

Review - Rethinking Peacebuilding

Written by Christina Woolner

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CHRISTINA WOOLNER, FEB 5 2013

Rethinking Peacebuilding: The quest for just peace in the Middle East and Western Balkans
Edited By: Karin Aggestam and Annika Björkdahl
London and New York: Routledge, 2012

Although the term 'just peace' is common in peacebuilding literature, and is frequently invoked as a desired goal of contemporary peacebuilding activities, there is surprisingly little research focused on what a 'just peace' may entail. Karin Aggestam and Annika Björkdahl's edited volume *Rethinking Peacebuilding: The quest for just peace in the Middle East and Western Balkans* takes up the timely challenge of reframing both peacebuilding theory and practice to better address questions related to the relationship between peace and justice in contemporary peacebuilding. This volume takes a highly interdisciplinary approach to address three core challenges: the quest for justice in contemporary peace processes; the quest for a durable peace; and the quest for effective peacebuilding strategies (p. 1). This review will highlight some of the main conceptual insights of the volume, pertinent details about individual chapter contributions, and then assess the strengths and weaknesses of the work as a whole.

'Just Peace' as an Outcome and Process: A Conceptual Framework

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Perhaps the most conceptually useful part of the book is Aggestam and Björkdahl's introduction. Here, the authors make the helpful distinction between thinking of 'just peace' as both an *outcome* and a *process*. As an outcome, research on 'just peace' focuses on delineating the characteristics of what makes peace 'just' and sustainable. 'Just' in this instance is an adjective used to qualify the ethical quality and durability of 'peace', which is often measured by the extent to which a given 'peace' responds to underlying causes and perceived injustices that perpetuate conflict (p. 2). The authors identify four divergent outcomes that are often associated with making peace 'just': order (the re-establishment of the rule of law); retribution (punishment of perpetrators, an end to impunity, and accountability); restoration (a restorative justice approach that focuses on repairing relationships and rebuilding trust); and distribution (addressing core structural inequalities) (pp. 2-5).

While these different outcomes give us a sense of what a 'just peace' may entail, the authors ultimately suggest that because both 'peace' and 'justice' are highly contested and value-laden terms, one universal definition of 'just peace' can never be found. Rather, we should conceive of 'just peace' as a *process* in which peace is constructed intersubjectively. The degree to which all parties to a conflict can be meaningfully involved in helping to shape the quality of the peace to come is thus what makes a peace 'just'. Strategies for allowing such a peace to emerge include various forms of negotiation, deliberation, and reconciliation. While not stated outright in the introduction, this conceptualization of 'just peace' (or 'just peacemaking' in its verbal form) in turn demands a re-thinking of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm. This model has tended to impose a standardized blueprint for peace, often overlooking local agency and understandings of peace. This critique of liberal peacebuilding surfaces more fully in the authors' conclusion, as well as in a number of individual chapters throughout the book.

Whether conceived as an outcome or a process, Aggestam and Björkdahl note that the quest for 'just peace' faces a range of ethical and practical dilemmas. These include: considering the trade-offs necessary between peacebuilding and transitional justice; the challenge of timing and/or sequencing peace and justice activities; considering the relationship between local and international actors; and the evolving nature of European Union (EU) peacebuilding strategies. Addressing these dilemmas in both theory and practice becomes the focus of the proceeding chapters.

Theorizing Just Peace

Part I of the volume includes 7 chapters that each contain different theoretical reflections on the nature of 'just peace'. To begin, Chapter 1 (Bar-Simon-Tav) addresses the challenge of sequencing peace and justice activities, and explores different ways of balancing the relationship between justice demands and peace that will enable a durable peace. Ultimately, Bar-Simon-Tav argues that the issue of injustices can be raised during a peace agreement, but addressing these injustices should not be a pre-condition for a peace agreement to be signed. This should rather be deferred to the reconciliation phase of a peace process.

In chapter 2, Aggestam further develops a process-oriented approach to studying just peace (first introduced in her introduction), which focuses on the intersubjective and relational nature of the concept. Aggestam suggests that paying more attention to the politics of reconciliation and recognition may help us to understand the 'middle ground' in which an intersubjective understanding of just peace may be fostered.

