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Pol Bargués-Pedreny[a] and Elisa Randazzo[b]

[a]Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research, University of Duisburg, Essen, Germany; [b]School of Humanities, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, UK

ABSTRACT

Critical peacebuilding scholars have focused on the impact of the encounter between the 'local' and the 'international', framing the notion of 'hybridity' as a conceptual mirror to the reality of such encounter. This paper explores a dual aspect of hybridity to highlight a tension. Understood as a descriptor of contingent realities that emerge after the international–local encounter, hybridity requires acknowledging that peacebuilders can do little to shape the course of events. Yet, framed as a process that can enable the pursuit of empowering solutions embedded in plurality and relationality, hybridity encourages forms of interventionism that may perpetuate the binaries and exclusions usually associated to the liberal peace paradigm. The paper suggests that when hybridity is used to improve peacebuilding practice, an opportunity may be missed to open up this tension and analytically discuss options, including withdrawal which, whilst largely left out of the conceptual picture, may be relevant to calls for reclaiming the self-governance of the subjects of peacebuilding themselves.

Introduction

The past decade has seen a flourishing of critical accounts engaging with the negative by-products of more than 20 years of foreign direct involvement in war-affected territories.[1] From all these critiques, one has become increasingly central, underlining the Eurocentric logic of peace interventions that has so far pervaded and guided the manner in which post-war reconstructions have been conceptualised and practiced.[2] Scholars such as Séverinne Autesserre, Annika Björkdahl, Volker Boege, Roger Mac Ginty, Gearoid Millar and Oliver Richmond, among many others, have suggested that the liberal peace paradigm has problematically engendered a deep dissonance between the aims of peacebuilders and the needs of the populations subjected to the missions.[3] 'This "liberal peace"', argues Mac Ginty, 'effectively minimises the space available for indigenous and traditional approaches to peace-making'.[4] The friction between international agendas and local realities, it is claimed, is premised on a fundamental preference for top-down approaches based on Western epistemologies of peace, which treat local forms of knowledge and practices as secondary to their aims.[5]

CONTACT Elisa Randazzo ✉ e.randazzo@herts.ac.uk

When national actors, needs and wants have been marginalised the result almost invariably has been one of faltering legitimacy,[6] rising resistance[7] or elite co-option.[8] By highlighting the conditions of complexity and contingency that have limited the international peacebuilders' ability to translate their liberal agenda into reality, these scholars have sought to move peacebuilding away from the liberal gaze.[9] Recent attempts to reconceptualise peacebuilding have thus focused on bringing local perspectives back to the heart of theory and practice. Yet the 'local turn' is in a state of deflation: it is beloved by practitioners and critics alike and is beginning to lose its clarity and rigour.[10]

This paper has two aims: first, to conceptually engage with and provide clarity to hybridity, a particular instrument employed with a dual significance by proponents of the local turn; and second, to argue that hybridity has mainly been used by this literature to enhance further intervention without questioning the need for external assistance as such. In the first section, it is suggested, hybridity has been brought forward as an acknowledgment of the multiple and plural qualities of the post-conflict milieu. The concept is seen to capture the multiple interactions between agents, interests and spaces occurring in post-conflict settings, challenging linear understandings of intervention and thus opening up space for organic and locally-owned peace initiatives. In the second section, the article suggests that hybridity has, however, retained a secondary role, particularly in cases when hybrid processes seem to be insufficiently emancipatory or even provide negative outcomes. Hybridity is then used as a positive framework to be employed purposefully against the dominance of liberal or illiberal practices.

In the third section, the paper argues that these two trajectories of hybridity may hold contradictory positions and contain two risks. First, when hybridity is recognised as a real-world condition defying impositions, predictions and causal analyses, this makes any form of external assistance – no matter how open, subtle or context-sensitive – increasingly difficult to practice. This risk is minimised when hybridity is repurposed as a tool for building peace, as a solution to access a more authentic form of agency and operate a different form of peacebuilding from below. Hybridity is no longer a mere acceptance of the openness, plurality and contingency of the post-conflict milieu, and thus peacebuilders are granted more space for selection of legitimate and appropriate forms of agency. Yet the risk within this second understanding is that external practitioners keep a highly interventionist role, reproducing the failures of past interventions.

Reappraising the two understandings of hybridity, we argue that an opportunity to criticise regimes of intervention has been missed. Today, hybridity – as a world condition – discredits top-down interventions but encourages peacebuilders to iteratively learn from the everyday realities and acknowledge their little capacities for affecting change; hybridity – as a tool – assumes that hybrid institutions and peace initiatives should be mobilised to build peace. In both cases, hybridity is taken as a reconciliatory framing between interveners and intervened upon to improve international interference. So far, we suggest, this has eschewed any discussion on the possibility of withdrawal and its impact. The paper does not claim that withdrawal should be, in a normative sense, advocated in all or some specific cases, but rather that the current discussion of hybridity has not invited a debate that includes this possibility. Considering this option may be important, particularly where hybrid peace processes prolong the crisis of neoliberal governance and become spaces tainted with structural inequalities and cultural alienation, undermining, rather than enhancing, the autonomy of the subaltern.

