

Shaping Inclusive Political Settlements: Critical Approaches to International Peacebuilding

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Chair and Discussant: Tomas Van Acker, Ghent University

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The Making of Peace, Conflict and Security - Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion

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Panel Abstract

International actors involved in peace processes and peacebuilding – such as third-party mediators, representatives of UN agencies, regional organisations or international NGOs – are increasingly seeking to encourage inclusive political settlements. Our panel aims to look critically at how these actors influence processes of inclusion, and the impact of these efforts in specific contexts. Different international actors promote diverse forms of inclusion, from the inclusion of armed groups into power-sharing institutions, to establishing spaces for women, minorities, or vulnerable groups to shape governmental agendas.

As theoretical ideas and tangible practices of inclusion continue to develop, this panel invites context-driven papers which address the role played by and aims of international actors in shaping inclusive peace processes. This could include: moral and political rationales for deciding who should be included or excluded; existing relationships between international and local actors, and the effects this has on inclusion; the role of international norms in guiding particular approaches; and how existing power relations are reproduced or challenged by international peacebuilding efforts. What are the unintended consequences of promoting particular forms of inclusion, and what challenges are presented by existing practices? We welcome contributions from scholars at all career stages.

Papers' Details

[Strengthening Local Peace Committees: The 'local turn' and 'effective' peacebuilding in Burundi and eastern DRC](#)

Mathijs van Leeuwen, Joseph Nindorera, Jean-Louis Nzweve, and Corita Corbijn

Abstract

Local Peace Committees (LPCs) have become an important strategy of development organizations to promote transitional justice in conflict-affected contexts. The popularity of LPCs may be understood as part of a 'local turn' in peacebuilding over the past two decades, and from dissatisfaction with conventional peacebuilding practices. LPCs are seen to provide opportunities to enhance local support for national level peace processes, and to work on local dynamics of conflict; to actively engage local communities, and to better relate peacebuilding to local contextual understanding, resources, and ambitions; and to change power relations and state-society relations from the local level upwards.

This paper critically reflects on such expectations, starting from an exploration of different ontologies of conflict and peace prevailing among the peacebuilding community. Experiences of local peacebuilding in Burundi and eastern DR Congo underscore that, the local turn does not by itself resolve several of the key challenges of conventional peacebuilding. First, local conflict can seldom be dealt with in isolation from conflict at other levels of society. Second, moving to the local level will not result in a more coherent and comprehensive agenda for peacebuilding. Third, local peacebuilding is inherently a highly contested process, involving strong local debate about the desired institutional order.

Putting the 'Local' in Local Ownership: Examples from Sierra Leone

Laura Martin, University of Edinburgh

Abstract

Local ownership and inclusion in peacebuilding programmes has become something of a necessity in recent years. While post-conflict programmes are frequently aimed to assist different groups and facilitate peace and justice in different settings, they are all actively engaging with the discourse and 'practice' of local ownership. The dynamics of how these processes ultimately unfold illustrate how they do in fact 'become local', just not always in the ways that are intended. This paper will explore various examples of how local ownership was framed in different post-conflict programmes in Sierra Leone, including the DDR programme, the Truth Commission, the Special Court and a local reconciliation programme called Fambul Tok. I will illustrate how the discourse and practice of these different programmes are contrary to notions of local ownership, but despite their roots and foundations, such programmes do 'become local' through efforts of individual appropriation.

White Lab Mice and Trojan Horses: Implementing Decentralisation in Kosovo

Laura Wise, Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh

Abstract

Decentralization as a form of power-sharing in conflict-affected societies has been a popular aspect of constitutional design in peace agreements developed by international mediators. Much of the academic literature on the subject attempts to assess whether decentralization contributes to further division of multi-ethnic societies, or if it sates ethno-national group demands for further autonomy. This focus on outcomes and efficacy, however, can overlook the processes of negotiating and implementing decentralized plans – particularly the role of ethnic minorities in determining how power should be devolved in order to accommodate their needs.

This paper attempts to develop understandings of decentralization as a form of peacebuilding, by questioning the practice of implementing international power-sharing plans from the top-down, with a form of governance depicted as moving decision-making from the national to the local level. It asks what importance members of the Serb community in post-conflict Kosovo place on peacebuilding notions of consent, legitimacy, and transparency, when developing decentralized systems of governance.

It explore these questions through qualitative analysis of local and municipal power-sharing provisions in peace agreements, and positions the normative expectations advanced by these plans alongside perspectives raised by minority discussions facilitated by the Kosovo Open Society Foundation about the Association/Community of Serbian Municipalities.

Civil Society in the Myanmar Peace Process and Peacebuilding – included or not?

Michael Lidauer

Abstract

Myanmar has faced civil wars, local level violence, and forms of inter-communal violence for over sixty years. Since the end of military rule and the beginning of a political transition in 2010, 13 bilateral ceasefires (2011/2012) and a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA; 2015) have been signed. However, the NCA was not “inclusive” and was only signed by 8 groups, with several major ethnic armed groups not engaging in the truce. One reason for them not joining the agreement was a preference for political settlements rather than a ceasefire agreement. The NCA foresees the holding of Union Peace Conferences and the development of a formalized political dialogue process, some of which has since started. The paper intends to provide an overview about stakeholders in the Myanmar peace process with a particular focus on civil society. Civil Society plays limited roles in the formal peace process, but finds various forms of engagement in larger peacebuilding. This paper is based on three months of fieldwork across Myanmar as part of a research project contracted by a Yangon-based fund.

