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Pol Bargaés–Pedreny

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## Connolly and the never-ending critiques of liberal peace: from the privilege of difference to vorarephilia

Pol Bargaés–Pedreny  
*University of Duisburg Essen*

**Abstract** *Over the last decade, a dominant critique of international interventions underlines the problem that interventionary strategies have denied the political, societal and cultural heterogeneity of conflict-affected societies, excluding the interests of the majority of their population. A deeper engagement with the everyday life of these societies is understood to expose the errors of international missions and animate an alternative way of thinking about peace: ‘hybrid peace’, which is formed contextually and from below. Engaging with William Connolly’s work on pluralism, this article clarifies the nature of this critique, which rests securely on the assumption that local alterity cannot be fully understood, respected or treated sensitively by international governance approaches. However, as much as this assumption enables the thinking of an emancipatory hybrid peace, it is in turn the source of its critique, as hybrid peace is also seen as reproducing binary schemas and thus considered incapable of caring for the societies intervened in. At the conclusion, the metaphor of vorarephilia—paraphilia where sexual arousal occurs in the idea of being eaten or eating another person—will be used to warn against the tragic direction that critiques seem to be travelling to: critical scholars would be increasingly tempted to welcome the inevitable failures of international interventions.*

### Introduction

Alongside the policy difficulties in building a stable and durable peace, exemplified by interventions in the former Yugoslavia, the Congo, Cambodia, Afghanistan and Iraq, over the last decade scholars have come to the fore to announce the crisis of ‘liberal peace’. Three main strands of critique have contributed to this backlash. Drawing on neo-Marxist structuralist frameworks, a group of scholars argue that the economic, security and political interests of Western states and financial institutions have driven international interventions, thereby expanding neoliberal market relations and perpetuating power imbalances (Barbara 2008; Cooper et al 2008; Jacoby 2007; Pugh 2004; Pugh 2005). Inspired by Foucault’s critique of neoliberal governmentality, other commentators emphasize the therapeutic and disciplining techniques of development and statebuilding paradigms that are intended to appease sources of international insecurity and reproduce a hierarchical world

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order (Abrahamsen 2000; Chandler 2010a; Duffield 2001; Evans and Reid 2014; Jabri 2007; Joseph 2016; Pupavac 2001).

Informed by poststructuralist sensibilities, a third group of scholars underlines the problem that international peace frameworks have denied the political, societal and cultural heterogeneity of conflict-affected societies, excluding the views of the majority of their population (Autesserre 2014; Mac Ginty 2011; Richmond 2011; 2014a; Tadjbakhsh 2011). A recognition and deeper engagement with the everyday life of these societies is understood to expose the biases of current peacebuilding processes and animate an alternative way of thinking about peace: 'post-liberal' or 'hybrid' peace. As Richmond (2012, 126) summarizes, 'the limitations of the liberal peace project have sparked new forms of peace in reaction, response, or as resistance, by a repoliticization of post-conflict subjects. This represents the inadvertent rediscovery or rebirth of post-liberal politics in infrapolitical terms.' This third strand of critique, which has come to dominate critical debate and revolves around the question of how to engage more generously with 'difference', is the focus here.

At stake is the problem that hybrid peace frameworks are under siege by authors who point out that hybrid peace is reproducing the liberal reductive and binary schemas that it is meant to overcome, still failing to engage sensitively with alterity (Graef 2015; Heathershaw 2013; Millar et al 2013; Rampton and Nadarajah 2016; Sabaratnam 2013; Wolff and Zimmermann 2016). Amidst the anxiety caused by the emergence of the 'critique of the critique' (Richmond and Mac Ginty 2015, 172), this article seeks to examine the inner logic of the critique of liberal peace and of hybrid peace. In order to do so, it engages with William Connolly's (1995; 2002; 2005) work on pluralism, which rethinks the classic pluralist ideal by committing to a deeper pluralism. As will be shown, Connolly problematizes approaches that address the tense relation between identity and difference either by empowering particular identities at the expense of others (as in Culturalist frameworks) or by professing a model inclusive of all identities (as in Universalist frameworks). These approaches are problematic because, he contends, difference constantly exceeds conceptual capture. Instead, Connolly (2002, 10) encourages us to 'draw agonistic care for difference from the abundance of life that exceeds any particular identity' by the means of adopting self-reflexive strategies and promoting a democratic ethos of public contestation.

The analysis of Connolly's work applies both to developing the argument and to drawing a conclusion from it. First, his attempt to pluralize existing forms of pluralism enables the conceptualization of critiques of international interventions. This article argues that the critique of both liberal peace and hybrid peace rests comfortably on the assumption that local alterity cannot be fully understood, respected or treated sensitively by current frameworks. Initially, tactics to build a liberal democratic peace were seen as disrespectful towards difference, disavowing large sectors of the population and bringing unintended consequences, hybridizations and negative peace outcomes. However, as much as this assumption has enabled the thinking of hybrid peace, it is in turn the source of its critique, as hybrid peace is also considered incapable of opening up to the needs and values in the everyday contexts of societies intervened in. Beyond Connolly, it could be argued that this postulate lies at the core of poststructuralist critiques. Derrida (1992), for example, posits that justice is infinite, undeconstructible, and thus any law (as *droit*), any attempt to take the just action, will betray justice.