Conceiving hybridity as an emerging world condition

Although the notion of hybridity had previously been used in different disciplines, it adopted a critical edge in political and cultural debates when it took centre stage in post-colonial studies.[11] Homi Bhabha described hybridity as an '"in-between" reality' that characterises the lives of post-colonial subjects whose existence is an interstice that makes it, as a political referent object, 'neither one nor the other' but a completely *new* entity in itself, with its images, representations and narratives.[12] This condition, Bhabha suggests, enables us to think of political agency as happening, as ever changing, opening up space to difference while alienating colonial expectations: 'This hybridity initiates the project of political thinking by continually facing it with the strategic and the contingent'.[13] In the context of anti-colonial and post-colonial struggles, therefore, this radical framing of hybridity was considered essential to critique colonisers' categories, assumptions and practices, while valuing the self-determination and self-governance of the colonised people. In the diverse work of Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon and Edouard Glissant, hybridisation – or the tense encounter between coloniser and colonised – is similarly a process of indeterminacy, ambivalence and fracture, where the subaltern turns from object of colonial rule into a political subject that resists against hegemonic forces and power structures.[14] 'Studies of hybridity', Haz Yazdiha sums up, 'offer the opportunity for a counter-narrative, a means by which the dominated can reclaim shared ownership of a culture that relies upon them for meaning'.[15]

Post-colonial scholars have, however, warned against whitewashing the concept of hybridity and turning it into 'a reconciliatory rather than a critical, anti-colonial category'.[16] A reconciliatory framing of hybridity is seen to resist colonial invasions, binaries and hierarchies but also to emphasise productive, creative and progressive interactions between colonisers and colonised: 'reconciliatory postcolonialism figures colonialism as a kind of tragedy with a happy ending – tragic because it was partly based on destruction and ethnocide; happy in the sense that the world-historical outcome – which we now name globalisation – unifies and de-spatialises the world in ways which supposedly render colonial repression obsolete'.[17] The purpose of this article is not to make a contribution to the postcolonial literature on hybridity, but to suggest that post-liberal approaches to peacebuilding have generally imported a reconciliatory notion of hybridity as a third space where the encounter between local and international can be placed in service of correcting the negative by-products of previous top-down liberal strategies. We argue that this framing has concealed the possibility to value the self-governance of the people and consider external withdrawal.

In peacebuilding discussions the term hybridity has entered through the back doors, in times of a widespread disillusionment with international governance. 'Liberal peace' – a loose analytical category that refers to the dominant international interventions since the end of the Cold War – is considered to be in crisis. Critical scholars tend to highlight the overall negative accomplishments of foreign missions. For example, some analyses highlight how 'inequality and poverty increased dramatically' in countries that were subject to international projects of democratic reform and assistance.[18] Authors also cite chronic insecurity,[19] continued institutionalised ethnic and territorial disputes,[20] and non-liberal outcomes[21] amongst some of the negative by-products of international peacebuilding projects. The consensus is that international practitioners have relied too much on formal rules and institutions in accordance with Western norms of statehood, instead of counting on contextual resources and facilitating local participation and leadership.

It is in response to the limitations of interventionist models that hybridity is gaining traction as an analytical concept among scholars critical of the liberal peace. A growing body of literature highlights that international policies, rules and norms are continually resisted, co-opted, subverted or distorted from their original estimations. Carefully studying local conditions and the complex context in which governance occurs, these analyses acknowledge that, instead of the intended 'liberal peace', interventions in post-conflict situations are generating processes of hybridisation.[22] New actors, logics and dynamics constantly emerge and interact – from *vigilantes*, religious brotherhoods or gang leaders, to more pleasant customary mechanisms of reconciliation.[23] Even when the concept of 'hybridity' is not used specifically, the tendency is to show how peacebuilding projects deviate from the initial objectives and from the principles professed by interveners.[24]

Hybridity and hybridisation thus are understood to be a 'real-world condition' or a 'state of affairs' that is 'emerging' when various external and national actors, norms, interests, institutions and practices interact in the process of building stability and peace.[25] The nature of this interaction ranges from cases of compliance or submission – in which international actors enforce their will or, on the contrary, in which local agents resist and reject external mechanisms of governance – to more cooperative encounters.[26] These authors adopt a non-essentialist understanding of hybridity, emphasising that it is not a simple negotiation between two discrete units (i.e. foreign and domestic).[27] Instead, hybridity implies a long-term process without a point of origin or end, in which different norms, networks, institutions and actors co-exist and blend.

The analytical utility of the concept of hybridity is established vis-à-vis liberal peace frameworks. Hybridisation processes are considered to challenge 'the unhelpful binaries' and 'notions of universals' that plague liberal understandings of international assistance,[28] and which are problematic because they reduce complexity and pluralism, while prioritising Western models over indigenous initiatives. Notions of hybridity enable scholars and practitioners to disturb the consistency of presumed universal categories and accepted binary oppositions. As Richmond and Mac Ginty state: 'hybridity is a critical tool … we see it as a window on complexity and a way of questioning the fixity of categories and boundaries. It further leads us to question the static thought processes that rely on fixed categories and simple binaries'.[29]

The framework of hybridity then strengthens a critique of international frameworks of intervention and facilitates a closer look at context-specific needs and experiences.[30] However, this does not imply that every idea that comes from domestic actors is venerated. Studies on hybridity are cautious not to trace a simplistic binary in which local actors are equated with having positive values and qualities for peace, in contrast to irreverent, domineering and interest-driven international partners.[31]

Hybridity is thus thought to lessen the dangers implied in processes dominated exclusively by international or local actors. Irrespective of their origin, views that are considered 'pure' and seek to be hegemonic are humbled when analysing the dynamics of hybridisation. As an emerging world condition, the process of hybridisation is seen as producing an emancipatory *hybrid peace*, which is neither exclusively liberal nor customary in nature. 'The result', as Mac Ginty summarises, 'is a hybridised peace that is in constant flux, as different actors and processes cooperate and compete on different issue agendas'.[32] Richmond puts it this way: 'A post-liberal peace engages with the politics of hybridity emerging from a mixture of

contextual and international social, political, economic, cultural, and historical dynamics of peace'.[33]

