

Race, Culture and Civil Society: Peacebuilding Discourse and the Understanding of Difference

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This article seeks to draw out an understanding of the role of narratives and discourses of race, culture and civil society within international peacebuilding, through the location of the discourse of culture as a transitional stage between interventionist and regulatory discourses of race and civil society. It particularly seeks to highlight that the discourse of culture is key to understanding the peacebuilding discourses of intervention and regulation that have developed in the last decade. This is all the more important as the discourse of culture has in many respects been displaced by the discourse of civil society. In drawing out the links between the framings of race, culture and civil society, the article seeks to explain how the discourse of civil society intervention has been reinvented on the basis of the moral divide established and made coherent through the discourse of culture, and how the discourse of civil society contains a strong apologetic content, capable of legitimizing and explaining the persistence of social and economic problems or political fragmentation while simultaneously offering potential policy programmes on the basis of highly ambitious goals of social transformation.

Keywords civil society • peacebuilding • intervention • Foucault

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN PEACEBUILDING has become increasing central to international policy interventions over the past decade. According to the World Bank's (2006: v) *Civil Society and Peacebuilding* report: 'Today the main question is no longer whether civil society has a role to play in peacebuilding, but how it can realize its potential, what are the roles of various actors, what are critical factors and pre-conditions for their effectiveness, and how can external actors best provide support?' Whether the issue of concern is problems of conflict resolution, development

or democratic transition, civil society appears to now be a key sphere of policy intervention. Yet it seems that the proliferation of work on peacebuilding and civil society has led to very little conceptual understanding of the role of civil society in peacebuilding discourse. This article seeks to explore the conceptual framing of civil society, and in so doing it seeks to analyse the changing nature of civil society discourse and to highlight its links to previous discourses of external intervention, couched in the terminology of race and culture.

In the academic and policy framings of international peacebuilding, the way in which the concept of civil society is used is very different from how the concept was deployed in traditional political discourses of liberal modernity.¹ This article will clarify some of these differences and highlight how, whereas for liberal democratic conceptions of civil society autonomy was seen as a positive factor, in the international peacebuilding discourse autonomy is seen as a problematic factor and one that necessitates regulatory intervention. This analysis draws upon and expands Michel Foucault's (2008) treatment of the changing nature of civil society discourse, set out in his lecture series *The Birth of Biopolitics*. In that work, Foucault traces how it is possible for a 'number of shifts, transformations and inversions in traditional liberal doctrines' to take place through the problematization of autonomy (Foucault, 2008: 118; see also Chandler, 2010a). The civil society discourse deployed in the international peacebuilding problematic highlights just such a 'transformation and inversion' through its attempt to cohere international policy practices through a focus upon the problematic nature of autonomy, understood as irreducible differences that risk conflict if not regulated via the correct institutional mechanisms. In the distinctive use of difference in this context of external peacebuilding engagement, the concept of civil society is used in ways that reflect and draw upon pre-modern concepts of difference, especially the pre-existing colonial and post-colonial discourses of race and culture. The way in which this usage of civil society relates to earlier framings of race and especially of cultural distinctions will be a central part of the analysis of the present article.

The article also draws upon Foucault in understanding civil society's conceptual significance for international peacebuilding in a way that grasps it not only as producing a set of policy practices and framing a sphere of policy intervention but also as a discursive framework capable of producing meaning – that is, as a policy paradigm through which the problems (and solutions) of peacebuilding intervention are interpreted. In this respect, civil society can be understood as the third of a series of interconnected and overlapping policy paradigms through which Western engagement and interven-

¹ See, for example, Ottaway & Carothers (2000a); Cousens & Kumar (2001); Maley, Sampford & Thakur (2003); Darby & Mac Ginty (2003); Paris (2004); De Zeeuw & Kumar (2006); World Bank (2006); Jarstad & Sisk (2008); Newman, Paris & Richmond (2009).

tion in the colonial and post-colonial state has been negotiated and reflected. The first paradigmatic framing was that of race, in which the hierarchical division of the world was given a natural basis.² As this framework of division was questioned and problematized, race was gradually displaced by the paradigm of culture as a prism through which the divide between the West and the post-colonial world could be understood in moral and psychological terms, initially reflecting the desire to perpetuate colonial power through the emphasis upon the incapacity of the non-Western Other and gradually shifting to explain the limits to post-colonial aspirations to equality on this basis (Furedi, 1994b). After 1990, this cultural paradigm served to give a moral framing for the problems and inequalities of post-communist and post-conflict transition and to justify exceptions to the norms of sovereign equality and non-intervention.

