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Peter Finkenbusch

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Liberal peace: from civilising mission to self-doubt

Peter Finkenbusch 

School of Humanities, Coventry University, Coventry, UK

ABSTRACT

Focusing on post-Cold War international interventions, this article traces the emergence of a malaise within the liberal universal project. While it is agreed that the liberal peace is in crisis, there is disagreement on the nature of the impasse. For mainstream IR scholars, there is a resistance by actors in the Global South to follow the policy dictates of powerful Western governments and the international organisations they dominate. While this is certainly the case, this article argues that the crisis of the liberal peace is also rooted in the erosion of liberal universal foundations. In addition to liberal norms being rejected by Southern actors, the liberal peace crisis reflects a deeper scepticism on the part of international policy elites regarding the ability of liberal market democracy to resolve a wide range of social, political and economic problems. In addition to being a crisis of legitimacy between the Global North and the Global South, there seems to exist an erosion of liberal universal foundations which is undermining the ability of international policy elites to act purposively in global affairs. This argument is drawn out with reference to post-liberal approaches to peacebuilding which foreground the radical potential of non-liberal forms of agency.

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Introduction

This article traces the emergence of a growing malaise within the liberal peace project. Rather than representing solely a questioning of legitimacy by political actors in the Global South,¹ the argument proposed here is that post-liberal approaches to peacebuilding reflect an erosion of the liberal peace foundations of international policymakers.² The

CONTACT Peter Finkenbusch  ad0262@coventry.ac.uk  Coventry University, Priory Street, Coventry CV1 5FB, United Kingdom

¹Christopher Daase and Nicole Deitelhoff, *Zur Rekonstruktion Globaler Herrschaft Aus Dem Widerstand*, Internationale Dissidenz Working Paper 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Goethe University Frankfurt, 2014), <http://dissidenz.net/workingpapers/wp1-2014-daase-deitelhoff.pdf>; Christopher Daase and Nicole Deitelhoff, 'Internationale Dissidenz. Ein Forschungsprogramm', in *Macht Und Widerstand in Der Globalen Politik*, ed. Julian Junk and Christian Volk (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2013), 163–75; Christopher Daase, 'Was Ist Widerstand?', *Aus Politik Und Zeitgeschichte* 64, no. 27 (2014): 3–9.

²Oliver Richmond, 'A Post-Liberal Peace: Eirenism and the Everyday', *Review of International Studies* 35 (2009): 557–80; Oliver Richmond, 'Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace', *Millennium* 38, no. 3 (2010): 1–28; Oliver Richmond, 'Beyond Liberal Peace? Responses to Backsliding', in *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*, ed. Edward Newman, Roland Paris, and Oliver Richmond (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009), 54–77; Oliver Richmond, 'Towards a Post-Liberal Peace', *International Political Sociology*, 2011; Oliver Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace* (London: Routledge, 2011).

crisis of liberal peace is to a large extent internal to Western policy and academic discourse, rather than being exclusively a sign of resistance from the Global South. The aim of this article is to make a case in favour of normative and analytical foundationalism. It is not a defence of the liberal peace paradigm per se. Critical scholars have rightly pointed out that the liberal peace paradigm has been used to stabilise an unequal and unjust international order and reinforce the status-quo of Western dominance.³ In order to address key issues of rights, equality and justice in the international system the liberal peace model might not be the best option. In particular, the liberal peace approach seems to be unable to remedy the structural inequalities (re-) produced by a capitalist world economy.

The first section deals with Roland Paris' confident call for a 'new civilizing mission'.⁴ Paris questioned the naturalness of the transition to liberal market democracy and, instead, emphasised the (informal) institutional preconditions of competitive markets and pluralist politics. However, although he was sceptical about the path to liberal market democracy, Paris ultimately remained a classic Wilsonian outlook. He believed in the ability of markets, human rights and the secular state to overcome the obstacles faced by post-conflict and other transitional societies.

This liberal universal project has attracted widespread critique. Rita Abrahamsen, for instance, saw the good governance agenda as a way of maintaining the hegemony of Northern actors over the internal affairs of the Global South.⁵ For Abrahamsen, post-Cold War interventions reflected a moment of 'Western triumphalism' and a 'continuation of Europe's "civilizing mission"'.⁶ What matters here is that despite lingering doubts about the process of transition, the 'new interventionism'⁷ of the 2000s articulated a 'belief in the pre-eminence of Western political values'.⁸ Similarly, Beate Jahn has shown how that the political, social and economic difficulties of democratisation are 'defined in opposition to the liberal ideal'.⁹ Jahn has analysed convincingly how the failures of transition have been blamed on the larger than expected deficits in Third World countries and how this framing has stimulated more ambitious and long-term interventions 'designed to reconstitute every aspect of the target society in the image of liberal market democracies'.¹⁰ For the policy elites of the 2000s, the failure of intervention to achieve its stated goals merely reinforced 'liberalism's basic assumptions – of its own superiority; of its right, competence and power [...]'.¹¹ Policy failure did not lead to a 'critical self-analysis and actual revision of liberalism itself'.¹²

In contrast, post-liberal frameworks propose precisely such a questioning of liberalism. The second section engages with the local turn by leading post-liberal scholars Oliver

³Michael Pugh, Neil Cooper, and Mandy Turner, *Whose Peace. The Political Economy of Peacebuilding* (London: Palgrave, 2008).

⁴International Peacebuilding and the "Mission Civilisatrice", *Review of International Studies* 28, no. 4 (2002): 637–56.

⁵*Disciplining Democracy. Development Discourse and Good Governance in Africa*. (London: Zed Books, 2000).
⁶43, 36.