A question, then, lingers. What happens when hybridised processes engender non-peaceful results? Or when hybrid peace processes are still dominated by donors' agenda or by the preferences of unrepresentative local agencies? In the post-liberal literature, authors recognise that hybridity may indeed bring some negative results or that hybridity is not necessarily the same as hybrid peace.[34] In some cases, the encounter between international and local agendas and spaces generates excesses, power imbalances and exclusions. The next section explores a different understanding of hybridity that instrumentalises the local-international encounter to generate preferred outcomes. It is necessarily a different conceptualisation because, as long as peacebuilding is based on certain normative expectations, hybrid realities are engaged with selectively, instrumentally and the alleged descriptive nature of hybrid peace ebbs.

Conceiving hybridity as a peacebuilding tool

This section argues that hybridity is frequently understood in the literature not only as a natural, factual description of an emerging reality, but also as an instrument to counter some reductionist world-views offered by statist, nationalist or Eurocentric lenses. While the 'prescriptive' notion of hybridity has been primarily attributed to liberal policymakers' instrumentalisation of hybridity to achieve liberal purposes,[35] we will conclude that post-liberal scholars have also often used hybridity to foster bottom-up forms of peacebuilding. The association of hybridity with the project of peacebuilding enables hybridity to move 'beyond conceptual abstraction',[36] and to embrace the role of emancipatory tool. When looking at how hybrid outcomes are assessed as well as how certain forms of hybrid scenarios are identified as ideal or more authentic, the function of hybridity as a descriptor of complex reality is funnelled and directed by a normative compass towards emancipation. This second expression of hybridity as a peacebuilding tool appears in different ways and this is most clearly observable in two contexts: first, when hybrid processes or local politics are recognised to bring negative results and thus some readjustments are necessary to change dynamics; and second, when hybridity is incorporated in policy-frameworks of development and peace.

The notion of hybridity becomes operatively useful as a tool when a distinction is made between the processes of hybridisation and the outcomes of hybrid peace, which can be desirable or undesirable. Richmond's recent conceptualisation of hybrid peace is representative of this. In his understanding of hybridity, two separate elements emerge: hybrid politics and hybrid peace. Hybrid politics represents the moment of encounter and mediation, which can take different shapes and forms: the process of 'intersubjective mediation between local and international scales and norms, institutions, law, right, needs and interests, depending on both power and legitimacy'.[37] Hybrid peace instead consists of the outcome of encounters between local and international and can be positive or negative: 'While a negative hybrid peace may represent the outsourcing of power and norms from the international to the state or society, a more positive hybrid form would be representative of a contextually rooted process through which broader political and social injustice is addressed, across local and international scales'.[38]

The distinction between positive and negative forms of hybrid peace suggests that in this framing of hybridity certain political expressions are more suited to the achievement of an ideal standard of peace. Richmond suggests that certain forms of hybrid politics, whilst important because they are the expression of a variety of different agency, can bring counterproductive consequences, 'where elite or certain group interests are maintained, even if mitigated by wider societal interests'.[39] The distinction between positive and negative forms of hybrid peace implies an intentional and calculated process of selecting valuable 'hybrid' outcomes. This would require favouring certain actors and groups on the basis of the likelihood of consensus and alignment with more general principles of peacebuilding. For Timothy Donais, for instance, besides capacity building, work should be done to promote 'capacity disabling' of some groups or practices: there ought to be 'efforts to disable, marginalise, or co-opt those domestic political power structures that stand in the way of the effective establishment of new institutions'.[40]

Other scholars warn against the dangers of certain forms of local agency: 'organic forms of hybrid political order can be the preserve of local elites, and sites of intolerance and violence'.[41] Often the 'language of liberation' adopted by some groups, Mac Ginty and Williams express, may 'merely continue the civil wars by peaceful means'.[42] Analyses of the cases of Afghanistan and Kosovo are paradigmatic of having an ambiguous approach to local agency. Commenting on the peace process in the Central Asian state, Richmond condemns the inclusion of Taliban as a negative hybrid outcome because 'gender issues are not addressed'.[43] In the Balkans, Richmond and Visoka are sceptical of claims for self-determination, as some groups mobilise donor funding to favour statist and identity-based forms of sovereignty.[44] In these cases, critical scholars of the liberal peace seem to determine what elements of 'the international' or 'the local' are suitable – a position that is reminiscent of earlier cosmopolitan approaches that promoted civil society.[45] It thus follows that when the course of hybrid politics is understood as producing outcomes that are either 'too local' or 'too international', this is seen as problematic. Henceforth, hybridity is reintroduced as a useful tool to correct undesired imbalances.

This conceptualisation of hybridity is quite different from more descriptive understandings that merely acknowledge the inherent complex inter-relationality that characterises war-affected situations. The picture that emerges from this engagement with hybridity is one that puts a premium on (positive) hybrid peace rather than hybridity in *all* of its forms. Scholars seem to suggest an element of selective prudence, rather than an ontologically open engagement with plurality and hybridity that constantly disrupts the linear assumptions of peacebuilders. Since the nature of the post-conflict milieu is imagined within a context of ameliorating conflict, then it follows that hybridity, where it emerges, is acknowledged both as a reality and at the same time is used instrumentally for building peace.

