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Liberal Countries: The Proprietors of Conflict

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"Liberalism Is Not Conducive to Peace." Discuss.

Introduction

In his 2000 work, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Thomas Friedman introduced his "Golden Arches of Conflict Prevention" theory, in which he stated countries that have reached liberal development, defined by Friedman as the point where there exists a middle class large enough to support McDonald's chains, do not enter into wars with one another, and while "people in McDonald's countries didn't like to fight wars anymore, they preferred to wait in line for burgers" (Friedman 2000: 249). Friedman is not alone in his understanding that to be liberal, is to be at peace. Former US President Clinton declared in his 1994 State of the Union address that the best strategy to ensure a global peace was the advancement of liberalism to all corners of the earth (Owen 1994).

However, contrary to such assertions that to be a liberal state is to be peaceful, this essay will argue that liberalism is in fact not conducive to peace, where peace is defined as the security of the individual in terms of satisfactory living standards such as adequate food, water and shelter, employment opportunities, access to healthcare, and incorrupt government, as well as the absence of violence (Galtung 1969). This essay will explore how the Western world, in seeking a hegemonic liberal peace, has paradoxically proceeded to instil conditions for conflict and a lack of peace across the illiberal Global South, as well as within the liberal world itself.

Firstly, it will be discussed that, rather than providing a model of peace for the developing world to aspire to, liberal states are in fact an instigator of conflict in the developing world via their frequent military forays into illiberal nations. This essay will focus particularly on the current "War on Terror" and the Vietnam War of the 1960s and 70s as examples of the liberal world deploying decidedly un-peaceful strategies, paradoxically engaging in violent warfare in order to ensure the spread of the "liberal peace" (Higate and Henry 2009).

Furthermore, the essay will explore Western military intervention, in which the liberal world creates conditions for conflict. The often contradictory notion of "liberal peacebuilding" will be assessed, focusing on the example of the UN peacebuilding mission in East Timor in the early twenty-first century, and the repercussions of the liberal world's actions on the citizens of the newly formed state—both in terms of perpetuating conditions for further conflict via allowing early elections to legitimise corrupt elites, and in the decidedly un-peaceful living standards left behind for the East Timorese people (Richmond and Franks 2009; Transparency International 2010).

The second subversive way in which liberalism is, rather than conducive to peace, often a contributor to un-peaceful living, is in the (neo)liberal economic policies enforced on the illiberal Global South. This issue will be assessed specifically via the discussion of structural adjustment policies implemented by the IMF and World Bank in sub-Saharan Africa, and in particular, the GEAR strategy employed in South Africa during the 1990s, and the severely damaging consequences of such policies in terms of lowered quality of life, due to vastly rising unemployment rates, decreasing investment in welfare, and rises in living costs—all issues that the (neo)liberal world and its economic institutions have bestowed upon what was already one of the poorest and least peaceful regions of the world (Riddell 1992; Iliffe 2007).

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Finally, this essay will explore whether, when we consider the current economic and social unravelling of the liberal world, it is truly possible to associate liberalism with peace. The collapsing image of a liberal peace will be discussed in terms of the global financial crisis, and the sense of outrage it has created across the globe, both peacefully in the form of the Occupy protests, and often violently in economically downtrodden states such as Greece. This essay will also assess the rioting and looting that took place in London and other major UK cities in August 2011, and how the anger and violence shown here, by citizens of the liberal world, should cause us to question whether liberalism can truly be conducive to peace. Through the assessment and analysis of the issues outlined above, this essay will attempt to decipher why the liberal world has failed to provide a prevailing peace.

Liberal Countries as the Proprietors of Conflict

When we observe the countries in which there has been major violent conflict since the end of the Second World War, the Western liberal world seems, at first glance at least, somewhat exempt. Wars ranging from the mountains of Kashmir to the deserts of the Gulf, throughout the latter half of the twentieth century up until the present day, appear to have an overarching commonality—they are not taking place in the liberal world. This appears to initially fit with Friedman's "Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention," the notion that liberal countries do not go to war with one another (Friedman 2000). In itself, it may lead to the assumption that liberalism *is* in fact conducive to peace, that violent conflict has no place in the democratically elected, free market economies of the USA and its Western allies. Indeed, since the Cold War era, the liberal world has prided itself as the "free world" (Stoessinger 2001), and in its establishment, conditions of war are removed, replaced instead by a flourishing peace (Reid 2006).