Second, Connolly is preferred to other post-structuralist thinkers because his most contemporary work informed by speculative realism is useful to grasp the direction that critiques are taking in debates about international intervention. Drawing on Connolly's speculative turn,<sup>1</sup> which radicalizes pluralism to emphasize a world of 'becoming' whose powers of creativity exceed human knowledge, the article concludes by highlighting an unforeseen consequence of critiques that continually privilege difference over universality (Connolly 2011, 8). Once it is appreciated that difference is always richer and more creative than peacebuilding frameworks, critical scholars actually start embracing the faultiness of international intervention. *Vorarephilia*—a paraphilia in which people feel sexual gratification in the idea of being eaten or eating another person—will be used as a metaphor to draw attention to the transvaluation of the crisis of liberal peace: rather than valuing peace and endorsing a particular alternative strategy to liberal peace, the trend is to take a sceptical view of peacebuilding and indeed embrace the incapacity to produce a final intervention that is respectful of pluralism.

The article proceeds through four sections. The first analyses Connolly's work on pluralism in order to frame the normative point of view from which the critique of liberal peace springs. The second focuses on the critical evaluation of existing interventionist policies and practices. The third explores the critics' alternative proposition. An agonistic negotiation between assemblages of local and international actors is understood to produce a contextual and locally engrained hybrid peace. However, as drawn out in the fourth section, hybrid peace has also been critically reappraised. Re-engaging with Connolly's work, the article concludes by arguing that critiques of international intervention seem to be increasingly valuing the imperfection and insufficiency of frameworks of intervention.

### **Connolly's pluralism: the fragility of identity and ethics**

Early in his career, William Connolly (1969) was in the vanguard of left-wing critics who argued that the pluralist ideal—as it was codified in societies like the United States—was biased in favour of certain groups who could formulate rules and laws and against others who were excluded from the public. Since the ideal imagined by Alexis de Tocqueville did not fit the circumstances affecting modern societies, Connolly (1969, 26) sought to extend 'the limits of politics'. His aim was to overcome closures, pointing to new and diverse views that ought to be included in the political sphere. The affirmation of a deep pluralism, which has been coined as the 'new pluralism' (Campbell and Schoolman 2008, 1), has been developed since the early 1990s and it will be examined below. The focus here is on Connolly rather than on other post-1968 theorists of pluralism because his latest work (2011; 2013; 2014), informed by speculative realism, has radicalized the pluralist sensibility, enhancing a care for a contingent world not amenable to human mastery. Thus, first Connolly's pluralism will be mobilized to understand the logic of the critique of liberal peace and of hybrid peace: critiques that point to the need to

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<sup>1</sup> Connolly (2013, 402–403) prefers the term 'speculative realism' or 'immanent naturalism' to 'new materialism' or 'posthumanism' in order to define his care for the 'fragility of things'. This is an appreciation of the multiple entanglements between humans and non-humans and the imbrications of culture and nature in a cosmos that remains open, becoming, self-organizing, mysterious to human understandings.

attend the alterity of post-war societies in order to reconsider peace-support missions. Second, as will become clear in the conclusion of the paper, his latest speculative turn illustrates the ongoing ethico-political shift in critical scholarship from a harrowing concern over the crises of international interventions to the positive acceptance of their inefficiency and inevitable mismanagement.

Connolly (2002, xiv–xv) introduces his ethics by presenting two paradoxes. First, every identity necessitates differences in order to be, but differences are seen as problematic and are diminished when identity pursues self-certainty and completion. For Connolly (2002, xvii), identity is an unfixed mixture of cultural and biological features that is fundamentally relational. Because identity and difference are mutually constitutive and essential for human beings, the question of whether it is possible to live without identity or without difference is answered negatively (2002, 158). However, identity and difference are seen to exist in a complex political relation. Due to contemporary experiences of contingency, fragility and existential despair, individuals and collectives need to protect the certainty and coherence of their identities. But in so doing, Connolly explains, they tend to subjugate the differences that pose a challenge to the self. And therein lies the paradox: the temptation to pursue an unambiguous and secure identity independent from difference automatically implies being disrespectful towards difference. Connolly (2002, 67) writes,

[T]he multiple drives to stamp truth upon those identities function to convert differences into otherness and otherness into scapegoats created and maintained to secure the appearance of a true identity. To possess a true identity is to be false to difference, while to be true to difference is to sacrifice the promise of a true identity.

For Connolly (1995, 89–90), it is the aspiration to achieve a true or total identity (a life without difference) that is problematic, for it converts difference into otherness in a process that is most often violent. The stronger the willingness to secure the identities of the normal individual, the society or the nation-state, the more otherness is produced that can be potentially assimilated, marginalized, opposed or condemned.

For example, the pursuit of a territorially coherent nation-state may generate ‘persecution, forced conversions, refugees, boat people, terrorism, ethnic cleansing’ and ‘evil’ (Connolly 2005, 29). All societies privilege some identities in the process of defining norms and building institutions. Irremediably, at the same time, they treat differences as deviations from the normal standards that need to be corrected or even as threats that ought to be eliminated (Connolly 1995, 88–89). These struggles against difference seek to ‘suppress’ the paradox—instead of pursuing a ‘political engagement’ with the paradox, as Connolly (1995, xxi) counsels. Hence, a vital question lingers: how is one to combat the longing for security, coherence and reassurance of identity that causes the exclusion or eradication of difference? In other words, is there a way to overcome the assimilationist risks implicated in the politics of difference? In facing this challenge, the second paradox comes in.