Indeed, if one understands the value of hybridity as a facilitator of positive hybrid peace outcomes, it comes as no surprise that the policy world has now largely adopted it as part of its toolbox. In its policy expression, hybridity is a tool that has taken many shapes. For example, in response to the failure of liberal peacebuilding projects, hybrid approaches to political reconciliation have implied the adoption of formal commissions as well as customary norms and everyday reconciliation practices, as seen in the cases of Timor Leste, Solomon Islands and Bougainville, in the Asia-Pacific.[46] It is also seen as a way to describe the hybrid and complex nature of new security threats and risks like terrorist networks, cyber attacks or climate change, as reflected in NATO's strategic concept or in discussions within the EU

Parliament.[47] These hybrid threats must be addressed by diverse hybrid strategies, which consist for example of collective responses inclusive of diverse actors, flexible partnerships and multisectoral processes, as attempted in the United Nation's 'hybrid' security mission in Darfur.[48]

Even when hybridity is not directly referenced, peace practitioners tend to show a shifting sensibility to work constructively with diverse local actors, showing a growing concern for local ownership as well as self-reflexivity in relation to the limits of external support. For example, indigenous knowledge over symbolic and material issues is recognised as crucial to combine with external expertise and enhance the practice of development and peace.[49] The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, a policy product of 17 fragile and conflict states along with development partners and international organisations, is deemed by McCandless and Tschirgi as raising issues concerning the notion of inclusive politics that largely 'reflect the notion of hybridity in profound and influential ways'.[50] The recent recognition of complexity in conflict-affected zones also demonstrates a degree of self-reflection concerning the importance of local knowledge and resources, non-linear methodologies and hybrid approaches required to sustain peace.[51] This, it has been suggested, is evidence of a shift in prioritisation that 'can also be said to reflect social welfare and justice concerns' as well as 'hint to the interplay between international and local normative agendas, which the liberal peace critique authors argue should be central to a conceptualisation of peace-building'.[52] What this implies is not only a close affinity between policy-makers and critics of peacebuilding,[53] but also that the concept of hybridity has firmly moved away from being a mere descriptor of a world condition.

Nevertheless, scholars of hybridity have increasingly voiced their concern over the shallow instrumentalisation of the notion of hybridity by international actors. Just like the notions of local ownership and civil society before it, the concept of hybridity has been manipulated to suit the agendas of peacebuilders.[54] Mac Ginty and Richmond contend that 'policy-oriented work has found hybrid political orders interesting insofar as they pave the way for more flexible ways of managing relations between international actors, national elites and local actors'.[55] This co-option of the concept, the authors claim, hinders hybridity's 'potential to alter the status quo truly'.[56] When engaging with the locals, it is suggested, policy-makers engage primarily in partnerships or capacity-building exercises that highlight a so-called 'imposition-ownership' dilemma. This dilemma pits the necessities of following peacebuilding *diktats* against the desire to respect local autonomy and grant real ownership.[57] Thus, even when peacebuilders embrace hybridity, it is suggested that this does not necessarily represent evidence of a 'hybrid, non-hegemonic peacebuilding strategy', but rather of a continued preference for working with enlightened local actors, such as 'western-style, capital-based NGOs'.[58]

Yet, one could argue that hybridity conceptualised by the post-liberal scholarship in terms of positive hybrid peace is not free from the imposition–ownership dilemma either. Most notably, questions emerge concerning the identification of local forms of agency that can take part to the 'bridging' exercise and 'more authentically' represent the realm of the everyday beyond the Western notion of civil society.[59] Indeed the endorsement of hybridity in its emancipatory role highlights the predominance of the prescriptive value of hybridity, which overall may clash with some of the epistemological foundations of the theory and with some foundational claims concerning the pluralisation, fragmentation and openness to alterity.[60] Hybridity is a concept embedded within the larger normative aims of constructing peace

and obtaining reconciliation. This is a process of '*consensus-building* not only along a horizontal axis among the wide range of relevant local actors but also along a vertical axis spanning grassroots civil society, the national government, and the broader international community'.[61] Because this process is one that rests on associational consensus building, it then follows that groups considered to be valuable and legitimate forms of local agency are selected and favoured due to their alignment to the process' aims.[62] It is then difficult to see how or why this view of hybrid peace as the expression of consensus-aimed interactions could be any different from that articulated by recent policy frameworks.

In short, it is possible to note that such an endorsement of hybridity 'as a way of overcoming hegemonic narratives of conflict and internationally supported peace interventions',[63] whilst often not directly framed in terms of policy-advice, represents a belief in the inherently progressive use of the concept.[64] Hybridity, as a critique of the liberal peace, is arguably understood as a problem-solving tool to intervene in peacebuilding processes. The next section will read the two understandings of hybridity together, exposing contradictory directions and risks and tracing how the two may have lost critical momentum.