However, once questioned, this liberal rhetoric of peace quickly begins to unravel. True, the majority of major conflicts in the world since the Second World War have occurred outside of the borders of the liberal world, but on closer inspection, it becomes impossible to avoid the fact that the West has often had huge influence on, and indeed is often, the primary proprietor of these supposedly "illiberal" conflicts. In much of the liberal world's foreign policies (in particular the USA and the UK), the discourse of upholding the liberal peace has in fact paradoxically led to the creation of conditions for war, a discourse most notable in the present in relation to the US-led "War on Terror" (Higate and Henry 2009).

In the post-9/11, fervour members of the liberal world, with the USA at their helm, have proceeded to embark upon a war in which there is no specific national enemy—a war of permanence based on the notion that "they," the nonliberal world, are a threat that must be acted upon violently in order to ensure the safety of "us, the liberal world (Ross 2004; Reid 2006).

Through the seeking and protection of a global peace, the liberal world has inflicted an alarming amount of violent, and seemingly, unending conflict upon those it deems illiberal. The notion of liberalism as the path to peace is, therefore, ultimately paradoxical; the liberal world claims it is the proprietor of peace, and yet it is the most powerful liberal countries that are most equipped for, and most frequently engaged, in war (Reid 2006). The USA alone has intervened militarily in multiple countries across the globe, throughout every decade since the 1940s (Blum 2003). And despite fears of the countries developing nuclear weaponry, dubbed the "axis of evil" (Iran, Iraq and North Korea) by George W. Bush in his 2002 State of the Union Address (CNN 2002), the only country to violently inflict nuclear bombs in warfare to date is the USA itself. The residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki can surely testify.

Vietnam: A Paradoxical War?

In the "War on Terror," the West has identified an illiberal enemy that threatens its hegemony (Wood 2005) and has, therefore, proceeded to commit to violent means to protect "peaceful" liberal society, a trend that can be noted throughout modern history. Despite the rhetoric of peace, insisted upon by the leaders of the liberal world, relations between liberal and illiberal societies are defined by war and have been throughout time (Reid 2006: 3). There is no historical case more indicative of this than the Vietnam War.

The war, the longest in American history culminated in an inconceivable number of civilian deaths, ultimately saw the defeat of US troops by the North Vietnamese, and yet did not secure a liberal peace at the end, but rather a socialist

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one (Stoessinger 2001). Since the US intervened so drastically in Vietnam, of fears of the expansion of communist ideology in Southeast Asia, its obsession with the protection of the liberal peace would, ironically, led to some of the most brutal acts of violence seen in modern warfare. The US claimed that it had entered Vietnam on the grounds of "civil pacification," a misleadingly benign-sounding approach that lies at odds with the extraordinarily violent "search and destroy" operations carried out by the US military's "Operation Rolling Thunder" of 1967, where bombing targets included local infrastructure and factories across Northern Vietnam (Moran 2001). During US military intervention in the region, it is estimated that more than 7 million tons of bombs were dropped on Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos—eighty times the amount dropped on Britain during WWII (Stoessinger 2001: 106), and the CIA estimated that 2,800 North Vietnamese civilians were killed every month during 1967 alone (Moran 2001): 188).

In light of the overwhelming violence inflicted upon Vietnam and its neighbours (to name but one historical incident), in the name of ensuring liberal hegemony, it is somewhat difficult to accept the notion that liberalism is conducive to peace. Rather, it seems that in their scrabble to assure a liberal peace, the Western world has succeeded, paradoxically, in perpetuating violence and conflict through their decisions to wage war on illiberal nations.

Liberal Peacebuilding: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?

Liberal involvement in, and perpetuation of, conflict does not always appear in the form of direct military combat, as in Vietnam, but can arise in more subversive ways, such as in the extortionately paradoxical involvement of the West in illiberal states in the name of peacebuilding. The discourse of liberal peacebuilding is framed around notions of the West as the "saviour" of the violent illiberal world (Escobar 1994). Conflict, therefore, becomes contained as an occurrence of the non-Western world, an occurrence that can only be resolved by Western nations ensuring that violent, illiberal peoples are shown the "correct" path towards peace and development, that path being of course a liberal one (Escobar 1994; Pugh 2004; Duffield 2007).

The liberal world's vigorous self-promotion through the medium of peacebuilding has had a marked effect upon all those subjected to the implementation of liberal hegemonic policy upon their illiberal state, and whilst these effects are often successful in ending existing conflicts in war-torn regions of the world, they can, too, lead to the birth of new conflicts, arising directly from the involvement of liberal peace-builders, as the following example of peacebuilding processes in East Timor will highlight.