Connolly (2002, 9–12) contends that ethical principles are required to resolve the problems that arise when seeking to protect identity from difference. Yet the second paradox, that of ethics, lies between the need for premises to contain violence against others and the cruelties and injustices installed in any attempt to define these premises. This paradox thus may be synthesized like this: having some ethical standards is indispensable for social life, but finding an ultimate

ethical injunction that could work for ever and for all always does violence to some. Connolly uses the paradox of ethics to criticize forms of liberalism—as well as Marxism, secularism and other philosophies that hold specific presuppositions of the self and the world.<sup>2</sup> Because all forms of liberalism, he argues, organize societies by bestowing privilege to certain identities, norms and ideals, but fail to ‘identify the constellation of normal/abnormal dualities already inscribed in the culture they idealize’ (2002, 74). In assuming a model for all, these theories are understood to lack self-reflexivity and care for the differences they neglect, belittle or punish as abnormalities (2002, 70–94). In brief, the critique advanced is that these approaches misrecognize that no particular form of the common life can be responsible for the fullness of diversity.

By contrast, Connolly’s ethics do not stem from a transcendental command nor are they deduced from any authority, reason or divine force. He is not willing to respond ‘*why* be ethical?’ Or ‘*what* is the epistemic ground of ethics?’ Instead, he pursues ‘*ways* to cultivate care for identity and difference in a world already permeated by ethical proclivities and predispositions to identity’ (2002, 10, emphasis in original). His ethics, therefore, are motivated from the care for the rich diversity of life that is constantly foreclosed by drives to secure identities and institute ethical guidelines. In other words, Connolly’s (1995, 27, 93; 2002, 82) sensibilities are governed by the readiness to appreciate the energies and fugitive experiences that exceed any form of identity or model for human organization.

In order to surmount the problem of violence against difference—this is the highest aspiration that cannot be fulfilled by any ethical standard—Connolly proposes to negotiate (rather than suppress or ignore) both paradoxes. The negotiation operates on two registers: at the self and at the encounter. At the level of the self, engaging with the first paradox, there is the need to adopt tactics of self-reflexivity and self-modification. This means to defy the resentment against the other that emanates from the impossibility of achieving the completion of one’s own identity. Rather than hoping to possess a true identity, Connolly (2002, 180; 1995, xvi) urges people to adopt self-reflexivity and, for example, ‘live one’s own identity in a more ironic, humorous way’ or ‘affirm contingency in identity’. These gestures open up alternative possibilities for relating to others, resisting forms of stigmatizing or discrediting their beliefs. As the strategies of self-modification are necessary but insufficient, Connolly orients his ethics towards the encounter with others.

In order to engage with the second paradox, Connolly enacts a democratic ethos, guided by the principle of contestability (Schoolman 2008, 41; see also Honig 2007; Mouffe 1999). Drawing on Foucault’s practices of care for identity and difference and Nietzsche’s appreciation of the diversity and uniqueness of life-forms,<sup>3</sup> Connolly (1995, xx) strives for the expansion of ‘agonistic respect

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that Connolly is not seeking to counter liberalism. He critically revises it by cultivating an ethics that affirm the ambiguities and contingencies of life (Connolly 2002, 83; Schoolman 2008, 19).

<sup>3</sup> In his work on pluralism, Connolly (2002, 10; 1995, 1–40) borrows from the two philosophers: he shares with Foucault a responsibility to difference through genealogical strategies that the Nietzschean ethos lacks; and he supplements Foucault with Nietzsche by emphasizing the plethora of life-forms called to care. It could be argued that in the latter Connolly (2014, 149–178) the Nietzschean sensibility—an attention to (non-)human elements in a world in constant flux that is never ready for human understanding—has come to dominate over the Foucauldian.



and critical responsiveness between diverse constituencies'. While the pluralist accepts the fragility of their faith, they are nevertheless active in their relations with others. They are alert to contest the dogmatization of hegemonic identities and fundamentalisms, disturb conventional judgements, suspect frozen consensus and resist practices that cement contingency (Connolly 1995, 85–93). Far from reducing public life to a static or passive place in which no meaning or consensus can be advanced, a pluralist engagement with diversity creates new possibilities for peaceful identification. As Connolly (1995, 90) puts it, the contestation of dogmatic identities 'forms an essential prelude to the effort to devise creative ways through which a wider variety of identities can negotiate less violent terms of coexistence'. In brief, at the level of selves, individuals and collectives are encouraged to 'cultivate the experience of contingency in identity'; and, at the level of the encounter, to 'interrogate exclusions built into [people's] own entrenched identities' with the intention of developing 'a politics alert to a tragic gap between the imperatives of organization in the order it idealizes and admirable possibilities of life that exceed those imperatives' (Connolly 2002, 14).

What is important here is that by negotiating the two paradoxes Connolly (1995, 4–22) aims to subdue the politics of generalized resentment against difference that have emerged in what he calls 'the late-modern time'. This is a time of uncertainty, deterritorialization and globalization of contingency, in which struggles for identity abound—as seen for example in religious crusades, terrorist plots, cultural wars and the projects of international governance and justice intended to palliate their effects. But for Connolly (1995, 99) the contemporary era also 'forms a condition of possibility for emergence of a more generous pluralism'. Connolly's new pluralism thus can be situated vis-à-vis the explosion of civil wars of the 1990s and the ensuing international peace-support interventions. Even if Connolly rarely addresses particular cases, the intention here is to mobilize his ethical sensibilities to unfold the core assumptions of liberal peace critiques.