Rethinking hybridity: reclaiming the critical momentum

The previous two sections have drawn out two dominant uses of the concept of hybridity. On the one hand, hybridity is seen as an emerging condition in cases of post-war international intervention in which multiple agents, ideas and interests overlap and interact. By resisting the prevalence of hegemonic, linear, universal approaches to peacebuilding, processes of hybridisation are seen to facilitate a locally engrained peace. Here, hybridity is used for analytical or descriptive purposes. On the other hand, hybridity is understood as a tool that must be instrumentalised to shape the peacebuilding process so that the outcome can be inclusive and plural. While these two uses of the term hybridity have already been recognised by some critical scholars,[65] we seek to make two contributions. First, we seek to spell out the tension that emerges from current framings of hybrid peace. Within the descriptive understanding of hybridity, international peacebuilding processes become increasingly confusing, as they are difficult to plan or shape from an external perspective and yet a foreign presence is still deemed central. Within the prescriptive one, on the contrary, external and local peacebuilders still have to intervene, decide, cooperate, negotiate and craft a hybrid peace, thus potentially reproducing the errors of liberal peace. Second, we argue that both understandings are closer than it is usually assumed, as both tend to be used to improve external action. In so doing, we suggest that an opportunity has been missed: hybrid frameworks have lost the original push against interventionism, and thus have eschewed the possibility to question external interference as such. This is important, as spaces of hybridity – for example, through globalisation, capitalism or neoliberal governance – can sometimes constrain, if not degrade or deprive, the agency of the subaltern,[66] as well as undermine the self-determination and self-governance of indigenous people. In this sense, discussing the possibility and implications of a possible withdrawal might be necessary to satisfy the needs of some of the actors on the ground and respect their autonomy, an aim close to the privilege for pluralism and openness embraced by the post-liberal turn. To be clear, we do not suggest that withdrawal should be an option in all or some post-conflict cases. Instead, we seek to show how this option is no longer available in the two dominant understandings of hybridity.

The first use of the concept of hybridity starts with the observation that the complex and uncertain dynamics of post-conflict processes are challenging the liberal assumptions of international missions. State-building and reconstruction efforts, which have traditionally engaged with formal institutions and overlooked non-state actors, have been overwhelmed by hybrid cultural milieus and overlapping interests and alliances, as Louise Moe fittingly shows in relation to the intervention in post-war Somalia.[67] To hybrid realities, traditional liberal strategies of intervention and regulation appear out of sync.

In this case, hybridity might involve accepting that retreat may be one of the options available, and indeed desired, by some of the local actors; instead, this possibility is largely left undiscussed and hybridity is taken as a sign that peace practitioners must reorient their policies and strategies. In other words, hybridity is seen as 'reconciliatory' and mobilised to enable more sensitive, relational and indirect forms of intervention. It is used to beseech external practitioners to appreciate traditional livelihoods, social networks and indigenous knowledge and resources for decision-making, as indigenous people value local biodiversity and show response capacities and resilience in the face of uncertainty and abrupt change.[68] The role of external actors evolves, moving away from leadership and executive tasks. Instead of claiming moral authority or a superior knowledge to shape processes, external interveners are humbled by historically and context specific circumstances. Their preconceived ideas collapse when dealing with the contingency of the events, as they must cope with the inadvertent consequences of their actions.[69] As seen in the first section, the tendency is to call for cautious initiatives, avoiding the curtailment of indigenous agency and the causing of harmful side effects. Hybrid peace frameworks thus assume a flat ontology in which peace is beyond external control; it cannot be decisively, directly and intentionally promoted – although foreign assistance is still considered important,[70] if not unquestionable. Any pathway to peace that may require exit rather than intervention is foreclosed.

Conceptualising hybridity in this manner runs the risk of turning peacebuilding into a bewildering process: on the one hand, intervening appears a gradually impossible task, doomed to fail; on the other, it is a task that must nevertheless be pursued. The fear of contradicting domestic interests and excluding indigenous practices haunts every decision, making intervention ever more difficult. As Peter Finkenbusch explains: 'Doubt and uncertainty' plague hybrid peace, as 'peacebuilders can never be sure they are not imposing their Western modern episteme again'.[71] An emerging hybrid or complex condition continually humbles a priori peacebuilding assumptions or ideas making initial calculation and planning a near impossible feat.[72] Yet, since the need for external intervention is rarely questioned, setbacks are taken as an opportunity to continually revise external policy guidelines and practices.

This bewildering impasse is the risk posed to critiques of hybrid peace that nevertheless defend neither a return to forms of liberal peace, nor the end of international support missions. The irony is that, even if most accept that hybridity limits external assistance, the pressure for obtaining policy results or simply achieving peace often leads to adopt more prescriptive understandings of hybridity. The question that twists the meaning of hybridity was expressed by Eli Stamnes as such: 'how to address the insights from the liberal peace critique while at the same time not rejecting outside involvement in peacebuilding, nor the possibility that elements of the liberal peacebuilding model could be desirable in the recipient societies'.[73]

Within understandings of hybridity as a 'tool', a key rift is found between promoting liberal and non-liberal options, or between positive and negative formulations of hybridity. In other words, rather than a flat ontology that may result in the questioning of invasive forms of interventions that exploit and dominate, these hybrid frameworks assume a hierarchical ontology: peacebuilders continue to be able to distinguish between good and bad options and affect the course of the process at will, despite the nominal acceptance of the end of top-down policy-making. Although peacebuilding is never linear nor an easily calculable project, it can be carefully cultivated with a bottom-up project that incorporates the preferences from traditionally marginalised individuals and groups.