The cultural paradigm established a moral divide between formally equal polities in the West and in the post-colonial world, suggesting that the political subject of non-Western orders was less capable of acting in a rational or autonomous manner (Malik, 1996: 149–169). This problematization of the post-conflict subject and moral framing of difference was reproduced in the paradigm of civil society, which similarly acted as an apologia for essentialized differences at the same time as it understood irrational or suboptimal social, economic or political outcomes on the basis of rational choices made by autonomous subjects (see, for example, how this paradigm is used to explain global economic and social inequality in the work of economic institutionalists such as Douglass C. North [1981, 1990]). The civil society framework views post-conflict societies from the standpoint of self-governing individuals (as in the liberal democratic model) rather than as submerged and subjugated by collectivities of race, nation or religion (as in the framings of race and culture) and, to this extent, may appear to be more progressive (typified in the capability perspective of Amartya Sen [1992, 1999]). However, this view of civil society as a more progressive framing would be misleading, as the shift from a collective or communitarian model of culture to the paradigm of civil society individualism reshapes the problematic of external intervention and peacebuilding in ways that extend the interventionist mandates of international peacebuilders on the basis of their asserted capacity to transform and modify behavioural choices through policy interventions.

In the civil society paradigm, the hierarchical views of race and cultural difference are reproduced, but through the focus on the autonomy and rationality of the post-conflict subject rather than through the focus on their alleged lack of rationality or lack of autonomy (see Foucault, 2008). This emphasis on the autonomy of the subject of peacebuilding intervention presents external intervention as an act of empowerment or of capacity-building, consciously disavowing colonial discourses of fixed distinctions of superiority (Chandler,

² See, for example, Lugard (1965); Plamenatz (1960); Emerson (1960); Bain (2003).

2006a, 2010a). This article deconstructs the civil society paradigm to demonstrate, first, the reproduction of the moral and civilizational divides of the paradigms of race and culture and, second, the reproduction of the apologetic intent of these previous discourses of understanding, shifting the focus from racial or cultural framings of incapacity to the institutional frameworks alleged to hold back developmental possibilities.

In the sections that follow, we first consider the differential paradigm of race. Then, following the discrediting of racial framings of inequality and hierarchy, the article analyses how the concept of culture displaced race in articulating and reifying difference. Examples of the use of culture to explain development differentials, conflict and problems with transitions to democracy then follow. The second half of the article analyses how the civil society framework of peacebuilding has tended to displace cultural framings, and the problems of development, conflict and democracy are reconsidered within this problematic, highlighting the ambiguity of the civil society framing that can both provide an apologia or explanation of difference and posit the need for extended programmes of external intervention.

The Ideology of Race

Colonial discourses of external intervention and regulation of non-Western societies were premised on the idea of racial difference. With the development and modernization of Western societies, distinctions with the rest of the world were increasingly posed in racial terms (see, for example, Wolff, 1994). The discourse of race reflected the power inequalities at play in external intervention, which was legitimized on the basis of what were understood to be inherent differences. The initial legitimacy for empire or colonialism was that the subject peoples, denied political equality, were racially distinct. The distinctions of race were held to legitimize the denial of equality and the direct domination of peoples on the basis of their incapacities (Plamenatz, 1960; Emerson, 1960). In the words of Kipling's 'White Man's Burden', the subject races were held to be 'half man, half child' and therefore incapable of self-government.

The ideology of race was used to justify differences in political rights to self-government and to legitimize external rule. Race developed and was used to posit the inequality of humanity as a natural fact. While some races were capable of self-government or of political autonomy, other races were not and therefore were destined to subordination. Initially, the ideology of race developed independently of the question of colour or ethnicity and was dependent upon the linking of economic and social inequality with gradations of political and social capacity, naturalizing inequality. In the response

to the Enlightenment demands of universality and the French Revolution, which attempted to transform these demands into a framework of government, the conservative reaction was articulated in terms of race, as a defence of the hereditary claims of the aristocracy (Malik, 1996). As Kenan Malik (1996: 42) notes, the radical Enlightenment claim to universal equality was the precondition for the defensive and apologetic discourse of natural (racial) difference.

The question of race was intimately tied to the right to rule from its emergence (see Foucault, 2003: 65–84). As long as the right to rule was a restrictive one, race played a central role in justifying political inequality as natural and inevitable. Over the course of the 20th century, the denial of political equality on the naturalized terms of race was increasingly discredited, especially in the wake of the genocidal racial experiment of the Nazi regime and the weakening of the major European colonial powers through the two world wars (Furedi, 1998). The post-World War II order was one in which race could no longer play the role of apology for difference and inequality, nor could it provide legitimacy for colonial rule or for the revival of interventionist policy-making in the post-Cold War period.

The Differentiation of Culture

While race was discredited in the experiences of the mid-20th century, the inequalities of the international sphere were not overcome. In many ways, the arguments of racial distinction were taken over through the replacement of the concept of race by the concept of culture. Cultural differences were given the same determining weight as earlier distinctions of race on the basis that cultures were separate, homogeneous and with their own paths of development (Malik, 1996: 149–177). Path dependencies were key to understanding culture in reified terms of dependency upon the past rather than as reflective of the social relations of the present (see North, 1981, 1990). The hold of the past over the present thereby enabled a moral rather than a racial critique of the capacity of the colonial (and post-colonial) Other.