⁷Simon Chesterman, *You, The People. The United Nations, Transnational Administration, and State-Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

⁸Abrahamsen, *Disciplining Democracy. Development Discourse and Good Governance in Africa*, 35.

⁹The Tragedy of Liberal Diplomacy: Democratization, Intervention, Statebuilding (Part II)', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 1, no. 2 (2007): 225.
¹⁰223.

¹¹Jahn, 225.

¹²Jahn, 227.

Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty.¹³ In a nutshell, Richmond and Mac Ginty suggest that an open-ended, unscripted conversation with the local goes against the ‘universalism that lies at the heart of liberal optimism and notions of universal rights’.¹⁴ For Richmond and Mac Ginty, engaging with the local – and the even deeper ‘local-local’ – deliberately ‘undermine[s]’ the ‘legitimacy of universal projects’.¹⁵ Bringing in local voices requires a fundamental rejection of the ‘liberal peace paradigm itself’.¹⁶ As long as international policy elites are wrapped up in liberal universal ideology they will not be able to see, let alone to fully appreciate, ‘the local’. Here, ‘the local’ is not defined substantially, but negatively as the opposite of liberal universalism. Since international policy elites are defined by their very liberal universal episteme, the quest to identify and freely interact with genuinely local actors is set up for failure. The ‘deep gaps between liberal governance [i.e. international interveners] and local praxis in terms of culture and customs’ can never be fully overcome.¹⁷ Post-liberal peacebuilding can be nothing else but a mutual attempt by international interveners and post-conflict subjects to overcome their own exclusions and binaries.¹⁸ Hence, Richmond’s point that post-liberalism seeks to introduce a new ‘sensitivity’, rather than an ‘alternative paradigm for “peace”’.¹⁹

The final section connects these critical insights to the question of international authority. It argues that the current crisis of the liberal peace is to a large extent an internal one. In addition to being contested by the targets of international policy intervention, the legitimacy of the liberal peace project is increasingly questioned from within the peacebuilding community itself. The crisis of the liberal peace project does not only hinge on the ‘question of domination: Who *can* and who *may* proscribe to the actors of international politics how they ought to behave?’.²⁰ It is part of a larger difficulty to ‘giv[e] meaning to authority itself’.²¹ This is clearly evidenced in contemporary policy thinking on international peacebuilding. For example, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) stresses that ‘there is no clear, predefined pathway to peace’.²² Clearly rejecting any universalist approach, the OECD seeks to ‘[m]ake the country context the starting point, rather than basing decisions on a development partners agenda’.²³ Imposing one-size-fits-all liberal blueprints is seen with scepticism. Western policymakers should refrain from ‘impos[ing] models and norms on the rest of the world’.²⁴ Building peace is an ‘endogenously driven process’ in which international interveners may act as ‘moderators and facilitators’, but never as ‘implementers of outside “fixes”’.²⁵ The OECD

¹³Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond, ‘The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace’, *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5 (2013): 763–83.

¹⁴778.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Richmond, ‘Beyond Liberal Peace?’, 55.

¹⁷Richmond, ‘Beyond Liberal Peace?’, 66.

¹⁸see Richmond, ‘A Post-Liberal Peace: Eirealism and the Everyday’, 580.

¹⁹Richmond, ‘Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace’, 682.

²⁰Daase and Deitelhoff, *Zur Rekonstruktion Globaler Herrschaft Aus Dem Widerstand*, 3, original emphasis, author’s translation.

²¹Frank Furedi, *Authority. A Sociological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 383.

²²Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *International Support to Post-Conflict Transition. Rethinking Policy, Changing Practice* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2012), 24.

²³*Supporting Statebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Fragility: Policy Guidance* (Paris: OECD, 2011), 60.

²⁴Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 25.

²⁵Ibid., 3; Importantly, the argument in this article operates on the level of governmental rationality (Michel Foucault 2004. *The Birth of Biopolitics*. New York: Picador). It is concerned with the way in which political decisionmakers and their organic intellectuals think about the best possible way of governing. It deals with government’s

also emphasises the ‘endogenous’ character of statebuilding, the fact that social transformation needs to be locally driven, rather than externally imposed.²⁶ Rather than focusing on their ability to trigger positive change, international organisations like the OECD today are clearly more concerned about all the things that could go wrong. Driven less by a positive image of their own potential contribution, their primary concern is to ‘[d]o no harm’ and avoid ‘unintended outcomes’.²⁷ This is a far cry from Paris’ ‘new civilizing mission’ and clearly showcases how the liberal peace is being eroded from within by the policy and academic communities. It demonstrates forcefully how the growing inability of international policy elites to act purposively in the world is not exclusively a sign of resistance ‘from below’, but also an expression of self-doubt.

Interventionary ambition and the civilising mission

Looking back at the 2000s it is difficult not to notice the interventionary zeal of leading Western governments and international organisations. As Jarat Chopra rightly points out, by the end of the 1990s, there was an increasing ‘converg[ence] on ideas for comprehensive, political missions’.²⁸ While initial international policy efforts in post-conflict and other transitional societies had focused on early elections and the quick withdrawal of external actors, the missions in Kosovo and Timor Leste signalled the arrival of much more ambitious, long-term forms of engagement. This was in large part due to a new focus on the institutional preconditions of competitive markets and pluralist politics. In the words of leading statebuilding theorists Roland Paris and Timothy Sisk, ‘little attention’ had so far been paid to the ‘longer-term tasks of constructing or strengthening the institutional structures necessary for democratic governance and market reforms [...] to take root’.²⁹ In the wake of the new emphasis on institutional preconditions, international peacebuilding missions became ‘more complex and multifaceted’.³⁰

A key contribution to the peacebuilding debate at the time was Roland Paris’ *At War’s End* which stressed the importance of ‘Institutionalization Before Liberalization’.³¹ Paris was a staunch believer in the ability of free markets and democratic politics to remedy a broad range of political, economic and social problems – from economic underdevelopment to violent conflict and environmental degradation. However, he was sceptical about the peaceful transition to liberal market democracy. Paris argued that the ‘desire to turn war-torn societies into stable market democracies was not the problem’.³² Instead, he claimed that international peacebuilders had been underestimating the ‘destabilizing

consciousness of itself. Therefore, it is less interested in the gap between goals and implementation or the actual practices of intervention on the ground.

