Bosnia's Paralyzed Peace

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Review

Bosnia's Paralyzed Peace
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This study offers a powerful blow by blow analysis of the attempts to create peace in BiH since the Dayton Agreement. According to Christopher Bennett, Dayton provided a "balance of terror," was full of unrealistic deadlines, and aimed at providing internationals with an exit strategy (81) and international involvement constantly suffered from an "enforcement gap" (110) derived from the contradiction between trusteeship and democracy as well as limited resources (114). It has even reinforced existing power structures (the *ethnos* rather than the *demos* (116, 182), connected to para-states, and undermined democracy. A "new ethno-national reality now exists" even extending to the education system (244). Bennett expertly lays bare the oddity and inconsistencies of the post-Dayton BiH framework for politics. There is much to agree with, and to learn from the analysis as it proceeds chronologically. Even if one does not agree with the final argument and conclusions presented to the reader, it is a very well written and extremely insightful, detailed volume (though more thorough references would have been useful to the sources it uses).

The text provides a policy perspective, drawing on key theoretical approaches. It is not a theoretically or methodologically-based text, but instead is more in the area studies

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and policy-oriented mold, hoping to uncover the reasons why Bosnian politics have not been susceptible to liberal interventionism. It asks one of the key questions of our age: can you build peace and democracy through undemocratic means (13) without falling into a sort of neo-colonial trusteeship system? Can democracy be "learned" and externally inculcated and can external interveners wean themselves off their special powers (190), even if compliance, democratization, reform, and intervention have become something of a pretense (to paraphrase Chris Patten who was probably repeating a similar adage about the former USSR [184])? It starts from the premise that international intervention has failed in BiH (xxiv) and that a Rawlsian system is required as a response (xxv) in order to reform the Dayton framework (xxvi). It illustrates the risks of a rocky peace process, in particular the way in which the failure of the Vance-Owen plan led to ethnic consolidation (72), and, of course, in the context of the now heavily criticized Dayton Agreement. From this we have a journey which traverses the Bonn Powers and the reluctant trusteeship of the OHR and its repeated but failed attempts to withdraw (166) and the many unintended consequences of its presence. The EU was supposed to save the day, but so far has failed (242). Yet, most of the progress that has been made has come about because of the presence of international trusteeship or actors, rather than despite them, according to Bennett (278), and more and better of the same ("euro-Atlantic" mechanisms of intervention) are required (279), as well as "better" models of constitutional design.

Bennett frames his analysis implicitly within the liberal peace system, heavily focused on rights and identity, and underlying notion of the benefits of democracy and capitalism for peace. However, there is a lack of clarity about the liberal positionality of the analysis (81), which is why it ends up missing the acute materiality of both, and repeats the usual liberal interventionist tropes of trusteeship and local ownership (and the clear imbalance between the two) (242). For example, an easy assumption is made (93) about the need for a shift from socialism to capitalism as part of the reform process the peace package itself made possible, as if this was thoroughly uncontroversial for peacebuilding. This makes it difficult for the author to engage with the possibility of alternatives to the Dayton system, even though he eventually concludes that Dayton has become a significant problem, though the author notes that historically, Tito may have succeeded where the West has failed (27). This was probably precisely because ideologically, Tito could address material issues, which as Bennett argues were clearly the ultimate cause of the collapse of Yugoslavia, along with the related nationalism (34). The OHR, well as it might have been

run at various points, cannot operate at this level (243), which points to very significant problems with a rights and law based peace process, in the very common situation of a failed local economy and emergent ethno-nationalist politics, as well as an inability of the international community to do more than marginally engage with economic matters, public services, jobs, and social justice matters (Michael Pugh has written extensively on these matters).

Thus, analytically there is little that is new here: it reiterates and expands in useful detail the dynamics of the ongoing tensions, and the limits of liberal peacebuilding, and reiterates common arguments on how to "save liberal peacebuilding" as a response in the vein of Roland Paris' work. It even goes as far as arguing that ethnic categories for security need to be consolidated and strengthened if there is to be a viable peace, which the author proposes could take the form of a "double confederation" (260). We know from the case of Cyprus how difficult it is to negotiate the nature of political units, boundaries, and external relations in ethicized environments of acute scarcity. Multiple voting and referenda have also been much discussed or actually used in Cyprus with very mixed effects. The study is very much focused on elite, state, and international levels of analysis, seeing these through the prism of ethno-nationalism and power-sharing. So while it is interesting as an account that brings the empirical political situation up to date, much of the argumentation is in itself indicative of the internal contradictions this system of liberal peacebuilding is tied up in and of a particular policy narrative that has shaped the world since the 1990s. Interventionism breeds trusteeship, which breeds resistance, and cycles of danger, withdrawal, re-engagement, never-endingly so forth.