### From Connolly's paradoxes to the critique of liberal peace

The critiques of liberal peace are more vivid than ever, responding to the continuous difficulties encountered by international missions in building stable and peaceful societies. This article seeks to argue that these critiques are sustained by the assumption that while peace needs to be truly local to be successful, durable and just, *local alterity cannot be embraced by international interventions*.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on poststructuralist frameworks, this dominant liberal peace critique flags up the problem that international interventions have paid insufficient attention to the diverse 'infra-political areas'—the 'social, historical, cultural, political, and economic realities, in their everyday contexts'—of conflict-affected societies (Richmond 2011, 198). This lack of attention, the critics contend, stems from the predisposition to export neoliberal strategies, security-based policies and human rights principles in a subtle colonial form that favours a West-dominated world order to the detriment of non-Western countries. As Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013, 773) succinctly put it,

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<sup>4</sup> This sensibility can be said to stem from Edmund Husserl's philosophy and his insight that 'objects always lie beyond any possibility of total presence' (Harman 2005, 3).

state building strategy appears to confirm a longstanding colonial narrative that places the global North in a dominant, selfish and also vulnerable position. The West exercises structural and governmental power against the local, simultaneously preaching democracy, human rights and accountability and assuming the subaltern has little agency.

It is from this external, distant, seemingly universal formulation of peacebuilding that the infra-political areas of war-affected populations—their inner being or their difference, as it may be put here—cannot be comprehended, represented or governed to achieve the intended results.

For example, Beatrice Pouligny (2005, 507), after her extensive experience as a practitioner in Central and South America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Balkans, has documented how liberal internationalism overlooks the ‘stories written at the community level’. Using a reflexive methodology, her studies represent a step further towards the comprehension of local subjectivities. Knowledgeable of local languages (or working closely with anthropologists and local experts), she pursues formal interviews as well as informal contacts with diverse people in the street, in markets or in buses and pays a careful attention to daily life to get as close as possible to the experiences of the people (Pouligny 2006, ix–xvii). Like Pouligny, observing the complexity of everyday experiences that resist organizational structures, critical scholars point out the flaws of top-down liberal universalist frameworks: these are seen first to have used reductionist categories to evaluate conflict; second to have focused on formal rules and institutions, state-centric models and elite-bargaining processes or applied one-size-fits all prescriptions to make peace (Autesserre 2014, 20–96; Millar 2013; Richmond 2014a, 1–30).

In the past few years, peace-support policy practice has experienced a shift, gradually coming to rely on indigenous knowledge and resources and relinquishing control and leadership of the peace process to national actors (Paffenholz 2014). Although most critical authors recognize that international peacebuilders are increasingly adopting more context-sensitive and bottom-up strategies, they regard the shift with utter suspicion (Brigg 2013, 12–18; Lemay-Hébert and Kappler 2016; Richmond et al 2011). For them, the local turn in policy frameworks is only happening rhetorically, as a tactic to improve the legitimacy of international authorities, but not in practice, where the parameters of peacebuilding are still established from the outside (Belloni 2012, 35; Mac Ginty 2008, 142; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, 775; Richmond 2009, 565). Boege and colleagues (2009, 611), for example, argue that recent references to ‘local ownership’ are merely paying ‘lip service’, but international actors do not actually take national customary rules into account. Another charge is that international organizations only give support to local standpoints that fit their interests or purposes, rather than attempting a more inclusive and pluralist representation, allowing for the participation of the more complex, deeper and richer ‘local-local’ (Richmond 2011, 29; 2012). Moreover, a shallow local turn within policy framings is understood to generate severe unintended effects. In some cases interventions are seen to reproduce the divisive and violent categories that ignited the war, thereby excluding alternative or peaceful views and facilitating the cooption of the peace process by self-interested elites or nationalist entrepreneurs (Mac Ginty 2008, 151; Hehir 2006, 206–210). Therein lies the logic of the critique of liberal peace: though international policy-makers are increasingly showing a greater respect for local agency and contexts, alterity



eludes governance. This assumption, in turn, rationalizes the negative consequences and crisis of liberal peace.

A re-engagement with Connolly's two paradoxes is useful to disclose the ethical sensibilities underpinning this critique. First, the paradox of ethicality: while some ethical standards are necessary to organize social life, any particular standard is problematic, as it will inescapably dismiss, relegate or undermine some perspectives. Following this insight, it appears that liberal frameworks of intervention have nullified or ignored some local resources and realities in their attempt to bring a just peace (Mac Ginty 2008, 145). The critique of liberal peace, in essence, points out how existing practices of peacebuilding are incapable of being true to difference—or to the deep local-local, as Richmond hints. Brigg (2010, 339) states, 'currently available theoretical frameworks tend to be insufficient for addressing the challenges of cultural difference in peace and conflict studies'. What ought to be recognized is that this is not only an empirical point, laying particular stress on the numerous methodological complications encountered when approaching complex realities. It is also a normative judgement, which reflects a broader commitment to 'decolonizing' and 'decentering' international relations (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004; Nayak and Selbin 2010). For the critics of liberal peace, as for Connolly, the aim is to develop an account of peace that affirms the ambiguities and contingencies ubiquitous in the everyday life of local citizens without relying upon another set of a priori principles or out-of-context institutional frameworks. The highest aspiration may be cast in terms of developing a process of peace that is infinitely responsive and respectful of local alterity.<sup>5</sup>

In highlighting the limits of external governance and excoriating international interveners for adopting domineering, interest-based and quasi-colonialist roles, however, liberal peace critiques do not consider war-affected societies to be automatically unproblematic or benign. When studying the domestic politics of post-conflict transitions, some local actors are accused of having strong partisan feelings, pursuing hierarchical social relations or seeking to marginalize ethnic minorities (Belloni 2012, 33; Boege et al 2009, 612; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, 770). As Mac Ginty (2008, 149) explains, 'rather than a romantic defence of all things traditional or indigenous or the pursuit of a discourse of authenticity (which attaches premium to anything deemed authentic), all peace-making techniques and assumptions should be exposed to rigorous tests of relevance and fitness for purpose'. To understand this position, Connolly's paradox of identity seems apt: there can be no identity without difference and yet the stronger the attempt to secure one's identity, the greater the predisposition to diminish, exclude or demonize differences. According to Connolly (1995, 27, 97; 2005, 28–29), identity conflicts cannot be addressed by moves to protect, let alone to reinforce or reassure, a particular identity at the expense of others—for example, by the means of designing territorial arrangements or favouring specific national or ethnic agendas. These strategies will undermine pluralism as much as doctrines or movements with universalist visions and ambitions. Analogously, critics of liberal