²⁶Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, ‘State Building in Situations of Fragility. Initial Findings – August 2008’ (OECD, 2008).

²⁷Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Do No Harm. International Support for Statebuilding* (Paris: OECD, 2010).

²⁸‘Building State Failure in East Timor’, in *State-Building. Theory and Practice*, ed. Aidan Hehir and Neil Robinson (London: Routledge, 2007), 149.

²⁹‘Introduction. Understanding the Contradictions of Post-War Statebuilding’, in *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding. Confronting the Contradictions of Post-War Peace Operations*, ed. Roland Paris and Timothy Sisk (London: Routledge, 2010), 6.

³⁰Paris and Sisk, 56?; see Edward Newman, Roland Paris, and Oliver Richmond, ‘Introduction’, in *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*, ed. Edward Newman, Roland Paris, and Oliver Richmond (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009), 7; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *International Engagement in Fragile States. Can’t We Do Better?* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2011), 27, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264086128-en>.

³¹*At War’s End* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

³²6.

effects of liberalization'.³³ What he advocated was a 'more controlled and gradual approach to liberalisation, combined with the immediate building of governmental institutions that can manage these political and economic reforms'.³⁴ Put differently, Paris continued to support the end goal of liberal market democracy and hailed its pacifying effects. However, he problematised the transition process to this end state, calling for a 'more interventionist and long-term approach to peacebuilding'.³⁵ What matters here is the fact that Paris did not question the Wilsonian aims of intervention *per se*.³⁶ If anything, he propagated the expansion of international policy efforts to spread liberal market democracy. While Paris expressed doubts about the transitional process and the (informal) institutional preconditions of stable market democracy, there is still a very strong liberal *telos* foregrounding the benefits of markets and elections.

It is this propagation of liberal market democracy as the ultimate aim of intervention which led Paris to claim that international policy elites were – and should be – embarking on an 'updated (and more benign) version of the mission civilisatrice, or the colonial-era belief that the European imperial powers had a duty to "civilize" dependent populations and territories'.³⁷ Paris seemed to welcome the fact that international peacebuilders were 'promulgat[ing] a particular vision of how states should organize themselves internally'.³⁸ His support of liberal market democracy is inseparable from the claim that peacebuilders should "'transmit[...]" standards of appropriate behaviour from the Western-liberal core of the international system to the failed states of the periphery'.³⁹ Paris' argument and the statebuilding projects of the 2000s which it helped to shape are in line with the 'belief that one model of domestic governance – liberal market democracy – is superior to all others'.⁴⁰ Although Paris questions the natural transition to a market economy and competitive party politics, he is very much a defender of liberal market democracy as the end goal of intervention. In equally affirmative terms, Simon Chesterman suggested that the problem is 'not that transitional administration is colonial in character', but that it is 'not colonial enough'.⁴¹

The emergence of a new civilising mission has attracted widespread and well-founded criticism. Rita Abrahamsen, for example, considered the good governance agenda of the World Bank and other international organisations as 'one way in which the North maintains and legitimizes its continued power and hegemony in the South'.⁴² For Abrahamsen, the spread of liberal market democracy was an instance of Northern domination. Good governance strategies, like Paris' 'Institutionalization Before Liberalization' approach, were enabling the West to 'continue its undisputed hegemony on the African continent'.⁴³ They reflected the ambition of international policy elites to claim the 'moral high ground, the right to administer development and democracy to the South'.⁴⁴

³³Paris, 6.

³⁴Paris, 7–8.

³⁵Paris, 206.

³⁶211.

³⁷'International Peacebuilding and the "Mission Civilisatrice"', 637.

³⁸637.

³⁹Paris, 637.

⁴⁰Paris, 638.

⁴¹*You, The People. The United Nations, Transnational Administration, and State-Building*, 12.

⁴²*Disciplining Democracy. Development Discourse and Good Governance in Africa*, ix.

⁴³44.

⁴⁴Abrahamsen, 44.

Importantly, for the critics of the new interventionism, efforts to spread liberal market democracy were signs of ideological confidence. Abrahamsen claimed that the good governance agenda spoke for a 'Western triumphalism', a 'belief in the pre-eminence of Western political values'.⁴⁵ Similarly, Beate Jahn saw the drive to intervene even after the most devastating failures as rooted in the 'length, breadth and depth of the power of the liberal ideology'.⁴⁶ According to Jahn, international intervention geared towards establishing liberal market democracy evidenced 'vigour and conviction'.⁴⁷ They showcased the 'pervasive power of the liberal ideology'.⁴⁸ In line with the liberal approach of intervention, host societies were seen as a 'uniform or "virgin" territory' to be remade in the image of 'externally conceived models' of peace.⁴⁹ Steeped in liberal ideology, international interveners were effectively engaging in self-imposition. As Séverine Autesserre argued in her much-discussed book on *Peaceland*, peacebuilders were relying on their 'own models of how best to rebuild a state, their own beliefs about the responsibilities a government should meet, and their own notions of what ordinary citizens would want'.⁵⁰ Local political practices were rejected with a view to being 'replace [d] [...] from above with Western patterns of liberal democracy'.⁵¹ Interveners were claiming 'transformative power over post-conflict spaces', seeing post-conflict societies 'according to how they saw themselves: as liberal or Wilsonian'.⁵²

Notably, according to mainstream IR scholars, this liberal statebuilding model 'has remained largely unchanged and unchallenged since it took shape in the early 1990s'.⁵³ In contrast to this popular view, the next section will elaborate how the liberal ambition of international interveners is increasingly questioned from within by post-liberal calls to engage with local context and everyday forms of agency.⁵⁴

Post-liberal peacebuilding and the local turn

Post-liberal peacebuilding constitutes a clear departure from the liberal hubris of Paris' 'new civilizing mission'.⁵⁵ In the post-liberal framework, the notions of the 'local' and the 'everyday' serve as the discursive means for articulating a sweeping critique of

⁴⁵34, 35.