Views of cultural difference were developed less in reaction to the colonies than as a projection of Anglo-American social sciences, which viewed the rise of mass democracy as a threat to 'civilized' values and a danger to liberal democracy (Furedi, 1994a: 112–113). This elitist moral and cultural framing of the 'irrational' demands and responses of the masses was easily transferred to the colonies and used as a framework for understanding and delegitimizing anti-colonial protest. As Edward Said (1985: 236) noted in *Orientalism*, social and political movements of non-Western societies were interpreted in cultural rather than political terms by colonial theorists. These interpretations

always highlighted the psychological and non-rational underpinnings of demands and protests, which were seen to express the hold of tradition or the need to express identity, often in reaction to the civilizing impact of the colonial project.

The crisis of colonial rule was apologetically reinterpreted in terms of the psychological problems of the colonial subject, and challenges and opposition to this rule were framed in terms of the maladjusted individual pursuing petty egotistic goals rather than political convictions or ideals (Park, 1950). It seemed that colonial societies were doomed to be permanently stuck in transition owing to the dilemmas of the cultural clash of the colonial experience and the hybrid consequences, which meant that societies lacked the moral and civilizational ties necessary for a transition to autonomy and self-government. Marginal societies lacked the necessary civic culture and public values, and those who sought to replace the colonial rulers were held to lack legitimate political and public aspirations, being driven instead by petty objectives of power and personal grandeur; their social and political weight being explained through their ability to have a demagogic influence over the gullible masses (Stonequist, 1961).

Where the discourse of race expressed the confidence of imperial rule and the essentializing of difference, the discourse of culture expressed the decline of the imperial project and a defence against the shifting international norms that expressed more sympathy for the claims of the colonial subject. The elitist assumptions of Western superiority were no longer expressed in the discourse of race but through that of culture, emphasizing the psychological problems of (post-)colonial transition and cultural hybridity. These moral, psychological and cultural frameworks enabled the negotiation of colonial withdrawal and shifted responsibility for the outcomes of colonial rule to the subject peoples themselves, through highlighting the fixity and path dependencies of cultural contexts and the alleged cultural clash between the 'liberal' West and the traditional values and beliefs of the colonial Other. This discourse of culture as apologia can be drawn out in relation to the three interlinked themes of current peacebuilding discourse: development, conflict and democracy.

Culture and Development

In the post-1945 world, the international agenda was dominated by decolonization. And, while the concept of culture played a similar role to that of race, the questions of controversy were less those of rule and the justifications for political inequality, than those of economic and wealth division between the former colonial powers and the post-colonial world. By the 1970s and the end of the postwar economic boom of European reconstruction, the economic and social divisions between the 'developed' and the 'developing' worlds had

become greater and were the subject of a number of critiques that understood the problem to be that of the world market system, which reproduced the inequalities of power and opportunity despite the formal equalities of the international states system.³

Douglas C. North developed the framework of institutionalism as a direct apologetic defence of the status quo, asserting that, rather than capitalism, culture was the key to understanding developmental inequalities. North tackled the framings of the critics of underdevelopment directly through the assertion that there was no such thing as the logic of capitalism but rather many capitalisms, each dependent on its institutional and cultural context (North, 1990; see also Foucault, 2008: 164–165). The important point to highlight is that culture came to the fore alongside growing disillusionment with the extent of economic and social progress in the post-colonial world. The shift from economic and social explanations to the realm of the cultural reflected the lowering of policy horizons, as culture operated as a limiting factor for international engagement. For North, there was little that international intervention could do, as even institutional reform at the level of state policy would only have a limited impact unless the informal cultural values and norms of post-colonial societies were in line with these imported institutional frameworks. There was therefore little that could be done to externally assist post-colonial development, as ‘informal constraints that are culturally derived will not change immediately in reaction to changes in formal rules’, and it was this ‘tension between altered formal rules and the persisting informal constraints’ that produced counterproductive outcomes (North, 1990: 45).

Culture and Conflict

Culture was a vital framing justifying new frameworks of intervention in the 1990s. Culture operated as a way of legitimizing intervention, in an international context where traditional views of sovereignty and non-intervention were formally dominant, rather than as a comprehensive framework for international engagement, such as that developed through the paradigm of international peacebuilding (see Chandler, 2006b). In this respect, culture operated as a delimiting framework for peacekeeping intervention in the 1990s. A good example of the 1990s’ discursive framing of the role of cultural difference is that of Mary Kaldor’s conception of new wars.

Kaldor develops the concept of new wars to describe conflicts in the post-colonial world in ways that construct a moral divide between understandings of war and conflict in the West and in the non-West. The binary of old and new war has little to do with the spatial framing of conflict as intrastate rather than interstate – for example, the US or Spanish civil wars would be construed as old wars rather than new wars (Kaldor, 1999: 13–30). Following

³ See, for example, Wallerstein (1976); Gunder Frank (1967).

Kalevi Holsti's (1996: 19–40) analysis of 'wars of the third kind', Kaldor draws a moral distinction where old wars are rational, constitutive of a collective or public interest and politically legitimate, whereas new wars are understood to be irrational, driven by private interest and politically illegitimate. This moral divide then enables Kaldor to argue that illegitimate political representatives have no right to hide behind the protections of sovereignty and that external peacekeeping intervention is morally necessary and legitimate, casting international interveners as interest-free enforcers of emerging international legal norms rather than as undermining international law.