The risk of this framework may appear self-explanatory at this point. The more hybridity is understood as a tool or a framework to be intentionally fostered, the more it resembles the very same inflexible liberal forms of intervention it sought to critique. Hybrid ideas, identities and projects appear to have replaced the universal norms, values and institutions that constituted the state-building approaches of yesteryear. A reflexive note from Daniela Körppen makes clear the tension between defending the normative value of hybrid peace and reproducing the failures of past interventions:

> In the end it should be recognised that systemic thinking runs the risk of being technocratic and dogmatic if it is understood as *the* new and alternative model for conflict transformation, seen as being able to address all existing shortcomings in peacebuilding concepts, such as bridging the gap between the micro- and macro-level. If this is the case, systemic thinking will be only a continuation of the liberal peacebuilding discourse.[74]

The fear of confronting the same old problems carries the day.[75] When hybridity is incorporated into policy-frameworks, as a problem-solving tool, it may avoid the risk of producing a form of peacebuilding that is an incommensurable practice of radically detached practitioners (as in the descriptive framing of hybridity discussed above) but it cannot do away with the shadows of reductionist and rational logics typically associated with decades of liberal peace interventions. Hybrid peace ceases to be a nascent organic peace, free from programmes, guidelines and impositions. Indeed, when hybridity is instrumentalised, this limits viewing it as an emergent reality that constantly defies attempts to impose, divide or exclude.[76]

It is worth noting that the tensions between the two understandings of hybridity have not gone unnoticed. Recent critiques have sought to demonstrate the problematic assumptions associated particularly with prescriptive usages of the concept of hybridity. For example, some scholars underline the prevalence of Eurocentric traces within understandings of hybrid peace, as these reinstate a spatial and hierarchical differentiation between interveners and intervened upon.[77] Along similar lines, Bruno Charbonneau contends that hybridity reaffirms the binary opposition between domestic and foreign that it is supposed to deconstruct, because 'hybridity needs a distinction to exist as a concept'.[78] Other authors emphasise that the concept is deemed insufficient to capture earlier hybridisations of the categories at hand, as well as the ongoing transformation and emergence of new hybridisation practices.[79] Hybridity appears as yet another framework for imposing or favouring external views and interests, expressing scorn for different non-liberal ways of practicing peace.[80] Nadarajah and Rampton, for instance, similarly suggest that hybridity loses its critical edge, particularly when it is used instrumentally in service of certain normative claims, as a problem-solving tool aimed at rendering local realities more amenable to practices of intervention.[81] These

critiques have put hybrid peace approaches in a state of disarray,[82] condemning prescriptive understandings of hybridity and adding value to descriptive ones.

Even if the tendency among critical scholars is to criticise prescriptive notions of hybridity to recognise more descriptive ones, most scholars ultimately understand hybridity as an opportunity for improving peacebuilding.[83] For example, Millar explains how hybrid institutions, practices or rituals in Sierra Leone have been counterproductive, even conflict-promoting.[84] This is because the 'conceptual level', which is always 'hybrid', is a site of resistance to external control: 'hybridity is insulated from purposeful influence and administration'.[85] In his conclusion, Millar does not consider international withdrawal amongst the possible options, but proposes a more truly hybrid approach, which is consistent with the conceptual hybrid level.[86] Joanne Wallis, Renee Jeffery and Lia Kent seem to concur.[87] Analysing the cases of Timor Leste, Solomon Islands and Bougainville, they criticise the implementation of hybrid reconciliation practices and end up using hybridity to reclaim better forms of peacebuilding: 'it is incumbent on scholars of hybridity to likewise turn from formulating prescriptive models of hybridity to providing more detailed, nuanced and sensitive descriptive accounts of bottom-up processes'.[88] Ultimately, these scholars' critiques operate as a starting point to use hybridity in such a way that highlights its use as a third space: a space of consensus where international and local agendas come together to improve peacebuilding practice, but where the option of withdrawal is almost never considered.

At a policy level, considering withdrawal would certainly imply assuming the risk that in some cases political tensions may rekindle. As Chesterman alerts, 'premature restoration of local control might lead to a return to the governing policies (or lack thereof) that led to intervention in the first place'.[89] Policies that favour the exit of interveners must necessarily reflect on the reasons that triggered intervention, but exit should not be read as fundamentally fatalistic. It can also boost a sense of responsibility among national bodies and a spirit of solidarity among local people, while it can open the door to other possibilities of international assistance, like regional cooperation, diplomacy and trade partnerships. At the academic level, more fundamentally, the option of withdrawal certainly problematises the thinking of peacebuilding as the only mechanism to address the root causes of problems and it questions the paternalistic ethos underpinning contemporary humanitarianism.[90] It widens policy options and enhances conversations, rather than closes them; for example, reviving arguments (largely forgotten) that defended sovereignty and self-determination against the negative effects generated by international regulatory forms of intervention.[91] To be clear, the argument here is not that withdrawal should be the first option, or indeed should be pushed, normatively, as an alternative to peacebuilding. Assessing the impact of withdrawal in and of itself is a worthwhile endeavour that nevertheless goes beyond the scope of the paper. More modestly, the aim of the paper is to highlight that thus far the discussion of hybridity has not really engaged with the possibility of withdrawal. Hybrid peace frameworks have expressed a deep mistrust towards the prospect that peoples govern themselves, thus losing critical momentum.

Although the two conceptions of hybridity highlighted in this paper are presented as vastly different, in the literature they are ultimately mainly used to improve peacebuilding, thus narrowing the space between prescription and description. The result is a growing disillusionment with hybrid peace frameworks, which are left with little space to manoeuvre, and with a problematic paradox. If hybridity is used as a world condition, peacebuilding loses its capacity to affect change and turns into an exasperating process; as soon as it implies

the possibility of implementing hybrid initiatives, it runs the risk of reproducing liberal binaries. Trying to find a balance between the two is conceptually untenable. A conceptualisation of hybridity that may substantially move away from the liberal peace – and transmit the frustration with passive interventions that can do little – may require pushing the call for openness and for countering domination to the extent that it would bring exit and withdrawal on the conceptual table. This would imply a defence of local autonomy, increasingly rare in international relations.[92] It would imply, as Vanessa Pupavac intimates following post-colonial writer Aimé Césaire, 'to resurrect [a] spirit of defiance, and like Prometheus, steal the fire from the gods of resilience governance'.[93] Only then hybridity might recover conceptual soundness and critical edge.