Peacebuilding Leads to Conflict Building? The Case of East Timor

In 1999, after more than twenty years of brutal Indonesian occupation, whereby over a third of East Timor's population died in the first five years alone (Magalhaes 1992), Indonesia's newly elected President Habibie announced that there would be a referendum in East Timor to either accept autonomy within Indonesia or reject it in favour of complete independence and the formation of a new East Timorese state (Drexler 2010). The elections resulted in 78.5 percent of the East Timorese people voting for total independence from Indonesia. This led to a huge outbreak of violence, whereby 2,000 East Timorese were killed, 230,000 East Timorese were deported to refugee camps in West Timor, and several hundred thousand people were internally displaced (Zaum 2007).

The UN intervention and peacebuilding processes that followed have been hailed by the international community as one of the great success stories of liberal peacebuilding (Richmond and Franks 2009). Indeed, the actions of INTERFET (International Force East Timor), following the 1999 outbreak of violence, were successful in restoring a sense of peace on the island. However, it is the actions of the liberal world, which followed, that proceeded to undermine this initial establishment of security and potential for peace.

Directly after the INTERFET intervention, the UN established UNTAET (UN Transitional Authority for East Timor) (Drexler 2010). UNTAET would, at least in theory, create the conditions for a liberal, democratic state in East Timor before withdrawing entirely. However, from the outset, this proved far more complex than the UN could have anticipated; imposing liberalism on a newly independent state that had no roots in Western liberalism proved to do more harm than good (Richmond and Franks 2009). Even the most basic liberal peacebuilding process, the implementation of democratic elections, left a decidedly un-peaceful mark on East Timor.

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The early elections in East Timor, a country with no history or tradition of liberal democracy, only sought to allow the democratic process to be abused via allowing the legitimisation of elites. In the wake of being brought to power, the political party Fretilin was able to monopolise power while major state corruption became easily entrenched. Indeed, East Timor was named 2010's 127th most corrupt country by the non-governmental organisation, Transparency International (Richmond and Franks 2009; Transparency International 2010).

Despite having been present in East Timor for six years and having supposedly "shown the natives the light" (Escobar 1994) and built the foundations for a liberal peace, the scaling down of UN operations on the island led to a fresh eruption of violence in 2006. What began as fighting among the military over alleged discrimination between soldiers from the eastern and western parts of the country, quickly amassed into general mass violence across the country, in particular, in East Timor's capital, Dili. In intervening and forging a liberal hegemony in the vulnerable, newly formed nation, the international community ultimately failed to create a liberal peace in East Timor. As soon as UNTAET left the island, violence erupted once more (Richmond and Franks 2009).

However, the liberal countries of the world's failure to create peace in East Timor reaches beyond the UN's creation of conditions for further conflict alone. Where the understanding of peace is that it is not merely the absence of war, but the presence of contentment among citizens, access to food, water, healthcare, education, and employment opportunities, it is unquestionable that East Timor, whilst currently not experiencing major violent conflict, is far from at peace. According to the 2010 UNDP Human Development Index, life expectancy is 62.1, and 39.7 percent of the population live below the poverty line.

As shown by the case study of East Timor, in relation to intervention and peacebuilding strategies in illiberal states, the actions of the liberal world cannot be seen to be automatically conducive to peace, as by ending the original violence, the liberal international community often assists in creating the conditions for new conflicts, and fails to act to ensure that societal structures are put sufficiently in place to provide peace, contentment, and security for the citizens of newly liberalised states.

The (Neo)liberal Economy vs. Peace: The Case of Structural Adjustment Policies in Sub-Saharan Africa

Peacebuilding is not the only forum for showcasing the paradox of the liberal peace. Another subversive manner in which the West, in its promotion of liberal hegemony, can create conditions for further conflict and insecurity in the illiberal world, is via the economic realm. The implementation of (neo)liberal economic policies upon the Global South by the IMF and World Bank has had an often-destabilising effect. This section will explore the impact of economic liberalisation on peace in regards to the structural adjustment policies implemented by the IMF and the World Bank in sub-Saharan Africa, with specific reference to the application of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) in 1990s South Africa.

The 1970's recession was not a crisis contained solely within the liberal world that it had initially occurred in. Because exports rose by 43 percent in price, indicating a significant decrease in demand for products from the developing world, there were also severe repercussions for the illiberal Global South (Lurie 2004). In the wake of this colossal economic downturn, many nations of sub-Saharan Africa were forced to turn to the IMF and World Bank for loans to cover their foreign debts. Unfortunately, these loans came at what was to become an exceedingly heavy price. In return for these loans, illiberal nations were expected to adhere to "structural adjustment policies," schemes that aimed to liberalise the market economies of these illiberal countries; thus, in theory, allowing them to repay the loans at a quicker rate (Riddell 1992; Lurie 2004: 205).

