, the resilience approach to resistance often entails more subversive and adaptive strategies (Ryan 2015). Lee's discussion of community resilience in post-conflict Cambodia also reveals something about the factors that might drive resilience responses, in particular, ontological (in)security as a driver for recovery, maintenance and transformation. His study also identifies some societal properties, in this case, leadership that facilitated these strategies. Further research needs to build on these insights to explore factors that might foster and/or undermine resilience at the community level (see Krause 2018).

Conclusions

This Special Section provides an in-depth examination of how resilience thinking can contribute to building peace in conflict environments. In particular, it has sought to address the following questions: what does resilience mean in the context of peacebuilding? Can it be incorporated into peacebuilding interventions? If so, does it always have a positive impact? when is resilience a good thing to promote, and when is it an impediment to durable peaceful solutions in conflict situations? And finally, can we promote resilience from the outside?

As mentioned in this Introduction, by contrast to other policy areas, resilience is still a relatively newcomer to peacebuilding. Yet, given current developments in the field, and particularly the move towards locally-owned and pragmatic solutions, resilience finds a fertile and receptive ground for its application. It is not surprising then that resilience has already been incorporated into the vocabulary of many international actors such as the UN or the EU active in post-conflict areas. In practice, however, it is still early days to determine how significant a shift this might be. The articles in this Special Section, however, note how a focus on complexity, systemic approaches, embracing local ownership and agential capabilities holds a lot of promise. In fact, it is possible to observe on the ground instances where local actors and communities have adopted a wide range of strategies to cope with and respond to the shocks which conflicts represent.

The concept of resilience helps us to make sense of such developments. As evidenced by several articles in this Special Section (e.g. Lee 2020; Kastner 2020), it is possible to identify such emergent and bottom up initiatives, which correspond to different forms of resilience (whether in the form of adaptation or transformation). It is also possible to see how resilience can be understood in terms of resistance to either governmental or international initiatives (Bargués-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro 2020; Kastner 2020; Lee 2020).

In an area where international intervention has been highly criticized in the past for being too top-down and prescriptive, the question that remains is whether and to what extent can these strategies of resilience be facilitated or promoted from the outside? And even if this is the case, whether this is desirable? At the moment, it would seem that the main attraction of the concept of resilience for international actors has been the emphasis on an integrated approach and the rhetorical commitment to local ownership (Joseph and Juncos 2020). For resilience to be properly implemented by international actors it would require so much investment (both in terms of funds and time) that it is difficult to see how this will ever happen. More importantly, it would require for peacebuilding agendas to become, in line with complexity thinking, agnostic about the end goals. Again, it is difficult to see how this taking place any time soon. Instead, a number of contributions to the Special Section (e.g. Bargués-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro 2020; Shah et al. 2020) have confirmed some of the concerns raised by the critical literature on resilience, that international actors have used the discourse of resilience as a form of neoliberal governance, as well as an excuse to withdraw international resources/funding and to responsibilise the local.

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