⁴⁶The Tragedy of Liberal Diplomacy: Democratization, Intervention, Statebuilding (Part II)', 226.

⁴⁷225.

⁴⁸Jahn, 227.

⁴⁹Edward Newman, "'Liberal' Peacebuilding Debates', in *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*, ed. Edward Newman, Roland Paris, and Oliver Richmond (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009), 42; see Michael Wesley, 'The State of the Art on the Art of State Building', *Global Governance* 14, no. 3 (2008): 374, 380; Caroline Hughes, "'We Just Take What They Offer": Community Empowerment in Post-War Timor-Leste', in *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009), 219, 220, 223, 228.

⁵⁰*Peaceland. Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 4, emphasis added.

⁵¹Jason Franks, 'Beware of Liberal Peacebuilders Bearing Gifts: The Deviancy of Liberal Peace in Palestine and Israel', in *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*, ed. Edward Newman, Roland Paris, and Oliver Richmond (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009), 283.

⁵²John Heathershaw, 'Seeing like the International Community: How Peacebuilding Failed (and Survived) in Tajikistan', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 2, no. 3 (2008): 329.

⁵³David Roberts, 'Hybrid Politics and Indigenous Pluralities. Advanced Lessons in Statebuilding from Cambodia', in *Statebuilding and Intervention. Policies, Practices and Paradigms*, ed. David Chandler (London: Routledge, 2009), 167.

⁵⁴Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace*; Richmond, 'Towards a Post-Liberal Peace'; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 'The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace'.

⁵⁵Richmond, 'Towards a Post-Liberal Peace'; Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace*.

liberal-universal foundations. They are meant to work as 'a fundamental challenge to the dominant ways of thinking and acting about peace'.⁵⁶ The local turn is defined in opposition to the universalism allegedly informing international interveners – 'a retreat from the certainties and binaries that underpin Western modes of thinking'.⁵⁷ The local turn views liberal peacebuilding as fundamentally flawed: 'liberal democracy, liberal human rights, market values, the integration of societies into globalization and the centralized secular state [...] are not necessarily universal [...] values'.⁵⁸ Rather than constituting a universally applicable paradigm, liberal market democracy constitutes the West's own local. It is the West's own parochial identity. In the words of Oliver Richmond, liberal peace is itself a 'form of customary political community'.⁵⁹ It is their social embeddedness in this particularistic identity which keeps international policy elites from openly engaging with other epistemologies. Because of their liberal universal blinders, international interveners can literally not "see" what is happening on the ground'.⁶⁰ The exclusions, binaries and hierarchies of liberal universalism make the local 'elusive' for international policymakers.⁶¹ The local – defined as the liberal universal interveners' Other – is 'all but invisible'.⁶² What Richmond and other post-liberal authors call for is a much more 'empathetic understanding' of post-conflict societies.⁶³ Peacebuilding needs to 'move beyond liberalism'⁶⁴ if it wants to make room for 'hidden agencies' to come to the fore.⁶⁵ Post-liberalism is a search for essentially 'unknowable others'⁶⁶ who are defined negatively as everything but liberal universal.

The key feature of post-liberalism for the purposes of this article is that it deliberately avoids formulating a 'new metanarrative of "peace"'.⁶⁷ The point of highlighting the 'political and normative closure' of the liberal peace is not to replace liberal values with a fresh set of new foundations.⁶⁸ In the eyes of post-liberal authors, this would merely result in the creation of a 'new hegemonic "-ism" or a grand metanarrative'.⁶⁹ The critique of liberal universalism, therefore, does not involve an 'alternative paradigm of "peace"'.⁷⁰ Reconstructing international peacebuilding from the local and the everyday cannot be accomplished 'in general theory'.⁷¹ Rather than a new foundational theory, post-liberalism revolves around a new political and cultural 'sensitivity'.⁷² Where liberal universalism stresses homogeneity and reductionism, post-liberalism foregrounds 'particularism and local variation that confront universalist ideas and practices'.⁷³ What coheres post-

⁵⁶Mac Ginty and Richmond, 'The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace', 772.

⁵⁷Mac Ginty and Richmond, 780.

⁵⁸Newman, Paris, and Richmond, 'Introduction', 12.

⁵⁹*A Post-Liberal Peace*, 18.

⁶⁰Richmond, 57.

⁶¹Richmond, 46.

⁶²Richmond, 71.

⁶³Richmond, 133.

⁶⁴Richmond, 'Beyond Liberal Peace? Responses to Backsliding', 60.

⁶⁵Richmond, 'Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace', 670.

⁶⁶Richmond, 'A Post-Liberal Peace: Eirenism and the Everyday', 566.

⁶⁷Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace*, 213.

⁶⁸Richmond, 'A Post-Liberal Peace: Eirenism and the Everyday', 576.

⁶⁹Richmond, 580.

⁷⁰Richmond, 'Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace', 682.

⁷¹Richmond, 682.

⁷²Richmond, 682.