Nonetheless, the four basic elements of structural adjustment policies are: currency devaluation, the removal or reduction of the state from the workings of the economy, the elimination of subsidies in an attempt to reduce expenditures, and the liberalisation of trade (Riddell 1992: 53). In theory, once currency is devalued and trade becomes liberalised, exports become reduced in value and become cheaper, leading to more foreign investment. The economy will build in strength as a consequence and will create more economic opportunities for the nation as a whole (Foster 2005).

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The reality of such economic theorisation, however, looks starkly different to this apparently seamless transition from impoverished illiberal statehood into functioning, economically thriving (neo)liberalism. Firstly, the devaluation of a country's currency means that even basic household products can become unaffordable to its people. For example, after currency devaluation in Sierra Leone in 1986, a bar of soap became four times more expensive than it had been before structural adjustment (Riddell 1992: 57). Secondly, in sub-Saharan African nations, where emphasis on economic liberalisation overtook focus on nationalism and welfare, the vast majority of the citizens of the region saw huge negative consequences. The decline in state power over the economy led to a decline in services, most notably in education and healthcare in much of sub-Saharan Africa (*ibid*: 58).

GEARing Up for (Neo)liberalism in South Africa

A clear example of the negative impact of structural adjustment policies is South Africa's Growth, Employment, and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR), implemented during the 1990s by the newly empowered post-apartheid, ANC Government. The strategy saw emphasis placed on liberal, free market approaches, with the hope of boosting the country's economic output, and therefore, benefitting the nation as a whole. However, once implemented, it became clear that such liberal policies had highly potent side effects: investment and improvements in the South African welfare system were sidelined, which led to a notable decline in national healthcare and education facilities (Iliffe 2007: 291). GEAR "...fell far short of its own optimistic targets for economic growth and job creation. From 1996 to 1999 ...interest rates rose and foreign investment crucial to the GEAR strategy did not materialise" (Foster 2005: 249). The chief losers of the GEAR strategy, then, were South Africa's unskilled workforce, which GEAR had promised to create 600,000 jobs over five years, but in reality, 500,000 were lost during that period (Iliffe 2007: 291). Between 1993 and 1998, one third of manufacturing jobs in the Vaal region were lost, as well as over a quarter of the region's trade and service sector jobs (Foster 2005: 249).

The reality of implementing liberal economic structures has, for sub-Saharan African communities, proved nothing short of devastating. Quality of life has been reduced, as living costs have drastically risen, infrastructure has collapsed, integral services in healthcare and education have been reduced, and unemployment has risen—all in the name of the western world promoting liberal hegemony (Riddell 1992: 66). Even where the liberal world is not physically involved in conflict or violence in an illiberal nation, the enforcement of liberal ideals can have a decidedly dangerous effect upon the peoples of that nation. The destabilising effects of structural adjustment policies in sub-Saharan Africa have created conditions for inadequate education, healthcare, and employment—conditions which this essay feels can in no way be consigned as attributes of peace.

The Liberal World as a Site of Conflict

As discussed in this essay, the Western world, in its quest for the liberal peace, has instead proceeded to inflict conditions for conflict and/or a lack of peace in the illiberal world, both directly through military intervention, and more subversively, by enforcing particular brands of peacebuilding and economic development in the Global South. However, it must be highlighted that these factors do show a clear pattern: *liberal* countries are involving themselves in *illiberal* ones in the promotion of peace.

Therefore, there appears to be some semblance of truth in Friedman's theory that liberal countries do not go to war with one another (Friedman 2000). As a result, it could be argued that if all countries were liberal, then there would be no need for the west to intervene and liberalise others, and that some semblance of peace would finally be found. Perhaps Clinton was correct in declaring in his 1994 State of the Union address that ultimately the best strategy to ensure the security of the Western world and to build a durable peace was to support the advancement of liberalism across the globe (Owen 1994). Perhaps conflict in the present is a price worth paying for a peaceful, liberal future for all?

Of course, this would be a much sounder argument for the global promotion of liberalism were it not for the fact that, since the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the liberal world has begun to collapse in on itself. What began as a credit crunch at the end of 2007 has escalated into an unprecedented global economic crisis (BBC 2011). What has followed has been equally unprecedented—citizens of the financially imploding Greece protest

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violently on the streets of Athens. In other words, what began initially as a protest against corporate greed on Wall Street, New York City has become the global Occupy movement. In August 2011, rioting and looting took place across London, spreading into other major British cities. This section will consider these conflicts that are currently arising in the Western world, and how these conflicts highlight the fact that liberalism is not necessarily conducive to peace; rather, that it is a contributor to conflict.