It is the cultural and moral divide that discursively facilitates and reflects the shifting practices of external intervention, recasting the rights of sovereignty as conditional upon external judgement. However, while the cultural, moral divide of the new wars thesis legitimizes intervention, it provides little in the way of a policy framework. The fact that the cultural divide depends on assertions of incapacity and irrationality is a limiting factor, as it implies that either sovereignty is undermined on the exceptional basis of incapacity or that sovereign rights should be upheld. In fact, the peacebuilding discourse of extended engagement, presented as holistically covering intervention and prevention, emerges in response to the formal rights-based framing of interventionist debates in the 1990s.⁴

Culture and Democracy

Francis Fukuyama's (1995) view of the centrality of culture for democratic transition is also a perspective that relates to the specific policy practices of the 1990s. Like North and Kaldor, Fukuyama uses a cultural paradigm to delimit the exceptions to democratic transition and naturalize the restrictive nature of international recognition and institutional integration, suggesting that those former Soviet states that were not being engaged with (such as Belarus, Ukraine and Russia) lacked the cultural preconditions for transition. In calling for a lowering of expectations about the speed and extent of post-communist reform, he advocates an apologia based on the problem of underestimating the cultural gap:

social engineering on the level of institutions has hit a massive brick wall: experiences of the past century have taught most democracies that ambitious rearrangements of institutions often cause more unanticipated problems than they solve. By contrast, the real difficulties affecting the quality of life in modern democracies have to do with the social and cultural pathologies that seem safely beyond the reach of institutional solutions, and hence of public policy. The chief issue is quickly becoming one of culture. (Fukuyama, 1995: 9)

For Fukuyama, a culture of civil society was something that these post-totalitarian societies lacked, making stable political transitions problematic.

⁴ See, for example, United Nations (2000); ICISS (2001).

Here, civil society is posed within a cultural discourse of moral division; in this context, the lack of capacity for civil society is emphasized. Fukuyama (1995: 7) stresses that while civil society may be a precondition for democratic transition, 'civil society in turn has precursors and preconditions at the level of culture'. For Fukuyama, the understandings needed to explain the slowness of cultural change require the expertise of sociologists and anthropologists rather than political theorists.

The Reinvention of Civil Society

Culture played a similar role to race in essentializing difference during the Cold War and early 1990s, in that it acted as an apologia for unequal treatment – for exclusions and exceptions – rather than as a holistic framework for policy intervention. However, central to the continuity of discourses of race and culture and those of the more extensive interventionist frameworks of international peacebuilding is the privileging of difference over universality. The precondition for the reinvention of civil society as both explanatory factor and sphere of policymaking is the understanding that the problems of post-colonial or post-conflict society are a product of difference located within the historic path dependencies of social structures and institutions: there is no universalizing logic within which we can understand the actions and political expressions of these societies within the same framings as those of the Western liberal democratic subject, held to be capable of rationalist political and economic choices.

The key to understanding the role of the concept of civil society in the framing of international peacebuilding lies in how post-colonial or post-conflict societies come to be understood as open to manipulation or change through policy intervention. The policy paradigm shaping international peacebuilding is focused and made coherent through a reframing of traditional liberal democratic conceptions of civil society (see Chandler, 2010b). The shift from cultural framings of the problems of colonial and post-colonial societies to a civil society framing operates on two levels: that of ideas or understanding, the comprehension of the nature of the problems themselves, and the practical or policy level, the formulation of external policy responses that might be appropriate to address these problems. On both these levels, it would be wrong to understand the civil society framing of problems or policy interventions as being solely focused upon something that we might seek to describe as civil society as a real sphere or set of relations. Foucault (2008: 252) usefully draws our attention to the transformation of civil society framings as both ideational (operating as a 'network' or 'grid' of 'intelligibility': a way of understanding the problematic of post-colonial or post-conflict society) and

as facilitating a set of practices (making possible a series of policy interventions, which follow from civil society becoming a sphere of peacebuilding intervention: becoming 'governmentalizable').

The second point, to which Foucault also draws our attention (as highlighted above), is that this framing of civil society depends upon inverting or transforming the classical liberal doctrine of civil society as a sphere in which autonomous rational subjects interact to further the collective good. For Enlightenment theorists, civil society was conceived in political and juridical terms – as, for example, in John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, which, as Foucault (2008: 297) notes, understood civil society 'as absolutely indistinguishable from political society'. This view of the rights-bearing autonomous subject of civil society is also clear in the classical treatment in Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, in which civil society is the political reflection of Adam Smith's economic analysis in which the autonomous interaction of rational interest-bearing individuals results in the collective development of the social good.

In classical framings, the subject of civil society – the autonomous rational individual – is the subject of both rights and interests. With regard to both, the individual subject's pursuit of self-interest is held to coincide with the collective good, as interests converge either through the market mechanism or through the reasoned debate of the political sphere. The liberal subject is not open to government intervention, but rather establishes the rationality of *laissez-faire* (Foucault, 2008: 270). This subject is very different from the post-colonial or post-conflict subject of peacebuilding discourses, who is assumed to be unable to pursue his or her interests or rights in a civic way, one that contributes to the collective good of society. In this framing, the problems of post-conflict or post-colonial societies are understood as problems with the frameworks or institutional contexts of these societies, as reflected in the choices made by individuals. This enables these choices to become understood as being amenable to policy intervention.