Conclusion

The last decade has produced some of the most arresting critiques of peace-interventions that are said to have engendered a fundamental fault line between international agendas and local needs. The discourse of hybridity has been re-adapted from post-colonial theory, appealing to its radical and emancipatory roots, in service of a project of critique that has sought to fundamentally displace the reliance on Western epistemologies of peace, and to place the local firmly at the centre of peace 'thinking'. As we have argued, hybridity has maintained a dual nature: it has appeared as a description of an emerging world condition and as a prescriptive instrument to shape the processes of peacebuilding.

The decoupling of this dualism is not all that this paper has sought to demonstrate. By disentangling the dual usage of hybridity, this article has crucially become a testimony to why hybridity is able to challenge liberal peace frameworks, but continues to generate confusion. On the one hand, read as a world condition, hybridity evades purposeful planning and interveners find themselves estranged from peacebuilding tasks. On the other hand, hybridity is understood as a tool for bringing forth hybrid solutions within an unchanged interventionist framework. The conflation of the dual roles of hybridity is conceptually misleading, based on two irreconcilable ontologies: as if one could learn from and adapt to complex peace dynamics and, at the same time, would be able to facilitate directions and change the same dynamics. Crucially, the transformative potential of hybridity vanishes in this paradox. Hybridity has been used to give interventions a more a human face, but the option of withdrawal has become unthinkable. This may often be a missed opportunity to defend the right of people to reclaim a detachment from interventions and from a neoliberal governance system that places them in a position of structural inequality.

Disclosure statement

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Notes on Contributors

Pol Bargués-Pedreny is working as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Duisburg Essen (Centre for Global Cooperation Research and Institute for Development and Peace). He has published in *Cambridge Review of International Affairs, Journal of Intervention* and *Statebuilding and Resilience*. His book *Deferring Peace in International Statebuilding: Difference, Resilience and Critique* will be published by Routledge in 2018.

Elisa Randazzo has a PhD from the University of Westminster. She is currently Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at the University of Hertfordshire. *Beyond Liberal Peacebuilding: A Critical Exploration of the Local Turn* was published by Routledge in 2017.

Notes

1. Hehir and Robinson, *State-Building*; Newman, Paris, and Richmond, *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*; Campbell, Chandler, and Sabaratnam, *A Liberal Peace?*
2. See Special Issues, Lidén, Mac Ginty, and Richmond, "Beyond Northern Epistempologies"; Millar, van der Lijn, and Verkoren, "Peacebuilding Plans and Local Reconfigurations."
3. Autesserre, *Peaceland*; Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel, *Spatialising Peace and Conflict*; Boege, "Vying for Legitimacy"; Mac Ginty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance*; Millar, *An Ethnographic Approach to Peacebuilding*; Richmond, *Failed Statebuilding*.
4. Mac Ginty, "Indigenous Peace-Making versus the Liberal Peace," 140.
5. Millar, van der Lijn, and Verkoren, "Peacebuilding Plans and Local Reconfigurations."
6. Lemay-Hébert, "State-Building from the Outside-In."
7. Richmond, "Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace."
8. Sriram, "Post-Conflict Justice and Hybridity."
9. Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace*; Graef, *Practicing Post-Liberal Peacebuilding*.
10. Hughes, Öjendal, and Schierenbeck, "The Struggle versus the Song."
11. Kraidi, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalisation*.
12. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 25.
13. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 64.
14. Prabhu, *Hybridity*, 6–15.
15. Yazdiha, "Conceptualising Hybridity," 32.
16. During, "Postcolonialism and Globalisation," 31.
17. During, "Postcolonialism and Globalisation," 37.
18. Tadjbakhsh, "Conflicted Outcomes and Values," 639.
19. Mukhopadhyay, "Warlords as Bureaucrats," 9–10.
20. Kappler, *Local Agency*, 66–146; Lemay-Hébert, "The 'Empty-Shell' Approach."
21. Taylor, "What Fit for the Liberal Peace"; Graef, *Practicing Post-Liberal Peacebuilding*, 83–6; Charbonneau, "War and Peace."
22. Belloni, "Hybrid Peace Governance"; Boege et al., *States Emerging*; Graef, *Practicing Post-Liberal Peacebuilding*; Mac Ginty and Richmond, "The Fallacy of Constructing Hybrid Political Orders"; Peterson, "Conceptual Unpacking"; Richmond, "Pedagogy of Peacebuilding."
23. Boege et al., "Building Peace and Political Community," 606–9.
24. Autesserre, *Peaceland*.
25. Belloni, "Hybrid Peace Governance," 22–7; Boege et al., "Building Peace and Political Community," 606; Mac Ginty, "Hybrid Peace," 392.
26. Björkdahl and Höglund, "Precarious Peacebuilding," 296–7.
27. Mac Ginty and Richmond, "The Fallacy of Constructing Hybrid Political Orders," 221.
28. Peterson, "Conceptual Unpacking," 12.
29. Richmond and Mac Ginty, "Where Now for the Critique," 184.
30. Richmond, "Pedagogy of Peacebuilding."