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<sup>5</sup> Beyond international relations debates, this ethical commitment to the Other has been long discussed. A radical interpretation of this position can be found, for example, in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1991, 9–11), who underscores an unconditional indebtedness to the Other prior to subjectivity or knowledge of the Other. For an excellent study that mobilizes Levinas's ethics to criticize frameworks of international intervention, see Campbell (1998, 171–185).

peace are careful not to essentialize ideas or practices defended by local constituencies—for this would be to reproduce the paradox of identity. In sum, engaging with both paradoxes, peacebuilding approaches that address identity conflicts can be based neither on universal principles and norms, nor on processes that affirm identity claims or strengthen the existing relations among groups.

By way of contrast, as seen in the previous section, Connolly (1995, 192) proposes ‘to enliven the awareness of contingency within established constellations of identity and difference’ on both the self and the encounter levels, opening up new possibilities for cooperation and coexistence. The important point here is that his sensibilities go beyond Universalist and Culturalist frameworks because neither of the two positions can show fidelity to the diversity of the human condition. Connolly (2005, 31–35) urges us to embrace difference through a ‘bicameral orientation’ towards political life: affirming identities or faiths and, at the same time, negotiating our identities with others in an agonistic process that is never completed. This new pluralism is useful to interpret alternative frameworks to the liberal peace, discussed in the following section. These are hybrid forms of peace, which seek to move away from the intrinsic problems associated with the universality of the liberal peace and, at the same time, shun local policies of cultural or national hegemony. However, as it will be discussed in the last section, as much as the new pluralism is helpful to understanding hybrid peace, it is also the source of its critique, foreseeing its flawed nature.

### **Hybrid peace: unsettling binaries to be true to difference**

In response to the flaws of liberal regimes of intervention, hybrid forms of peacebuilding hold a positive view of the ‘contextual, non-elite, and infrapolitical processes’ of war-affected societies (Richmond 2012). For critics like Richmond (2014a, 133–142; 2009, 571), an emancipatory version of peace needs to take into account daily habits and mundane elements that resist external and top-down forms of governance. The point is not limited to the importance of recognizing that culture matters or of comprehending other ways of living—for liberal frameworks of intervention have historically insisted on the need to acknowledge the cultural diversity of societies intervened in (Shannon 1995). It is to see that ‘culture’ is ‘an under-recognised human heritage and resource for processing conflict and pursuing peace’ (Brigg 2010, 341). The distinction can be expressed like this: while liberal peace considered culture a constraint on the development of peace, hybrid peace takes it to be a valuable resource to be used constructively (Bargaés–Pedreny 2015). For example, according to Boege and colleagues, the success of cases such as Somaliland or Bougainville and the failure of others such as East Timor depend on ‘the involvement of traditional actors and customary institutions’ (Boege et al 2009, 606–610). Whether these cases are successes or failures is beside the point. What matters is that, for these scholars, the critique of liberal peace and the solution to its political aporias must invariably emerge ‘from below’ (Richmond 2014b, 18).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pragmatic sociology has influentially posited a critique from below. Rather than using totalizing elements to describe an already made social world from above (a position always close to discourses of power or governance over society), this critique starts from the observation of agents in action or *en situation* and is attentive to their critical performances (Boltanski 2011).

Yet local resources for peace are not always visible at first glance. Indeed, they are unfathomable to international approaches that focus in overarching fashion on the mere analysis and reform of formal institutions (Richmond 2011, 128). According to the critics, it is indispensable to pursue a 'deeper contextualization' and comprehend the social and cultural dynamics of the population; it is also important to adopt 'ethnographic' methods to have access to the opportunities for peace that emerge in everyday habits and struggles (Richmond 2009, 570–572). That is, rather than endorsing the rigid, standardized and institutionalist takeover of liberal peace missions, a hybrid peace approach is alert to the 'hidden' and 'non-obvious' elements of peace through innovative and spontaneous methods (Mac Ginty 2013). 'Collective narrative methodologies', as one commentator proposes, 'open up the space for diverse meanings and alternative stories that can contribute to peacebuilding and recovery from the effects of trauma' (Pia 2013, 476).

The proponents of a hybrid peace do not yield an alternative to liberal peace, at least not in the sense of developing another set of principles or political institutions to foster peace. What they yield is a new way of thinking through the liberal peace problem of engaging with the socio-cultural heterogeneity of post-conflict societies. Rather than originating in an abstract discussion, hybrid peace appears to be a 'real-world condition' inherent in contemporary war-affected zones, in which local actors resist, modify, ignore, adapt and coopt international regimes of intervention. This accommodation, negotiation, tension or clash along the international/local divide produces neither the outcome intended by liberal practitioners, based on market economy, stable institutions and a pro-Western civil society, nor an indigenous peace based on the illiberal practices that ignited the war in the first place. Instead, for the critiques of liberal peace, what is emerging today is an emancipatory form of hybrid, or hybridized, peace (Belloni 2012; Mac Ginty 2010; Richmond 2010, 688). Differently labelled in the literature as 'hybrid political orders', 'hybrid peace' or 'hybrid peace governance' (Belloni 2012, 22), the multi-layered interactions between actors, norms and interests provide a new lens for thinking about contemporary cases of intervention and, even more importantly, project a more locally engrained form of peace.