The third crucial point to highlight is that the peacebuilding policy interventions that are held to impact on these choices do not necessarily have to be restricted to the narrow sphere of civil society 'on the ground'. In the civil society paradigm of international peacebuilding, international policy practices assume that the rational choices made by post-colonial and post-conflict subjects lead to irrational outcomes owing to the institutional context, and that this institutional context can be reformed in specific ways to facilitate the choosing of different choices. In this way, the divisive context of policy-making hierarchies can be legitimized (as in racial and cultural understandings), but the problem of the autonomy of the post-colonial subject is brought to the fore. In the civil society approach, there is no assumption that external interveners can make policies on behalf of the post-conflict subject.

The task of international peacebuilding intervention, in this paradigm of

understanding, is that of the indirect influencing of outcomes through institutional means. The framework of civil society enables management at a distance, where intervention is understood as necessary but never as sufficient, as the post-colonial subject is the means and ends of intervention. Civil society will only have been achieved when this subject makes the 'right' or 'civil' choices, revealing a rationality and maturity with regard to collective interests. The task of international intervention is to help facilitate this through policy intervention at the level of institutional frameworks, facilitating the compatibility of individual choices with collective outcomes.⁵

Civil society becomes central to the international peacebuilding paradigm of understanding only when this classical liberal framing is transformed and inverted: when civil society becomes a sphere of external or international policy intervention rather than an unproblematic sphere of autonomy, as under rationalist framings of the liberal polity. As cultural discourses become displaced by those of civil society, social, economic and political problems appear to be more amenable to external intervention. In fact, policy intervention only becomes possible with the expansion of civil society as a framework for understanding and transforming these problems. By removing civil society from the political-judicial framing of rights-based liberalism, it opens up 'a new object, a new domain or field' for policymaking (Foucault, 2008: 295) on the basis of which post-colonial and post-conflict society can become the object of external policy intervention.

Foucault points towards how civil society is transformed. Whereas cultural understandings (like racial framings before them) understood social problems as being the product of collective identification and belonging, the civil society framework privileges the individual and understands social outcomes as the products of individual choices. These choices are understood to be rational insofar as they can be understood as non-arbitrary responses to institutional contexts in which the individual finds him- or herself. Civil society becomes the mediating link in which individuals respond to 'environmental variables' (Foucault, 2008: 269). The shift from the collective of race, ethnicity or culture to the privileging of the individual enables civil society to be formulated as a sphere of intervention.

The peacebuilding policy framework thus depends on the relationship between the state and society being inverted (see Chandler, 2010a). Rather than society being primary and the state understood as the product of societal relations, the state is assumed to be prior and society and social relations are seen to be the product of state-shaped institutions at both formal and informal levels. In this way, the society (of interest-pursuing individuals) is held to be highly malleable. This malleability is based upon viewing social and political outcomes from the viewpoint of individual choices. As Foucault

⁵ See, for example, North (1990); Sen (1999); Paris (2004); Collier & Hoeffler (2004); Belloni (2008).

(2008: 252) notes, in the shift from culture to civil society, 'we move over to the side of the individual subject', not as the subject of rights but as an object open to policy interventions.

Civil Society and Development

Where North's focus on the rationality of the individual in civil society was largely one of cultural apologia – explaining the difficulties of change as due to the fixities of tradition and custom – today's approach to civil society is one that understands individual choices as much more flexible and as amenable to external policy intervention. Individual autonomy or freedom is the central motif for understanding the problematic of development in the post-colonial and post-conflict context. Rather than a material view of development, human agency is often placed at the centre and is increasingly seen to be the measure of development, in terms of individual capabilities. In the words of Amartya Sen (1999: xii), winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize for Economic Science, freedom is seen to be both the primary end and the principal means of development: 'Development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency.'

In peacebuilding approaches that build on this framing of 'human development', freedom and autonomy are foregrounded, but development lacks a transformative or modernizing material content. In this discourse, development is taken out of an economic context of GNP growth or industrialization, or a social and political context in which development policies are shaped by social and political pressures or state-led policies. The civil society framing, based upon an individualized understanding of development, takes a rational-choice perspective of the individual or 'the agent-orientated view' (Sen, 1999: 11), in which development focuses upon ways of enabling individuals to make more effective choices by increasing their capabilities.

In this paradigm, external intervention does not bring change through direct policy intervention but indirectly, through the agency of individuals, who act and make choices according to their own values and objectives (Sen, 1999: 19). The outcome of development can therefore not be measured by any universal framework; different individuals have different development priorities and aspirations and live in differing social and economic contexts. While a critique of top-down state-led approaches to development, this approach should not be confused with neoliberal advocacy of the free market. Markets are not understood as being capable of finding solutions or leading to development themselves, but are seen to depend on the formal institutional framework and also the informal institutional framework of social culture, ideas and 'behavioural ethics' (Sen, 1999: 262). Although the individual in need of empowerment and capability- or capacity-building is at the centre, both

the post-conflict state and the society are understood to have secondary and important supporting roles in developing the institutional and cultural frameworks to enable individuals to free themselves or to develop themselves (Sen, 1999: 53).