31. Belloni, "Hybrid Peace Governance," 23; Mac Ginty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance*, 51–3.
32. Mac Ginty, "Hybrid Peace," 397.
33. Richmond, "Pedagogy of Peacebuilding," 115.
34. Richmond, "Dilemmas of a Hybrid Peace."
35. Mac Ginty and Richmond, "The Fallacy of Constructing Hybrid Political Orders"; Millar, "Disaggregating Hybridity"; Wallis, Jeffery, and Kent, "Political Reconciliation."
36. Mac Ginty, "Hybrid Reconstruction," 208.
37. Richmond, "Dilemmas of a Hybrid Peace," 51.
38. Richmond, "Dilemmas of a Hybrid Peace," 51.
39. Richmond, "Dilemmas of a Hybrid Peace," 62.
40. Donais, "Empowerment or Imposition?" 14.
41. Mac Ginty and Richmond, "The Fallacy of Constructing Hybrid Political Orders," 233.
42. Mac Ginty and Williams, *Conflict and Development*, 80.
43. Richmond, "Dilemmas of a Hybrid Peace," 63.
44. Visoka and Richmond, "After Liberal Peace?" 121.
45. Kaldor and Muro, "Religious and Nationalist Militant Groups."
46. Wallis, Jeffery, and Kent, "Political Reconciliation."
47. EP, "At Glance"; NATO, "Active Engagement, Modern Defence."
48. See UNAMID webpage for details. https://unamid.unmissions.org/.
49. UN System Staff College, "Indigenous Peoples and Peacebuilding."
50. McCandless and Tschirgi, "Hybridity and Policy Engagement," 1.
51. de Coning, "From Peacebuilding to Sustaining Peace."
52. Stamnes, "Values, Context and Hybridity," 24.
53. Bargués-Pedreny, "From Promoting to De-Emphasising Ethnicity."
54. Barbara, "Rethinking Neo-Liberal State Building"; Boege et al., "Building Peace and Political Community," 612.
55. Mac Ginty and Richmond, "The Fallacy of Constructing Hybrid Political Orders," 226.
56. Mac Ginty and Richmond, "The Fallacy of Constructing Hybrid Political Orders," 226.
57. Donais, "Empowerment or Imposition?" 15.
58. Stamnes, "Values, Context and Hybridity," 24.
59. Tadjbakhsh, "Introduction," 7.
60. Randazzo, "Paradoxes of the Everyday"; Sabaratnam, "Avatars of Eurocentrism."
61. Donais, "Empowerment or Imposition?" 14, emphasis added.
62. Randazzo, "Paradoxes of the Everyday."
63. Mac Ginty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance*, 2.
64. Peterson, "Conceptual Unpacking," 17.
65. Mac Ginty and Richmond, "The Fallacy of Constructing Hybrid Political Orders"; Millar, "Disaggregating Hybridity"; Peterson, "Conceptual Unpacking"; Richmond, "Dilemmas of a Hybrid Peace"; Wallis, Jeffery, and Kent, "Political Reconciliation."
66. Chandler and Reid, *The Neoliberal Subject*; Prabhu, *Hybridity*.
67. Moe, "Strange Wars of Liberal Peace," 114–15.
68. Nakashima et al., *Weathering Uncertainty*; UN System Staff College, "Indigenous Peoples and Peacebuilding."
69. Aoi, de Coning, and Thakur, *Unintended Consequences*; de Coning, "From Peacebuilding to Sustaining Peace," 177–9.
70. Drawing on Deleuze, Delanda theorises a flat ontology – as opposed to a 'hierarchical ontology' – made of unique and singular individuals, which cannot be related to general types; Delanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, 47.
71. Finkenbusch, "Post-Liberal Peacebuilding," 259.
72. Barkawi and Brighton, "Powers of War."
73. Stamnes, "Values, Context and Hybridity," 28.
74. Körppen, "Space Beyond the Liberal Peacebuilding," 93, original emphasis.

75. See the discussions within science and technology studies, Munk and Abrahamsson, "Empiricists Interventions"; some of these studies present themselves as being able to compose a common world without reproducing the problems of liberal Modernity, Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 8.
76. Mac Ginty and Richmond, "The Fallacy of Constructing Hybrid Political Orders."
77. Rutazibwa, "Studying Agaciro"; Sabaratnam, "Avatars of Eurocentrism."
78. Charbonneau, "War and Peace," 511.
79. Graef, *Practicing Post-Liberal Peacebuilding*, 3; Laffey and Nadarajah, "The Hybridity of Liberal Peace," 406.
80. Björkdahl and Höglund, "Precarious Peacebuilding," 294; Millar, "Disaggregating Hybridity"; Randazzo, "Paradoxes of the Everyday," 1259.
81. Nadarajah and Rampton, "The Limits of Hybridity," 60.
82. Richmond and Mac Ginty, "Where Now for the Critique."
83. In some other cases, hybridity is used to develop more context sensitive and historically informed scholarly engagement with international interventions. See Nadarajah and Rampton, "The Limits of Hybridity"; Sabaratnam, "Avatars of Eurocentrism."
84. Millar, "Disaggregating Hybridity."
85. Millar, "Disaggregating Hybridity," 5.
86. Millar, "Disaggregating Hybridity," 10–11.
87. Wallis, Jeffery, and Kent, "Political Reconciliation."
88. Wallis, Jeffery, and Kent, "Political Reconciliation," 174.
89. Chesterman, "Ownership in Theory and in Practice," 7.
90. Barnett, *Paternalism beyond Borders*.
91. Chandler, *Bosnia*; Cunliffe, "Sovereignty and the Politics of Responsibility"; Pupavac, "International Therapeutic Peace and Justice in Bosnia."
92. Cunliffe, "Sovereignty and the Politics of Responsibility."
93. Pupavac, "Resurrecting Prometheus," 152.

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