Hybrid frameworks, however, are not understood to occupy a naive middle ground option agreed between two opposed views. The allure of hybridity in international relations and in cultural and post-colonial studies more broadly resides in the possibility of subverting binary thinking and its epistemic exclusions, associated with modernist frameworks (Bhabha 1994; Kraidi 2005). Analogously, in analyses of peace, hybridity is seen to dissolve the binary divisions that plague liberal peace approaches—such as international–local, liberal–illiberal or emancipators–victims (Peterson 2012, 12). For the relational identities and positionality of international and local actors are continually redefined in post-war situations. Their worldviews are transgressed and modified to the point where it is no longer possible to visualize a fixed or clear—and thus hierarchical—divide. This is 'a fusion of global and local', as Roberts (2012, 372) puts it, which 'accommodates the inevitable while pluralizing the possible'. Of course, critics of liberal peace do not assume ipso facto that all hybrid formulations have an emancipatory potential (Richmond 2015; Richmond and Mitchell 2012, 9–10). They observe that in some cases hybrid processes are still saturated with ideological biases; and in others hybridity is superficially or mendaciously instrumentalized in policy approaches to beguile local parties into compliance (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2016, 225–229).

Yet, in short, the angle of hybridity—considered a condition, ‘an ordinary experience’ (Pieterse 2001, 238)—is believed to enable hybrid peace frameworks to evade both Universalist and Culturalist positions. That is, peacebuilding resists being dominated by either international ‘liberal’ practitioners or local ‘illiberal’ actors. Hybrid peace can thus be read as an attempt to negotiate Connolly’s two paradoxes. On the one hand, by praising self-reflexivity, it is responsible for destabilizing the drives to solidify identities and power positions; on the other hand, it is committed to a form of peace that is aware of the violence against others implied in every move forward, thereby refusing to be a new model for peacebuilding (Campbell 1998, 200–208; Richmond 2010, 685–686). In Richmond and Mac Ginty’s (2013, 764) words: hybrid peace takes ‘a pluralist view of difference and see[s] peace as hybrid, multiple and often agonistic’. Largely sharing Connolly’s ethos, the move away from the liberal peace amounts to ‘an ontological commitment to care for others in their everyday contexts, based upon empathy, respect and the recognition of difference’ (Richmond 2009, 566). And yet, as will be examined in the following section, hybrid peace frameworks are nevertheless accused of erring in their effort to be true to difference.

### **No sorrow for crises: vorarephilia in the critiques of liberal peace**

In his *Ethos of pluralization*, Connolly warns against the closures in contemporary forms of pluralism. For the new ‘operational standards’ employed to protect diversity and correct earlier models of pluralism also ‘camouflage injuries that might otherwise be ventilated and foreclose admirable cultural possibilities that might otherwise be pursued’ (1995, xii–xiii). In light of the paradox of ethics discussed above, he impels us to interrogate current pluralist settlements and point out the exclusions, marginalizations and abnormalities they produce. Cognizant that the application of new standards would meet the same fate, Connolly (1995, xvi) reworks the ‘pluralist imagination’ and introduces a ‘pluralizing’ ethos that constantly ‘disrupts the stability of established identities’, while it ‘lacks a sufficiently stable definition through which to present itself’. In contesting identities and avoiding closure at the same time, Connolly’s ethos finds itself negotiating the Derridean ‘double contradictory imperative’ of the impossibility but necessity of deciding and doing the ethical gesture (Campbell 1998, 190; Fagan 2013, 70–76).

What is crucial for understanding the sentiments underpinning contemporary critiques of liberal and hybrid peace is that the double contradictory impulse that drives the ethos of pluralization remains, for both Connolly and Derrida, interminable. As Connolly (1995, 198, emphasis added) puts it in the last words of his book: ‘The constitutive tension between pluralism and pluralization implies that *there is always more* political work to be done.’ In this last section, it is argued first that the tension has filtered into international intervention debates through the need to further pluralize hybrid peace. The imperative to question the reductionist dimensions of existing forms of pluralism has created a space for the critique of the critique of liberal peace. Second, a consequence will be drawn. For endorsing a never-ending critical project of pluralization carries an unexpected normative shift: if a decisive form of pluralism is unattainable and indeed undesirable, then the errors, deviations and flaws of peacebuilding will be less agonizing. The frustration of failing to be true to difference will wither. At the end of the paper,

the direction of the critical project is critically assessed through the metaphor of vorarephilia. In sum, the vorarephiliac fantasy of a person who feels pleasure in the course of being devoured resembles the mood of critiques, both of liberal and of hybrid peace, as they start indulging in the shortcomings of international interventions.

The critique of hybrid peace, the critique of the critique, is on the rise: it appears that the proponents of hybrid peace did not successfully free themselves from the problematic binaries of liberal peace (Björkdahl and Höglund 2013, 293–294; Charbonneau 2012, 511–512; Heathershaw 2013, 277; Randazzo 2016, 1355–1361; Sabaratnam 2013, 266–267). Hybrid peace scholars are criticized for having a shallow understanding of hybridity, maintaining a strict distinction between, on the one hand, international, domineering and liberal agents and, on the other hand, local actors characterized by tradition, custom, specific norms, beliefs and material needs. Hybrid peace, the critics sustain, is flawed because it presupposes a superficial, programmed and calculated dialogue between international and local spaces and agents. In so doing, hybrid governance structures are unable to incorporate the complex and diverse experiences, non-linear rhythms and cosmologies that intermingle and morph unexpectedly in post-war processes (Björkdahl and Höglund 2013, 292–296; Millar 2014, 503–508; Millar et al 2013, 139; Nadarajah and Rampton 2014, 57). Local concepts and beliefs about the world are ‘insulated from purposeful influence and administration’ and thus fundamentally retract from intervention or hybrid institutions (Millar 2014, 506).