The discursive framing of development in terms of empowerment and capacity-building centres on the individual responsibility of the post-colonial or post-conflict subject, and has rightly been critiqued for its emphasis on 'non-material development', which has tended to reinforce global inequalities of wealth (Duffield, 2007: 101–105), and as marking 'the demise of the developing state' (Pupavac, 2007), as the poor are increasingly seen to be the agents of change and poverty reduction, bearing policy responsibility rather than external actors. Vanessa Pupavac, for example, highlights that, as development has come to the forefront of international policy agendas for peacebuilding and conflict prevention, there has been a distancing of Western powers and international institutions from taking responsibility for development, with a consensus that the poor need 'to find their own solutions to the problems they face' (Pupavac, 2007: 96).

Civil Society and Conflict

The transformation of cultural framings of conflict in post-colonial or post-conflict societies into civil society framings can be highlighted through a comparison of Kaldor's new wars thesis from the 1990s with the 'greed and grievance' framework developed by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler in the mid-2000s (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Collier, Hoeffler & Rohner, 2006). It could be argued that the intention of the Collier thesis is little different from that of Kaldor's: that of morally delegitimizing political actors in contexts of post-colonial conflict. However, Collier's reconstruction of conflict in the rational-choice framework of institutionalist approaches facilitates a much broader or holistic range of policy interventions than does Kaldor's.

Rather than morally distinguishing the post-colonial context from that of the West, making it seem merely 'irrational' or 'backward', the rational-choice framing of Collier seeks to develop an understanding of post-colonial societies in the universalist terms of economic frameworks of individual choices. In their critique of theorists who sought to understand conflict in the rational terms of political rights (struggles over grievances), Collier and his Oxford University-based team sought to understand conflict in terms of individual economic interests. In this framing, grievance no longer becomes explanatory or a legitimating factor; it is the opportunity for rebellion that has explanatory value. Essentially, if finance is easily available (for example, owing to easy access to primary commodity exports) and there is little opportunity cost (i.e. few other avenues to earn income, if access to secondary education is low and the economy is stagnant), then conflict 'entrepreneurs' will arise

who do not necessarily have any stake in furthering the interests or needs of their alleged constituents (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004).

Conflict is entirely removed from the political-juridical framing of modern liberal understandings. For Collier's project, 'where rebellion is feasible, it will occur without any special inducements in terms of motivation', and 'motivation is indeterminate, being supplied by whatever agenda happens to be adopted by the first social entrepreneur to occupy the viable niche' (Collier, Hoeffler & Rohner, 2006: 19–20). Once conflict is understood as the product of the choices of individuals, within an economic (rather than a political) framework of understanding, the possibility of reshaping the institutional context, and therefore the outcome of decisionmaking, arises. This approach of indirectly influencing the conduct of individuals on the basis of this shift from a rights-based to an economic behaviouralist or rational-choice framework of understanding exemplifies the civil society approach, which has displaced cultural framings within the policy practices of international peacebuilding.

To reiterate, the civil society framework is explored here using a Foucauldian approach, highlighting that this can best be understood as an ideational paradigm or discourse, facilitating a certain 'governmental rationality'. This perspective is rather different from that taken by the more policy-orientated peacebuilding literature, which takes a narrower approach to civil society.⁶ Intervention in the narrower field of civil society is just one set of policy interventions within this framework and often is not the most important. For example, in the work of Collier and his team, who have been highly influential in the policy developments of the World Bank, this civil society framing leads to a range of policy interventions, of which work in and upon the narrower sphere of civil society itself is not necessarily the key concern. Bearing in mind the goal of modifying the behavioural choices of individuals, policy is organized around minimizing the opportunities and raising the costs of rebellion. Such policies might include: the development of international regulatory institutions concerning the trade in primary goods, preventing rebel groups from having easy access to world markets; the sharing of sovereignty or international institutional control of income sources to prevent state capture being the source of aggrandizement; policies that prevent barriers to job creation or educational opportunities, thus raising the opportunity costs of engagement in rebel activities; external support to enhance the capacity of the state military to more easily deter rebel movements, etc.

Civil Society and Democracy

This framing of civil society intervention – as influencing individual behaviour choices – is the precondition for a broad range of peacebuilding policy interventions that assume a cultural and moral divide between the post-

⁶ See, for example, Cousens & Kumar (2001); Jarstad & Sisk (2008); De Zeeuw & Kumar (2006).

colonial subject and the liberal democratic subject of the West. This distinction presupposes that rationalist assumptions made with regard to the liberal democratic subject do not hold in the post-colonial context of peacebuilding interventions. Whereas the liberal democratic tradition argues that social conflicts can be resolved through rational deliberation and societal engagement, the peacebuilding paradigm does not assume that conflicts can be resolved through autonomous political processes and therefore opens up the sphere of civil society to policy intervention in order to structure institutional frameworks in order to contain conflicts.