While the book deals well with the great danger and problem of ethnic politics, it cannot escape the liberal framework without engaging with the elephant in the room of modern peace processes: their material, and particularly economic weaknesses, which allows ethno-nationalism to survive and oppositional politics to develop over the monopoly and distribution of very scarce resources. The problem in BiH with peacemaking has not only been in the experimental roles of the OHR or the limited responses ('resilience') of the citizenry to their own plight (even despite the emergence of the citizen plenums in 2014). BiH and its experiences since the fall of the Yugoslav economy and the Dayton Agreement show how difficult it is for stable orders to survive or emerge when material conditions are deteriorating. This is a lesson as old as history but also the main lesson of peacemaking in the twentieth century. Peace on the cheap in Bosnia (i.e., focused on rights

and institutions not material well-being) has failed, and this means the death of the liberal peace. Time and again this study struggles with the problem of what other approach might be tried, and is forced to come back to more of the liberal peace, partly because of a blind spot when it comes to the way in which conflict is generated and difference is exploited on material grounds which underpin ethnic, social, and class difference.

From the EU to the main donors, some parts of the UN system, the World Bank and IMF, it has become accepted wisdom that rights and law matter more that the materiality of everyday life (though the book acknowledges the potential of this in various towns such as Pakrac, Croatia, where conflict may have been avoided [48]) and that conflict is thus not materially based. Ethnicity becomes a cipher for discursive and identity frameworks of understanding conflict and peacemaking, which ultimately has been taken to mean the only discursive responses are required (even if analysts often acknowledge the influence of a shared Yugoslav background on personal relations [e.g., 244]). Any slightly informed reading of the history of the Balkans (and any other place in the world) would understand that politics, institutions, and law are also a consequence of the struggle for material resources: land and wealth, or at least well-being.

What is really interesting about the liberal reformist syndrome that this book also is connected with is that the more evidence that emerges which points to the materiality of politics, justice, peace, and order, the less it is seen or responded to. If war is for profit, then peace cannot be cheap. Bennett's study indicates that many resources have been expended in BiH, but this has mostly been spent on international staff, security, and returnees, rather than on addressing the underlying social uncertainties that feed ethnic politics and their related power structures. Expanding rights to achieve this has failed: unlike many post-colonial liberal interventions, citizens across the region have material expectations that far exceed what the peace process has given them. Often their conception of justice does not reflect well on the liberal peacebuilding period.

Reading this fascinating but flawed study, one cannot help but feel that the model of state and peace applied since Dayton to bring peace is now under attack for similar failures at home in the West: insecurity and the failure to provide jobs, welfare, and services. Sharing sovereignty is in effect proving difficult even in settled democracies (259). Yet, the local ownership model that BiH also heralded (under High Representative Petritsch in particular [154]) seems to have failed. It was supposed to unite local communities under the common liberal project, but underfunding and neoliberalism has

meant that many now reject the premise of an international presence and see local ownership as nationalism not liberalism. The EU is more popular, perhaps because it offers the ability to migrate or some material hope. It is no wonder that peace is paralyzed in Bosnia, and the constant coalescence of politics around ethno-nationalist parties mirrors the shift to populism in the West.

I have argued elsewhere that neoliberalism undermines liberalism and the rights and laws required to deal with violence emanating from scarce resources and identity conflict. Whilst a liberal peace system tended to be Eurocentric and depend upon trusteeship approaches (as with the OHR), the neoliberal peace system endorses the structural conditions for inequality, separation and war rather than cooperation and equality. Neither have proven legitimate with social actors, whether nationalists or peace formers. After 22 years perhaps we should be asking how peace can be stabilized in BiH according to local political practices when relieved from the acute material pressures of global neoliberalism and disinterested capital (interested mainly in profit not peace, that is). It was the political economy that partly caused the conflict in the first place, not only identity. Rights as a response might be plausible, but we have to remember that this particular society expects material rights, something the modern state they have experienced post-1995 cannot provide. Inevitably this pushes us all to look anew at the region's history and cultural practices of engagement, especially at the former Yugoslavia itself, and what made them maintain peace and order where they did, and also at the need to reform our own approaches to building peace in such circumstances. We also need to re-examine our global economic system, which has never really been part of the international peacebuilding architecture because peace has been seen as a mainly rights issue and a matter of liberal institutions designed to deal with discursive rather than material identities (ethnicity rather than class structures). Local legitimacy and international economic support in Keynesian mode seem to be the implication if we really expect something more than an unstable and dangerous order in BiH. Indeed, it is remarkable that Dayton's rough and ready, ethno-democratic peace has held since 1995: this book tells us to act quickly because it has now failed. It also tells us that though imperfect, international assistance is needed and perhaps more in material than in normative terms (248). Opening up the Dayton settlement means engaging with the contextual and material realities of peacebuilding, something which is long overdue: self-determination, the nature of the state, regional arrangements, and the practicalities of

reconciliation, and the role of intervention and EU integration so far have formed a circle that cannot be squared through design along, especially, as Bennett points out, under the current economic and political climate (256). It also points to the limits of global patterns of peacebuilding and the urgent need for reform.

Broader forms of legitimacy are required, rooted in social and global justice. This book indicates just how great the task that remains still is, even 22 years after Dayton, a matter than should give us all pause for thought and concern. It also indicates the reluctance of internationals to engage with larger questions of social and global justice when designing "peace" and thus the Sisyphean frustrations they continue to face in their ongoing interventions predicated on the technology of neoliberal state design and Eurocentric norm adoption. Warning after warning has been made by scholars working on BiH, from very early on (David Chandler was probably one of the first to note such limitations) and yet the standard operating procedure of statebuilding continues, flying in the face of global evidence, not to mention 22 years of evidence from Bosnia that "peacebuilding" requires much more.