⁷³Mac Ginty and Richmond, 'The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace', 772.

liberal peacebuilding is not a set of foundational norms and assumptions but the notion of 'resistance' to any totalising knowledge claims.⁷⁴ The aim of post-liberal peacebuilding, hence, is not to 'export ideologies of peace', but instead to 'seek open and free communication between post-conflict individuals and peace builders about the nature of peace in each context'.⁷⁵ In stark contrast to Paris' domineering 'new civilizing mission', Richmond stresses how locally-informed peacebuilding needs to 'be wary of any problem-solving meta-narratives relating to power, security, sovereignty, status or territory'.⁷⁶ This amounts to a general rejection of governance where this involves 'the claim to know on behalf of others, to govern on behalf of others, to secure others or to defer agency'.⁷⁷ While the critique of totalising knowledge claims and top-down intervention are a welcome corrective to the domineering liberal peace interventions of the 1990s, post-liberalism reflects an approach of 'critique-as-alternative'⁷⁸ in which the episteme of both the interveners and intervened are constantly deconstructed, with no firm ground re-emerging. As Gezim Visoka rightly points out, the 'critique-as-alternative' approach of Mac Ginty and Richmond 'offers a pragmatic critique of ethics'.⁷⁹ However, Steve Smith has stressed that 'the main failure of the alternative perspectives is that whilst they have done much to undermine the epistemological assumptions of the mainstream, they have not succeeded in establishing an alternative epistemology'.⁸⁰ That, for post-liberals, would constitute yet-another domineering imposition from outside.

In sum, post-liberalism is a response to 'issues of alterity' questioning the viability of liberal universalism in non-Western contexts.⁸¹ In so doing, it speaks for what Mark Duffield has astutely identified as a 'deepening malaise within the liberal project'.⁸² More broadly, post-liberalism reflects a 'post-ideological inability' to formulate a 'viable narrative framework within which to situate the exercise of power'.⁸³ As the next section draws out, this is an internal crisis of foundations rather than an external one of questioning legitimacy.

Lack of legitimacy or crisis of foundations?

The problem of international authority today does not seem to be exclusively an external one of the unwillingness of subordinate states and civil society actors to accept the

⁷⁴Richmond, 'Beyond Liberal Peace? Responses to Backsliding', 62.

⁷⁵Richmond, 'A Post-Liberal Peace: Eirenism and the Everyday', 580.

⁷⁶'Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace', 671.

⁷⁷Richmond, 671; see Autesserre, *Peaceland. Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention*, 53, 108–9.

⁷⁸Gezim Visoka, 'Critique and Alternativity in International Relations', *International Studies Review* 21, no. 4 (2019): 678–704.

⁷⁹Visoka, 685.

⁸⁰Steve Smith, 'Alternative and Critical Perspective', in *Millennial Reflections on International Studies* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2002), 195–208.

⁸¹Oliver Richmond, 'Becoming Liberal, Unbecoming Liberalism. Liberal-Local Hybridity via the Everyday as a Response to the Paradoxes of Liberal Peacebuilding', in *Rethinking the Liberal Peace. External Models and Local Alternatives*, ed. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 42.

⁸²'Challenging Environments: Danger, Resilience and the Aid Industry', *Security Dialogue* 43, no. 5 (2012): 487.

⁸³Philip Cunliffe, 'State-Building. Power without Responsibility', in *State-Building. Theory and Practice*, ed. Aidan Hehir and Neil Robinson (London: Routledge, 2007), 53; see Philip Cunliffe, 'Sovereignty and the Politics of Responsibility', in *Politics without Sovereignty. A Critique of Contemporary International Relations*, ed. Christopher Bickerton, Philip Cunliffe, and Alexander Gourevitch (Abingdon: UCL Press, 2007), 39–57; Christopher Bickerton, Philip Cunliffe, and Alexander Gourevitch, eds., *Politics without Sovereignty. A Critique of Contemporary International Relations* (London: UCL Press, 2007); Christopher Bickerton, 'State-Building: Exporting State Failure', *Arena Journal*, no. 32 (2009): 101–23; Alexander Gourevitch, 'The Unfailing of the State', *Journal of International Affairs* 58, no. 1 (2004): 255–60.

policy directives of Western interveners. The crisis of international authority does not appear to speak solely for a break-down of 'legitimate domination'.⁸⁴ Christopher Daase has pointed out the '[i]ncreasing resistance against liberal economic models, the disrespect of international rules and open protest against "Western values"', seeing them as 'signs of a legitimacy deficit'.⁸⁵ Their concern is with changing forms of opposition and dissent in the international system. There is arguably a 'legitimacy crisis of the global system'.⁸⁶ However, where I would like to differ from Daase and Deitelhoff is on their claim that the crisis of authority speaks primarily for a growing uncertainty concerning the 'question of domination: Who *can* and who *may* proscribe to the actors of international politics how they ought to behave?'.⁸⁷ In addition to legitimate global order becoming more instable by being openly questioned 'from below', there also seems to exist a difficulty within contemporary Western societies to 'giv[e] meaning to authority itself': 'In effect, authority ha[s] become a sort of embarrassment to those who are called upon to exercise it – a subject best avoided'.⁸⁸ The contemporary crisis of international authority is understood in this article less in terms of 'growing resistance against the existing order of international politics'⁸⁹ and more as revealing an internal process of normative and analytical deconstruction that is incapable of establishing a new basis of authority.