Possibility of an Alternative Negotiation Method for the Longest National Problem in Europe

Mertkan Hamit and Başak Ekenoğlu

Abstract

Two years ago there was a glimmering hope in Cyprus for the end of the longest national problem of Europe. The UN facilitated talks gained significant momentum however, the negotiation table dissolved at the beginning of the 2017. The attempts for the resolution of the Cyprus Problem are not over and it is widely considered as the last chance for Cyprus.

Despite in the long history of non-resolution of the conflict, the international and local actors failed to address the reasons of the failure by reintroducing the same methodology. This research invites to reconsider methodological problems in the failure to reach a deal in such a long period of time. Also the study argues the desperate need of reintroducing the wider society and the support from the grassroots level to reach to a viable solution. By introducing the significance of non-formal dialogue space across the communities, it draws the lessons from the Cyprus Dialogue Forum as a non-formal dialogue space in the island since 2015 which was created as a response to the need for inclusive and permanent space for structured dialogue to contribute the formal negotiations and change process.

The study critically approaches the elitist understanding of the international organizations in Cyprus and offers a way of engaging the inclusive methods for the conflict resolution.

Bringing Women and Victims to the Transitional Justice Table – Seeking Participation or Legitimacy?

Astrid Jamar, Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh

Abstract

Looking at the Burundian peacebuilding process, this paper will address the aid-dependent efforts seeking to include further participation in the transitional justice process. The general peace process involved important institutional engineering to address issues of inclusion and support a peaceful and democratic political transformation. Such political reforms were envisioned to redress the ethnic, gender and regional equilibrium in national institutions. In the shadow of the official peacebuilding process, long and difficult negotiations were taking place over transitional justice between the various involved actors including the UN, Burundian authorities and NGOs. Responding to global trends, international actors (the TJ unit of the UN Office in Burundi and other international NGOs) put pressure on to include women and victims groups in the transitional justice agenda.

Through ethnographic fieldwork, I observed the initial reluctance of existing civil society actors to welcome these newcomers. The UN TJ unit then created a victim network, with gender and ethnic quotas, whose members gradually became integrated into the process. However, since the country is now back in conflict, the TJ process has lost even more of its limited legitimacy and credibility – particularly from critical NGOs, political opposition and international actors (but not necessarily from these newly included actors).

Reflecting upon existing debates about participation and empowerment, my paper will review critically normative motivations for inclusion, its implementation, and the long term and side effects of such international intervention. It will ask how the inclusion agenda reproduces, challenges and/or transforms power dynamics between actors at the transitional justice table.

Internationalized justice and local injustice: Addressing impunity for Sexual Violence in Sri Lanka

Chulani Kodikara, University of Edinburgh

Abstract

There is a recurrent trope within the theory and practice of transitional justice that it is both backward and forward looking. Accountability in the form of truth, justice and/or reparations is the bridge between the past and the future where violence even if not entirely eliminated has been drastically and dramatically reduced. Temporalisation of violence as war and post-war, or simply war and peace is therefore central to this formulation of justice. Yet this is by no means the only binary opposition underpinning transitional justice processes. These processes are replete with and indeed heavily rely on a number of distinctions determined on the basis of 'who' committed 'what' kind of violations and to what extent, some more explicitly acknowledged than others: systematic versus unsystematic, public versus private, international versus national, civil and political versus social and economic, egregious versus the ordinary.

However these distinctions are deeply gendered and feminists scholars have been at the forefront of challenging these distinctions. Yet the international feminist campaign to make rape and sexual violence in the context of war a matter of international politics and a crime under international law reproduces and perpetuates these binaries with implications for the transformative potential of transitional justice processes.

In this paper, I examine the way in which some of these binaries are constructed and deployed in the international campaign for justice for sexual violence committed by the armed forces in the war in Sri Lanka. I argue that these binary distinctions are inevitable in heavily internationalized transitional justice processes and inquire whether it is possible to transcend these distinctions if there is more local ownership of such processes.

International Mediation of Power-Sharing Settlements

Allison McCulloch, Brandon University

Joanne McEvoy, University of Aberdeen

Abstract

Power sharing is largely accepted among scholars and policy-makers as a potentially effective mechanism for building peace in the aftermath of violent intrastate conflict. Although the operation of power sharing may be prone to ongoing challenges and even political crises arising from the legacy of the conflict, international actors continue to promote power-sharing arrangements to manage self-determination disputes. This paper investigates the normative and/or instrumental reasons why third-party mediators (on behalf of international organizations, non-governmental organizations and/or states) turn to power-sharing strategies during peace negotiations. It asks what role external actors envision for themselves in the post-conflict period and why external actors promote power sharing when its maintenance is likely to depend on their ongoing commitment and governance involvement. Exploring the role of external actors in upholding or promoting power sharing in divided societies, the paper draws on in-depth interviews with conflict mediators and extensive documentary analysis.