Chapter 3 (Herman, Martin-Orgeta, Sriram) presents a more practice-focused analysis of what happens when peacebuilding activities (specifically, rule of law promotion, DDR and SSR) and transitional justice activities (prosecutions, commissions or inquiries, vetting, restorative justice, amnesties) overlap. For each peacebuilding activity, the authors note that there are both contradictions and complementarities with transitional justice activities, suggesting that trade-offs may be necessary at times, but 'justice' and 'peacebuilding' activities are not mutually exclusive, and can complement one another.

Chapters 4 (Richmond) and 5 (Björkdahl) both offer theoretical critiques of the liberal peacebuilding model by focusing on the relationship between international and local actors. Richmond suggests the need for a 'fourth-generation' of peacebuilding, one in which 'hybrid' forms of peace that enable local agency are given space to develop, and issues of social and distributive justice are given more attention. Similarly, Björkdahl suggests that a process of 'localizing' just peace can occur by allowing for more constructive public deliberations.

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Chapter 6 (Hyde-Price) also offers a critique of the liberal peacebuilding model, though from a realist perspective. Hyde-Price suggests that instead of aiming towards an overly normative and utopian 'just peace', a "praxis-oriented, problem-solving approach to conflict situations," which is more realistic about what can be achieved, given the structure of both international and local systems, is more appropriate (pp. 99-100). Prudence, skepticism and reciprocity are key to this approach.

Finally, chapter 7 (Österdahl) explores some of the legal intricacies of the concept of *jus post bellum*, or 'justice after war' as an extension of just war theory, and considers its relationship to *jus in bello* and *jus ad bellum*.

Just Peace in Practice

Part II of the book shifts from theory to a focus on the search for just peace in practice, with a particular emphasis on the Middle East and Western Balkans. The section begins with a novel quantitative study on the relationship between the inclusion of justice principles in peace agreements and the potential durability of peace (Ch. 8, Wallenstein, Melander and Hogbladh). While the analysis seems to tentatively suggest that the inclusion of these principles may lead to a more durable peace (as Melander found in an earlier study), the chapter highlights the need for more research in this area.

Chapters 9 (Al-Momani and Rennick) and 10 (Persson) focus on some of the challenges of working towards a just peace in the Middle East. Chapter 9 explores how 'social justice' is conceived in an Arab-Islamic context, and how this relates to EU peacebuilding efforts. Al-Momani and Rennick point out that many of the assumptions about what constitutes 'just peace' in a communitarian Islamic setting (such as redistribution of wealth and social responsibility) are at odds with the liberal ideals of economic liberalization, individualism and democracy-building that undergird EU peacebuilding strategies. For a deeper and more lasting peace to emerge, greater attention must thus be paid to culturally relevant methods of conflict resolution. Chapter 10 examines the political, economic and security roles the EU is currently playing in Israel-Palestine, and highlights a number of the dilemmas faced in this work. While the EU has faced challenges, Persson is ultimately optimistic about their contribution to developing a just peace in Israel-Palestine.

Chapters 11 (Kappler) and 12 (Martin-Ortega) turn to an analysis of the quest for just peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). Kappler uses what she calls an "institutional ethnography" and "discourse analysis" approach (p. 169) to consider how the EU's vision of peace corresponds with representations of peace on the ground in BiH. Kappler also finds that the way the EU envisions peace (in a structural, linear and institutional way) contrasts sharply with local visions of peace (which are much more focused on every-day survival and issues of ethnic justice). Like Al-Momani and Rennick suggest, Kappler concludes that greater effort needs to be made to contextualize peace efforts, a conclusion that supports Aggestam and Björkdahl's call for thinking of 'just peace' as an intersubjective process. Chapter 12 turns to an analysis of the effects of post-war efforts to establish justice in BiH, including the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), as well as hybrid and national courts. Martin-Ortega suggests that the impact of the courts has been mixed; although a measure of justice has been achieved, and demands for accountability have increased, a focus on retributive justice has curtailed restorative justice initiatives.

Towards A Transformative and Reflexive Peacebuilding Model

Aggestam and Björkdahl's conclusion reiterates the idea that 'just peace' is a highly contested term, and notes that while the liberal peacebuilding model has become the *de facto* norm, the cases in this book highlight that this approach has led to problematic outcomes. Although the liberal model is increasingly being challenged, few alternatives have been put forward. The authors thus suggest a number of conclusions about just peace in theory and practice that they hope will advance the conversation on effective, transformative peacebuilding models. Theoretically, they highlight again that just peace can be seen as both an outcome and a process, but emphasize that a process-oriented approach underlines the intersubjective, transformative, and self-sustainable characteristics of building just peace.