It is a crisis of 'epistemic authority',⁹⁰ but it is to some extent internal to Western governmental discourse, rather than being primarily an issue of legitimacy breaking down. If Michael Zürn et al. define 'epistemic authority' as 'rest[ing] on the assumption that knowledge and expertise are unequally distributed, but that there is a *common* epistemological framework that allows us to judge this inequality', then it would appear that today it is precisely this erstwhile taken-for-granted liberal universal framework which is being taken apart from within.⁹¹

The argument presented in this article is generally in line with my earlier critique of post-liberalism.⁹² Where this article goes further is in its explicit case in favour of foundationalism, liberal or other. Analytical and normative foundations seem to be an essential requirement of socially transformative policy efforts. While the critical ethos of post-liberal argument is very welcome, it lacks a clear vision and understanding of agency to bring about purposive social transformation. In contrast to my earlier article in *Peacebuilding*, the argument here takes account of the fact that there is also an external dimension of the liberal peace crisis, i.e. resistance by actors from the Global South. Liberal peace efforts imposed from the top-down are necessarily fractured on the ground by local

⁸⁴Max Weber, *Wirtschaft Und Gesellschaft. Grundriss Der Verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1995).

⁸⁵Daase, 'Was Ist Widerstand?', 7–8, authors translation; see Daase and Deitelhoff, 'Internationale Dissidenz. Ein Forschungsprogramm', 164–5.

⁸⁶Daase and Deitelhoff, 'Internationale Dissidenz. Ein Forschungsprogramm', 163, author's translation.

⁸⁷Daase and Deitelhoff, *Zur Rekonstruktion Globaler Herrschaft Aus Dem Widerstand*, 3, original emphasis, author's translation.

⁸⁸Furedi, *Authority. A Sociological History*, 383.

⁸⁹Daase and Deitelhoff, 'Internationale Dissidenz. Ein Forschungsprogramm', 164, author's translation.

⁹⁰Michael Zürn, Martin Binder, and Matthias Ecker-Ehrhardt, 'International Authority and Its Politicization', *International Theory* 4, no. 1 (2012): 86.

⁹¹Zürn, Binder, and Ecker-Ehrhardt, 86, emphasis added.

⁹²Peter Finkenbusch, "'Post-Liberal' Peacebuilding and the Crisis of International Authority', *Peacebuilding* 4, no. 3 (2016): 247–61.

actors, practice and discourses.⁹³ This article also brings in new empirical material, including from the OECD, which is now emphasising the endogenous character of statebuilding and the importance of local context.⁹⁴

While the end of the Cold War ushered in a new era of external intervention by leading Western states and the international organisations they had come to dominate, it also 'brought to the fore problems of legitimacy that were obscured by the intensity of a highly ideological superpower conflict'.⁹⁵ In his much-discussed 'Age of Extremes', Eric Hobsbawm came to a similar conclusion arguing that there exists 'a crisis of the beliefs and assumptions on which modern society had been founded since the Moderns won their famous battles against the Ancients in the early eighteenth century – of the rational and humanist assumptions, shared by liberal capitalism and communism [...]'.⁹⁶ Importantly, this crisis in liberal modernity has not been followed by 'the constitution of a [...] novel version of foundational norms for validating authority'.⁹⁷ Thus, the crisis of international authority, as reflected in the growing inability of Western interveners to purposefully engage in a project of social transformation in the global periphery, is a 'problem of foundational norms' on the part of Western policy elites.⁹⁸ If there is, indeed, a crisis of *auctoritas* as the 'capacity to initiate',⁹⁹ it is a dynamic of distancing oneself from the 'ideal of a foundational authority which someone develops (augments) and takes forward into the present'.¹⁰⁰ As Hannah Arendt pointed out in her discussion of the word *auctoritas* and its root in the verb *augere* (augment), 'what authority or those in authority constantly augment is the foundation'.¹⁰¹ Against this background, it appears as if contemporary practices of critique – such as post-liberalism – go in the opposite direction. They seem to be geared towards diminution. They vie to disassemble the existing foundations, rather than to augment them – or, alternatively, to replace them with a fresh set of new foundational norms. They are about 'enabling people to destabilize even deeply institutionalized meanings'.¹⁰² It would seem as if contemporary critiques of the liberal peace 'have opted for the strategy of evading the question [of "foundational support"] altogether'.¹⁰³ The post-liberal 'sensitivity'¹⁰⁴ seems to be 'profoundly suspicious of the exercise of authority'.¹⁰⁵ As Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond make clear themselves, there has been a 'loss of confidence' by the actors driving international intervention.¹⁰⁶ Importantly, they go on to argue that 'this crisis at the international level

⁹³Joakim Ojendala and Sivhuoch Ou, 'From Friction to Hybridity in Cambodia: 20 Years of Unfinished Peacebuilding', *Peacebuilding* 1, no. 3 (2013): 365–80; Volker Boege et al., 'Building Peace and Political Community in Hybrid Political Orders', *International Peacekeeping* 16, no. 5 (2009): 599–615.

⁹⁴Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *International Support to Post-Conflict Transition. Rethinking Policy, Changing Practice*; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Do No Harm. International Support for Statebuilding*.

⁹⁵Furedi, *Authority. A Sociological History*, 385.

⁹⁶*The Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Abacus Books, 2004), 11.

⁹⁷Furedi, *Authority. A Sociological History*, 386.

⁹⁸Furedi, 6.

⁹⁹Harro Hopfl, 'Power, Authority and Legitimacy', *Human Resource Development International* 2, no. 3 (1999): 232.

¹⁰⁰Furedi, *Authority. A Sociological History*, 10.

¹⁰¹Hannah Arendt, 'What Is Authority?', in *Between Past and Present* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 91–141.

¹⁰²Autesserre, *Peaceland. Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention*, 42.

¹⁰³Furedi, *Authority. A Sociological History*, 205.

¹⁰⁴Richmond, 'Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace', 682.

¹⁰⁵Furedi, *Authority. A Sociological History*, 2.