This active, interventionist approach to civil society argues that external intervention by government or external actors is necessary to challenge or disrupt irrational or counterproductive forms of political identification through the process of multiplying frames of political identification. In this respect, interventionist civil society policy has become central to international peacebuilding as a framework in which political and social collectivities are understood and engaged with as products of irrational mind-sets shaped by the past that are, however, open to transformation. In this framing, civil society intervention is often presented as a way of challenging criminal, ethnic, regional or nationalist conceptions of political identity, and providing a policy framework through which these identifications can be substituted with a variety of alternative identifications, such as those of women, youth, unemployed, small businesses, etc. – the precondition being that these alternative identities transgress and cross-cut those that are considered to be irrational and problematic. This multiplication of political identities is then held to pluralize the political process, with barriers to progress in peacebuilding goals overcome through the means of civil society intervention.

As Audra Mitchell & Stephanie Kappler (2009) highlight, this framing of civil society as a sphere of policy intervention draws upon internal Western discourses critiquing liberal rationalist approaches (much as earlier colonial discourses drew upon internal Western elite concerns). Concerns with difference and the inability of the liberal democratic process to overcome particularist and conflicting identities have been expressed clearly by critics of the rationalist assumptions of modern framings of the political. Perhaps the most influential in this respect have been agonistic frameworks that suggest that conflict is inevitable and that differences are irreconcilable through liberal democratic frameworks (Honig, 1993), but that conflict can be accommodated and transformed through civil society intervention with the goal of multiplying political identifications. This has been expressed, for example, by William Connolly (2002) in terms of the development of 'agonistic respect', or by Chantal Mouffe (2005) through reviving the left/right distinction.

The key point about the agonistic critique of rationalist approaches to democracy is that civil society becomes problematized as a sphere of irreconcilable difference at the same time as it becomes transformed into a sphere of

policy intervention. Transferred to the sphere of international intervention, in the peacebuilding policy framework, a whole set of policy practices open up, based upon the thesis that through engaging with and transforming uncivil post-colonial or post-conflict societies, irrational antagonistic conflict can be transformed into rational agonistic contestation. Through institutionalist practices, external intervention is held to be able to build or constitute civil societies as a basis upon which the problems of societal development, inclusion and security can be resolved.

As noted above, with regard to the moral or cultural understanding of the problem of post-colonial society, the starting assumption is that civil society lacks the rational or civic qualities of civil society in the West. The focus of policy analysts is on group, ethnic, religious or regional identifications that are understood to be products of the past or path dependencies of conflict, or of colonial or Soviet rule. Civil society is understood to be hybrid in the sense of reflecting the divisions or traditions of society, but as open to intervention and transformation through informal institutional change (change of the norms and values of society). The peacebuilding discourse of civil society intervention is very different from that of the 1980s and early 1990s, where writers and commentators tended to juxtapose civil society as a sphere of pristine values and civic norms vis-à-vis the sphere of formal politics and state power, which was seen to be self-seeking and exclusionary. Civil society as a sphere of external intervention is necessarily hybrid and the field of both strategic calculation and tactical engagement. As a leading policy authority states:

Strategically, the promotion of civil society cannot occur in a platitudinous fashion that sees all civil society as an inherent good for peace and democratization. Quite the contrary, there needs to be a sharp strategy of differentiation in civil society promotion by which international donors are quite discriminating in identifying three types of non-state actors to support: those that cross-cut identity lines or fissures of conflict . . . those that are moderate but reflecting primarily one perspective or protagonist social group, and those that are more extreme but which, through coaxing and inclusion, can become moderate (Sisk, 2008: 255).

In the peacebuilding literature,⁷ the goal of external intervention is to transform civil society forms of voluntary association from existing and divisive forms (of bonding social capital) to pluralist and inclusivist forms (of bridging social capital) (Putnam, 2000). The clash of cultures, in the self-understanding of international peacebuilders, is played out in the policy interventions that attempt to transform traditional (non-)civil society into a civic polity in which social and political divisions are submerged, mitigated or disappear. For this reason, civil society cannot be left to its own devices:

⁷ See, for example, Ottaway & Carothers (2000a); Cousens & Kumar (2001); Maley, Sampford & Thakur (2003); Darby & Mac Ginty (2003); Paris (2004); De Zeeuw & Kumar (2006); Jarstad & Sisk (2008); Newman, Paris & Richmond (2009).

effective international action requires identifying and working diligently against those civil society groups that are deemed not constructive to peacebuilding aims, either because of their irredeemably extreme nature and positions or because they have other interests or activities . . . that work against progress toward peace or democracy (Sisk, 2008: 255–256).