Tying together the many lessons highlighted in part II of the book, Aggestam and Björkdahl suggest a number of key

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ideas that should guide the quest for just peace in practice, which warrant repeating in full: (1) Just peace needs to be grounded in an ethical and reflexive framework; (2) Building peace is a relational practice, and reconciliation is therefore key; (3) International actors should focus on facilitation rather than imposing a universal blueprint; (4) Peacebuilding is not an apolitical process, therefore questions of power and empowerment need to be better accounted for; (5) While opinions diverge on the sequencing of peace and justice activities, the authors suggest they need to be pursued simultaneously and be viewed as complementary

Assessment: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Questions for Future Research

Taken as a whole, this volume represents a timely and innovative contribution to the study of effective peacebuilding strategies, which fills a particular gap in the literature by focusing on the relationship between justice and peace. The editors and various contributors consider both definitions of 'peace' and 'justice' and the relationship between them in nuanced, diverse, and enlightening ways that also serve to critique some of the problematic elements of the liberal peacebuilding model. The division of the book into 'theory' and 'practice' sections gives it an accessible and logical progression.

The interdisciplinary nature of the volume—which includes everything from philosophical reflections and IR theory to quantitative studies, ethnography and discourse analysis—is also a great strength, and allows the reader a diversity of entry-points into thinking about 'just peace'. Significantly, the various contributors do not speak with one voice on the topic; although various contributions vary in their ability to directly address the issue of 'just peace', this diversity of opinions serves to highlight that 'just peace' is a highly contested term.

On a theoretical level, the authors' overall emphasis on a process-oriented approach to 'just peace', and the importance of developing just peace intersubjectively also sets this book apart from other books on 'just peace', most of which are more concerned with establishing recipes for what a 'just peace' may look like. Aggestam and Björkdahl do put forward a number of concrete suggestions to guide the quest for a just peace, but are still able resist the temptation to define. Instead, they wisely conclude, "the notion of just peace is not easily captured and requires reflection rather than affirmation" (p. 206).

While the strengths of this book far outweigh its weaknesses, the book contains a number of tensions and unresolved issues. Although the book clearly seeks to problematize elements of the liberal peacebuilding model, many of the chapters continue to use the term 'peacebuilding' in a *de facto* manner to refer to traditional liberal peacebuilding practices (such as rule of law promotion, security sector reform, economic liberalization, etc) that precludes consideration of other types of peacebuilding activities. The focus on state-centric EU peacebuilding efforts furthers this tendency. While this approach perhaps represents the general state of the field, this volume could have been strengthened by a fuller consideration of different types of peacebuilding activities.

One way to address the above concern would be to expand the types of case studies to include a broader range of examples. While the focus on Israel-Palestine and BiH is interesting, it seems to be rooted in the authors' own research backgrounds rather than any other rationale, and the amount of space in the book devoted to actually exploring these cases (two chapters each) does not seem to warrant their inclusion in the title of the book. Instead of focusing on only EU activities in these two cases, the volume would have been strengthened by including more examples of bottom-up peacebuilding activities from countries at different stages in the post-war rebuilding/reconciliation process. Some consideration of cases where 'hybrid', intersubjective and transformative forms of peacebuilding have taken root would have been especially helpful.

In addition to conceiving of just peace as an intersubjective process, another interesting theoretical insight put forward by the authors is the idea that 'just peace' is morally superior to negative peace, but superseded by positive peace. While the book makes clear the differences between negative peace and just peace, the qualitative differences between just peace and positive peace are not really explored. The idea of a continuum of negative-just-positive peace, and how it relates to just peace as an intersubjective process, holds interesting potential, and could serve as a starting point for future work on this subject.

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This book will be of interest to a wide range of students, scholars and practitioners interested in better understanding the notion of 'just peace'. The particulars of the case studies will speak most clearly to scholars and practitioners concerned with Israel-Palestine and Bosnia-Herzegovina, especially those working from within an EU context. However, the theoretical contributions made in the introduction and part I of the volume, and the lessons gleaned from part II, have much broader applicability. This book is therefore important reading for anyone concerned with better understanding the relationship between peace and justice, and the changing nature of contemporary peacebuilding.

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