Drawing on this assumption, the critics interrogate the exclusions of hybrid peace approaches. In preferring positive forms of hybridity to more negative ones (Richmond 2015), hybrid peace is seen to resemble the liberal peace previously dismissed, as it makes selective judgements, favours a particular form of pluralism, prescribes solutions and intervenes tendentially, while it is unreflective of the marginalizations and unintended effects it produces (Randazzo 2016; Wolff and Zimmermann 2016). In a similar point, Sabaratnam (2013, 260) argues that the critique of liberal peace still carries ‘avatars of Eurocentrism’. As she contends, hybrid peace reproduces a hierarchical division ‘between the liberal, rational, modern West and a culturally distinct space of the local’ (2013, 267; see also Heathershaw 2013, 277). Even if there is a positive understanding of local actors in their everyday settings, the argument goes, hybrid peace approaches have reified power relations when relying upon an ontologically different other that merely resists governance mechanisms. Drichel (2008, 588–590, emphasis in original) summarizes it this way: hybrid frameworks have not been able ‘to embrace the other without simultaneously recycling stereotypes’, as they have maintained ‘the original *colonial* distinction between self and other in *postcolonial* times’.

Even if scholars who defend the emancipatory potential of hybrid outcomes take a post-biological view of hybridity and acknowledge that ‘local’ and ‘international’ are ‘not discrete categories’ or espouse the ‘performative’ character of identity and difference (Campbell 1998, 30; Mac Ginty 2010, 392), or even if they propose an agonistic process of negotiation between multiple actors, spaces and dynamics to pay greater attention to the ‘deeper local–local’ (Richmond 2009, 566; Belloni 2012, 23), the critics of the critics recognize these gestures as unsatisfactory (Graef 2015, 30–32; Nadarajah and Rampton 2014, 57–60; Paipais 2010, 138; Sabaratnam 2013, 267–268). For every time ‘explanatory distinctions are projected onto the complex and uncertain post-liberal hybrid processes’ critical approaches



‘may paradoxically conceal the very transformative post-liberal processes they seek to expose’ (Graef 2015, 31). Analogously, Paipais (2010, 138) writes, ‘whenever critique pretends to secure an authoritative ground it undermines its legitimacy’. By seeking to affirm a position from which to build a just and plural peace, the pluralism of hybrid peace appears reductive, insufficient, even colonial. Within critical frameworks of hybrid peace, no matter how subtle, reflexive or committed is the alternative to liberal peacebuilding, it is challenged on the grounds of the elusive dimension of difference.

The vital point highlighted here is that the same premises the proponents of hybrid peace used to besmirch the consistency of liberal projects of intervention have been placed against them: a reductionist framework has overlooked the multifarious networks and complex dynamics of conflict-affected populations, thereby denying alternative and context-sensitive ways of being and of enacting peace. For the critics of hybridity, as much as for the critics of liberal peace before them, proposals for peacebuilding are unable to overcome binary structures and hierarchical relations. It seems that critical scholarship is constantly invoking Connolly’s (2002, xi) sensibilities in order to underscore ‘the limited, porous, and problematic character of any particular effort’ to shape peace.

If one admits both the ‘limited’ character and ‘problematic’ outcome of any intervention, purposeful action becomes less attractive. Instead, the weight is placed on the emergent and unexpected nature of peacebuilding processes that *cannot* be planned and *shall* not be planned (Millar et al 2013). For example, seeking to overcome static and simplified understandings of hybridity, Graef (2015, 36) argues that hybridity is ‘a source not an outcome’, and thus ‘the post-liberal world should be understood as an open-ended, emerging ontological process of uncertain becoming’. Other commentators suggest replacing the static boundaries of ‘hybridity’ with the concept of ‘friction’ in order to better ‘grasp the abrasive and unpredictable ways in which the global peacebuilding discourse interplay with post-conflict realities’ (Björkdahl and Höglund 2013, 294; see also Millar 2013; van der Lijn 2013). Preference is increasingly given to the constant pluralization of subjects and ideas, while pluralism is belittled. In critical approaches of hybrid peace, the ‘right’ intervention (that is, pluralism) is admitted to be impossible—because of the ineffability of difference—and thus any intervention becomes increasingly undesirable—for it contains specific exclusionary practices. Therein lies the unforeseen direction taken by critique in international affairs—a direction initiated in the critique of liberal peace and continued in the critique of hybrid peace. Once it is accepted that every purposeful international engagement, every closure, will inevitably carry exclusions and commit injustice to societies intervened upon, critique is forced to approve its transient authority, its instability.<sup>7</sup> Rather than bemoaning the failure to come up with different and successful forms of international intervention, critique is learning to praise its limitations and imperfections (Bargaúes-Pedreny et al 2015, 7–8).