Civil society is seen as the sphere capable of generating the solutions to problems of conflict or to the barriers to development or democracy. The focus on civil society rather than social or economic transformation builds on the moral and cultural discourses of empire, with their emphasis on mal-adjustment and psychological framings of social and political questions. The problems are perceived to be in the hold of the past over the minds of post-conflict subjects rather than the social relations of the present. The precondition for civil society peacebuilding intervention is the assumption of the irrationality of the informal institutional frameworks – of the mind-sets – of post-conflict subjects.

These irrational mind-sets are held to be capable of transformation through policy intervention; it is held that irrational values and identities can be challenged by education and social interaction that encourages the pluralization of political identities. It is for this reason that (in this narrower framing) civil society intervention takes two main forms. First, there is support for ‘democracy groups’, such as NGOs engaging in policy advocacy or civic education, that directly promote the politics of inclusion and civic principles. Roberto Belloni (2008: 189) argues that these groups contribute by:

stressing the importance of developing multiple civic identities, pluralism, equal opportunity, tolerance, and the government’s accountability. They attempt to defend and enlarge spaces for negotiation and compromise – islands of civility and dialogue in a context polarized by mutual fear and mistrust. They strive for inclusion, participation and equal access and place emphasis on the need to negotiate and cooperate in view of building consensus rather than repeating adversarial, zero-sum positions.

The second group of internationally funded NGOs held to be constructing civil society are those that, while not directly advocating democracy and civic values, attempt to pluralize political identification on the basis of ascribed identities held to be capable of breaking down primary collective affiliations, such as those of women, youth, or small and medium business enterprises. In post-conflict situations, often any framework for engaging people across ethnic or ideological divides is considered productive for changing people’s mind-sets and breaking them from the hold of dominant and problematic political identities (Chandler, 1999: 40).

The Ambiguous Programme of Civil Society Intervention

Despite being a framework making a broad range of policy interventions both possible and legitimate, the discourse of civil society is flexible enough to also offer an understanding of the limits to policy success or to societal transformation (as was also the case with the previous discourses of race and culture). As Carothers & Ottaway (2000: 7) note, civil society intervention, as a key framing of policymaking, evolved with the extension of peacebuilding mandates and goals in response to the perceived failures of post-conflict transition in the mid-1990s. They highlight that policy interventions often bear little relation to the grand claims made for them and argue that, in fact, civil society intervention is intervention on the cheap. Rather than undertaking major projects of economic and social transformation or undertaking major institutional reform at the level of government, which would be seen as hugely expensive and ambitious, civil society intervention claims to address problems of development, conflict and democracy but without an ambitious programme of societal transformation. The actual programmes of civil society support, while ubiquitous as part of every international peacebuilding project of international intervention, involve very small sums of money (Carothers & Ottaway, 2000: 8). This money is generally allocated to NGOs with tenuous roots within their own societies rather than to social movements. Donors focus on a very narrow set of organizations, usually highly professionalized and relating to the state through advocacy work or engaging in society through civic educational campaigns. It is suggested here that this disjunction between the asserted aims of civil society intervention and the limited resources and limited success of such intervention (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000b; see also Chandler, 1998) can only be understood by grasping civil society intervention as integral to the broader peacebuilding policy problematic.

Civil society becomes a focal point of international intervention and the peacebuilding project because it posits a framework in which international engagement can be legitimized on the basis of the autonomy of the post-colonial subject. Cultural frameworks posit autonomy as problematic and act as apologia for the limited success of external intervention, but cannot provide any transformative promise or a facilitative programme of policy prescriptions. In civil society interventions, the autonomy of the post-colonial subject is both apologia and means and the goal of intervention. Intervention in civil society is seen to be the precondition for the safe autonomy of the subject, with civil society – harmonious or conflict-free interaction – as the goal of intervention.

Conclusion

International peacebuilding is increasingly operating on a holistic paradigm of preventive intervention and indirect regulation, external intervention not to control states or societies but to enable them to manage their autonomy. The discourse of race, which legitimized and reflected the overt inequalities of colonial rule and direct domination, is no longer one that reflects the relationship management of international peacebuilding, which presupposes the relationship of formal equality and of autonomy. The discourse of culture that replaced that of race as an essentializing explanation for inequality fits uneasily with the interventionist framework of international peacebuilding. The emphasis on differential cultures provides an apologia for economic and social inequalities but provides little purchase for regulatory intervention. It is only once cultural differences are understood as social constructs that can be shaped and reshaped through institutional intervention that civil society becomes a central concept within the international peacebuilding policy framework.

The focus upon civil society maintains the role of race or culture in rationalizing difference and inequality on the basis of distinctive 'path dependencies' created in specific contexts of interaction between states and societies, but also – through positing these differences as the rational choices of the individuals within those societies – opens up society as a malleable sphere for external policy intervention. Civil society enables difference and inequality to be articulated and explained, but locates these distinctions as products of the choices of these societies themselves. In taking over and inverting a classical liberal concept that emphasized individual autonomy, the peacebuilding discourse tends to be much more judgmental and moralistic about the post-conflict societies that are the objects of its policy interventions. In this way, the civil society discourse enables a much more interventionist policy paradigm than that made possible through the framework of cultural division, while reinforcing and reinstitutionalizing international hierarchies of power and evading responsibility for policy outcomes.

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