¹⁰⁶'The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace', 763; see Neil Cooper, 'Review Article: On the Crisis of the Liberal Peace', *Conflict, Security and Development* 7, no. 4 (2007): 605.

is also partly internal'.¹⁰⁷ What they fail to fully appreciate is how their own post-liberal critique has been reflecting the erosion of liberal universal foundations.

Notably, the idea of an internal crisis of liberal foundations proposed in this article does not necessarily contradict the critical insights provided by friction¹⁰⁸ and hybridity¹⁰⁹ arguments. Plans are unavoidably refracted by local discourses, actors and practices. There is a friction between plan and reality.¹¹⁰ Building on a detailed case study of the UN peace mission in Cambodia, Ojendala and Ou have demonstrated how 'national elites have become increasingly capable of renegotiating, resisting, or disregarding the inserted order, or parts thereof, and increasingly powerful in creating a different version of peace'.¹¹¹ Foundationalism – for example the classic-liberal notion that all individuals everywhere, anytime are the bearers of inalienable rights and positive human faculties – does not contradict the empirical finding of a 'vast gap between the externally installed political system and the readiness of national actors to work with the system'.¹¹² We might 'fundamentally question[...] the viability of liberal peace as a backbone for conflict resolution interventions', but this, I argue, would need to be followed-up with an alternative set of assumptions and concepts able to guide purposive social transformation and human emancipation.¹¹³

The way forward

As the previous section has drawn out, the current crisis of the liberal peace is to some extent internal to Western policy discourse. In addition to reflecting a political challenge by the targets of international intervention in the Global South, post-liberal approaches to peacebuilding point to a crisis of confidence among leading Western governments and the international organisations they dominate. Paradoxically, international policy elites today engage in comprehensive statebuilding projects around the world, involving the reform of civil society, markets and public institutions, while their engagement with the world increasingly lacks necessity and conviction. The policy remit of post-Cold War international interventions has grown considerably, while the liberal universal drive of these missions is increasingly hollowed out.

Post-liberal approaches to peacebuilding reflect a deeper unease with liberal universal foundations. Taking the post-liberal argument as a paradigmatic reflection of contemporary policy thinking, it becomes clear that the current crisis of the liberal peace is to some

¹⁰⁷Mac Ginty and Richmond, 'The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace', 766.

¹⁰⁸Ojendala and Ou, 'From Friction to Hybridity in Cambodia: 20 Years of Unfinished Peacebuilding'; Annika Björkdahl and Kristine Höglund, 'Precarious Peacebuilding: Friction in Global–Local Encounters', *Peacebuilding* 1, no. 3 (2013): 289–99.

¹⁰⁹Boege et al., 'Building Peace and Political Community in Hybrid Political Orders'; Volker Boege, Anne Brown, and Kevin Clements, 'Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States', *Peace Review* 21, no. 1 (2009): 13–21.

¹¹⁰James Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹¹¹Ojendala and Ou, 'From Friction to Hybridity in Cambodia: 20 Years of Unfinished Peacebuilding', 368.

¹¹²Ojendala and Ou, 373.

¹¹³For an argument in favour of the liberal peace even under conditions of hybridity, see Joanne Wallis (2018). 'Is There Still a Place for Liberal Peacebuilding?', in *Hybridity on the Ground in Peacebuilding and Development: Critical Conversations*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 83–98). Drawing on evidence from East Timor, she contends that there is 'evidence that many Timorese desire a role for modern liberal state institutions as a response to the inequality, exclusions and injustices that can occur under local practices and institutions' (95). She useful points out that at root liberalism is about people being able to 'consent to the manner in which their political unit is governed, including deciding the extent to which it reflects liberal and local principles [...], in the form of a "social contract"' (97).

extent a crisis of liberal universal foundations. At the heart of post-liberalism seems to be an unwillingness to engage in analytical reductionism. While this new sensitivity has helped to highlight the epistemic and normative binaries and exclusions of liberal universalism, it has proven unable to found a new basis for social transformation in international relations. It would appear that a socially transformative engagement with the world calls for a set of normative and analytical foundations. Without a universalist outlook the encounter with local context turns into an exercise in self-deconstruction, as the work of Richmond and Mac Ginty demonstrates. Thus, what the critique presented in this article calls for is a return to foundationalism – liberal or other. Foundations seem to turn actors into agential selves in international politics.

Importantly, a return to liberal foundations would still be open to new and updated knowledge. The notion of foundational support is entirely compatible with an idea of critique as furthering our understanding of the world. Georg Simmel, for example, described nicely the way in which critique in a liberal-universal understanding of knowledge enables scientific progress:

If we admit that our understanding may have somewhere an absolute norm, a supreme authority that is self-evident, but that its content remains in constant flux because knowledge progresses and every content suggests another which would be more profound and more appropriate for the task, this is not scepticism; any more than it is scepticism when we admit, as is generally done, that while natural phenomena are subject to universal laws, these laws [i.e. their specific content] have to be corrected continually as our knowledge increases [...].¹¹⁴

According to Frank Furedi, this was an attempt to base authority on absolute norms ‘which are at the same time specific to the state of knowledge of the times. In this way, the changing character of life could be captured through a form of authority that could yield to new experience’.¹¹⁵ The central point here is that post-liberal critiques do not aim to revise the historically specific ‘content’ of ‘absolute norms’ according to the evolving state of scientific progress, but rather to do away with them completely. Knowledge increases here involve a demolition of ‘absolute norms’. The foundational norm which post-liberal critique is ultimately targeting seems to be the idea of the autonomous subject formulated at the beginning of political modernity in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, ‘acknowledg[ing] the potential for human agency’.¹¹⁶ But while Hobbes, and liberal contract theorists after him, formulated a new foundational norm (after the disintegration of the old religious and tradition-based order) through the ‘initiating role of individual judgement’ (seen as rational and self-interested), most contemporary critics ‘have opted for the strategy of evading the question [of “foundational support”] altogether’.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

This article has engaged with the growing malaise of the liberal peace project. It has argued that the current difficulties in the spread of liberal market democracy are an outgrowth of a larger crisis of liberal universal foundations in Western policy discourse. In

¹¹⁴*The Philosophy of Money* (London: Routledge, 1990), 104.