The shift appears clear if one turns to Connolly’s latest work. After confessing that every alternative will be challenged on the grounds of difference, Connolly’s emphasis is neither to arrogantly pretend the next attempt to capture difference

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<sup>7</sup> These approaches recognize their own limits and failures to embrace alterity. As Sabaratnam (2011, 800) explains in a self-reflexive note: ‘the approach I have set out as a mode of “decolonizing” the liberal peace is in no way exhaustive and necessarily instantiates its own exclusions’.



will succeed nor to accept the impossibility of its doing so with apathy, lament or resignation. Instead, drawing on Nietzsche, Connolly (2014, 174–175; 2011, 9–10) encourages us to adopt a ‘tragic vision’ and admit, on the one hand, ‘the modest human participation’ within an ‘ungoverned cosmos’ and, on the other hand, ‘appreciate modes of suffering as possible conditions of creative thinking and action’ and ‘affirm the sweetness and vitality of life in such a cosmos’. Without apparent mourning, Connolly (2014, 101–105) underlines the limited knowledge and capacities of humans, who are radically overwhelmed by a world of becoming. Lost and thrown into a complex world, humans are inclined to affirm its openness, creativeness, self-organization, as well as its fragility and ugliness. Connolly’s (2014, 76–77) acknowledgement that the pluralization of pluralism is interminable seems to have opened a new way of relating to the world: now humans ‘endlessly’ care for and value the experiences of uncertainty, mystery, incompleteness, disruption and surprise. The limits of human knowledge and mastery are no longer seen as a problem, as a ‘lack’ (Connolly 2011, 6). In a world of mesmerized and overpowered humans, the prior uneasiness with the impossibility of accessing alterity has been sapped. As other speculative realists have shown, the recognition that alterity, the world or mundane objects ‘withdraw’ fundamentally from human apprehension is not agonizing, but factual, true; for humans, it is a moment of ‘sincerity’ and ‘intimacy’ (Harman 2005, 244–247; Morton 2013, 138–139).

Analogously, the unforeseen consequence of critiques of international intervention appears to be to appreciate that all forms of intervention are deficient, unsatisfactory and meagre, unable to embrace alterity (van der Lijn 2013). Rather than lamenting the lack of success of approaches to peacebuilding, scholars would welcome the supremacy of an ungovernable world and the feebleness of every new attempt to act meaningfully, let alone to build an inclusive peace. An ethico-political shift is thus afoot: the liberal peace practitioners’ frustration with setbacks in the peace process is gradually disappearing, turning instead into a sincere greeting of peacebuilders’ ignorance and incapacity to govern and achieve the intended results (de Coning 2016; for a critique, see Chandler 2010b, 155; 2016, 405–409; Joseph 2016, 389; Schmidt 2013, 191). As Paipais (2010, 140) asserts without a hint of irony: ‘it is a failure [of the self/other conundrum] we should ... heroically assume’. This seems to be the move critical scholars are prepared to make.<sup>8</sup> What this article seeks to suggest is that if critical scholars are learning to concede the inexorable crises of interventions, they are heralding a critique that *loves* devouring its own underpinnings, as in vorarephilic fantasies. Rather than an emancipatory critique that could, for example, debunk its opponent while building new foundations (Koddenbrock 2014, 252–257), critique seems to enjoy being swallowed. This metaphor may appear an exaggeration to some, but it is intended to generate a useful conversation. The concern is that critical frameworks that privilege pluralization over pluralism will soon be ready to embrace their defeat, their incapacity to attain a plural peace. Critiques will approve and value the fact that the ‘new pluralism’ will be ‘old’ for the critics of tomorrow.

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<sup>8</sup> Seminal here is Bruno Latour, who can be read as reversing the Modernist project by the means of turning the scepticism and nihilism of Postmodernist critiques into a new hubristic project (Latour 2004). He graphically summarizes it this way: every time the Moderns wish to create something, they create monsters. But instead of abandoning or criminalizing the monsters, as the Postmoderns intimate, we must learn to ‘love’ our ‘monsters’ (Latour 2011, 21–22).

## Conclusion

Critiques of liberal peace are thriving, much as the critiques of hybrid peace. Examining Connolly's work on pluralism, this article has argued that these critiques firmly rely on the assumption that alterity exceeds conceptual grasp. In this regard, the infra-political areas of indigenous societies, the complex everyday settings, the constellation of norms of a given culture, the deep hybridization and the contingent dynamics of life in a post-war zone have been taken up by scholars to criticize the reductive schemas and binary distinctions made by frameworks of international intervention. The aim of the article has been to clarify the nature of these critiques and generate a useful conversation on the unforeseen direction taken by debates of international intervention.

Today we are witnessing a gradual transvaluation of the crisis of liberal peace. Earlier attempts to promote liberal democracy, to meet development standards, implement peace agreements or write plural constitutions, are viewed with utter suspicion and condescension. Now it is clear that these efforts have largely been unsuccessful. However, rather than using these crises as opportunities to transform political and social orders, rather than placing confidence in human capacities either to govern autonomously or to assist meaningfully, critiques are learning to cope with the chronic hopelessness of every new attempt to intervene. Instead of providing new foundations for international relations, Connolly (2002, 175) sets forth the wisdom of current critiques: the problem is not failing to be sensitive to difference, but thinking that a final pluralism can be articulated. This article is thus an attempt to foresee the consequence of critiques that disregard pluralism and continuously find new spaces to pluralize. The constant emphasis on the frustrating setbacks in peacebuilding processes is opening the space for a nihilistic world where peace can no longer be achieved, let alone built or facilitated. Even more fatally: the failures of pluralism and peace are increasingly accepted and affirmed without much torment, awakening our anthropophagic passions.

## Disclosure statement

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## Notes on contributor

**Pol Bargaés-Pedreny** (DPhil, University of Westminster) is a research fellow at the Centre for Global Cooperation Research (University of Duisburg Essen) and previously conducted research at the Institute for Development and Peace in the same university. He is interested in questions of difference and critique in international intervention debates. He has published on these themes in *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* and *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses*. [polbargues@gmail.com](mailto:polbargues@gmail.com)

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