¹¹⁵*Authority. A Sociological History*, 321.

¹¹⁶Furedi, 186.

¹¹⁷Furedi, 205.

addition to reflecting a political challenge from the Global South,¹¹⁸ there seems to be a dwindling belief in Western policy discourse in the ability of free markets and competitive politics to remedy a wide range of political, social and economic problems. It is a crisis of *auctoritas* as the ‘capacity to create and initiate’.¹¹⁹ The crisis of authority suggested in this article dove-tails with the empirical finding that international interventions produce hybrid political orders¹²⁰ and are met by local, often hidden resistance.¹²¹ The internal crisis of Western policy elites is, thus, accompanied by real-world obstacles on the ground. Liberal retrenchment has been driven both by a crisis of confidence and problems of implementation in target societies themselves.

The article started with an outline of the interventionary zeal of the 2000s. As a paradigmatic text, the analysis focused on Paris’ *At War’s End* and his call for a ‘new civilizing mission’.¹²² As we saw in the first section, Paris was doubtful about the smooth, natural transition to liberal market democracy in deeply divided post-conflict societies. However, he continued to believe in the desirability of human rights, market economics and secular politics. His ‘Institutionalization Before Liberalization’ approach emphasised the (informal) institutional preconditions of liberal market democracy, but continued to propagate the active spread of markets, elections and rights. In contrast, post-liberal approaches advocate a departure from the ‘liberal peace paradigm itself’.¹²³ Their attempt to include the ‘unknowable’ local directly challenges the liberal order.¹²⁴ Non-Western episteme and practice are seen as antithetical to liberal universalism. Importantly, post-liberal approaches shy away from formulating a new set of epistemic foundations. Richmond explicitly rejects proposing ‘a new meta-narrative of peace’.¹²⁵ In this way, post-liberalism expresses a larger uneasiness with totalising knowledge claims in general. As Pol Bargaés-Pedreny rightly points out, critical understandings of the liberal peace today problematise the ‘totalities of existing discourses’.¹²⁶ In this view, the irreducible difference of local context ‘exceeds the possibility of governing from an outside perspective’.¹²⁷ Seen from this angle, the contemporary crisis of the liberal peace articulates a crisis of foundations, rather than a legitimacy deficit between the Global North and the Global South. It is a crisis of *auctoritas*, rather than a crisis of resistance. Ultimately, what explains the transition from liberal to post-liberal frameworks seems to be the fact that policymakers and critical academics react to policy failure by questioning their *own* premises, rather than the world around them. They look for the causes of policy failure within *themselves*, rather than turning to the outside world. They critically interrogate their own knowledge claims, instead of looking at wider

¹¹⁸Daase, ‘Was Ist Widerstand?’; Daase and Deitelhoff, ‘Internationale Dissidenz. Ein Forschungsprogramm’.

¹¹⁹Furedi, *Authority. A Sociological History*, 62.

¹²⁰Boege et al., ‘Building Peace and Political Community in Hybrid Political Orders’; Boege, Brown, and Clements, ‘Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States’.

¹²¹Roger Mac Ginty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance. Hybrid Forms of Peace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹²²*At War’s End*; ‘International Peacebuilding and the “Mission Civilisatrice”’.

¹²³Richmond, ‘Beyond Liberal Peace? Responses to Backsliding’, 55; see Richmond, ‘Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace’; Richmond, ‘Towards a Post-Liberal Peace’; Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace*.

¹²⁴Richmond, ‘A Post-Liberal Peace: Eirenism and the Everyday’, 566; see Mac Ginty and Richmond, ‘The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace’.

¹²⁵‘A Post-Liberal Peace: Eirenism and the Everyday’, 570.

¹²⁶‘Realising the Post-Modern Dream: Strengthening Post-Conflict Resilience and the Promise of Peace’, *Resilience* 3, no. 2 (2015): 119.

¹²⁷Bargaés-Pedreny, 121.

socio-structural inequalities which might prevent liberal market democracy from producing its desired collective outcomes. Here, problems of underdevelopment, civil conflict and political instability grow out of the liberal universal outlook of interveners, rather than the socio-structural inequalities of the international system. Contemporary economic, political and social problems reappear as problems of deficient perspectives, rather than residing in the world itself.

Liberal peace advocates have commonly reacted to the failure of intervention by framing the intervened as inapt, as somehow not ready or inherently incompatible with a universal outlook.¹²⁸ Rather than questioning the ability of a capitalist market economy to overcome socio-economic inequalities at the domestic and international level, the dominant reaction has been to blame essentialised differences of race or culture. What the liberal peace has been used for is to stabilise an unequal world economy and Eurocentric international order.¹²⁹ However, the problem is not that international actors have a reductionist epistemology, that they have analytical and normative foundations. In contrast to the post-liberal critique, this article has argued that we might need a fresh set of foundations to inform collective action. What these foundations might look like should be open to negotiation and political struggle.

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Notes on contributor

Peter Finkenbusch is a lecturer in International Relations at Coventry University. His research interests are international intervention, resilience and security governance, with a regional focus on the Americas.

ORCID

Peter Finkenbusch  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4448-6367>

¹²⁸David Rampton and Suthaharan Nadarajah, 'A Long View of Liberal Peace and Its Crisis', *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 2 (2017): 441–65.

¹²⁹I would like to thank Reviewer 1 for stressing this point.