The Financial Crisis: Athens and Occupy

In light of the current financial climate in the Western world, the true hypocrisy of the quest for liberal economic hegemony becomes clear. The IMF and World Bank spent much of the 1990s imposing structural adjustment policies on the Global South with the hope of liberalising their economies—policies that were, for the most part, extremely damaging to the working populations of those countries, as discussed previously in this essay (Riddell 1992). And yet, whilst the liberal world was busy imposing economic policies on its illiberal neighbours, its own economy was gearing up to implode.

The global financial crisis is a stark example of how the liberal world has left its citizens embittered and brought about not peace, but immense opposition to the liberal regime. The habitual lending/borrowing nature of the liberal economy has led to countries such as Greece running up huge deficits, because when the economy downturned, Greece's economy lay on the brink of collapse (BBC 2010; CNN 2010). Since 2010, protests have taken place continuously in Athens, often turning violent, as citizens express their dissatisfaction with their government's inability to uphold a stable economy, and the severe austerity measures enforced upon the Greek people as a consequence (Reuters 2011).

However, it is not just the citizens of Greece that are reacting angrily towards the liberal world. What began in September 2011 as a protest against the role major banks and the multinational corporations that have had in the financial crisis on Wall Street, has extended to become the global Occupy movement, with protests against the corporate greed of the liberal economy taking place in over 1,500 cities across the globe (occupywallst.org). Across the globe, citizens of the liberal world have "gather[ed] together to express a feeling of mass injustice" (Declaration of the Occupation of New York City; 2011). Are these the actions of a contented, peaceful liberal society? Or are they the battle cries of hundreds of thousands of angry, dissatisfied citizens across the Western world whose leaders have failed them?

The UK Riots

Anger and dissatisfaction, key emotions of the Athens protests and the Occupy demonstrations, were also clearly prevalent during August 2011 in England (Lewis, et al; 2011). What began as a peaceful protest in Tottenham, North London, following the shooting of local man Mark Duggan by police, soon escalated into ferocious rioting and looting across London, eventually spreading to Birmingham, Liverpool and Bristol (BBC 2011; Channel 4 News 2011). The scenes of angry rioting and looting across the capital and other major UK cities appear to lie firmly at odds with the Western attitude that the liberal world is a peaceful one; although David Cameron was quick to steer analysis of the riots away from the politicised realm, stating that "this [the rioting] is criminality, pure and simple" (Cameron 2011).

For the British government, depoliticising the events provided "proof" that their methods of governance were not to blame (Aitkenhead 2011). However, a study since undertaken by the Guardian newspaper and the LSE, "Reading the Riots," expresses a very different sentiment among interviewees who took part in the rioting. The study highlights that "rioters identified a range of political grievances, but at the heart of their complaints was a pervasive sense of injustice . . . the lack of money, jobs or opportunity" (Lewis et al; 2011).

When we observe citizens' anger with their governments and police and lack of hope for future opportunities, reflected in the 2011 summer riots across the UK, the often violent demonstrations in Athens, and the unfaltering commitment of the Occupy protestors, it becomes increasingly difficult to reconcile such actions of citizens of the liberal world with the theory that liberalism is conducive to peace.

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Conclusion

To conclude, through the assessment and analysis of the liberal world's actions in the Global South, and the ways in which such actions can both contribute to creating or furthering conflict and form barriers to peaceful, contented living in the illiberal world, brings into question any assumptions that liberalism is automatically conducive to peace. Throughout modern history, and demonstrated by the case studies of the "War on Terror" and the Vietnam War, the liberal world has paradoxically engaged in warfare, in order to ensure a global liberal hegemony and a subsequent theoretical global liberal peace (Higate and Henry 2009). The Western world, in the form of international institutions such as the UN, IMF, and World Bank have also enforced Western liberal peacebuilding and economic policies upon the illiberal Global South, policies which have only furthered conditions for conflict, and/or decreased quality of life, security, and a sense of peace for the citizens of states in which such reforms have been implemented. This is evidenced is via this essay's examples of the UNTAET peacebuilding mission in East Timor, and the structural adjustment policies implemented in sub-Saharan Africa, with particular reference to the GEAR strategy implemented in 1990s South Africa.

However, despite these often negative results, caused by the enforcement of liberalism in the Global South, if this essay were to assess the issue of liberalism's relationship with peace, solely from the perspective of the liberal world's wrongdoings in illiberal nations, former President Clinton's assertion that once all the world's states are liberal, then peace will become entrenched across the globe, could still be viable (Owen 1994). Unfortunately, as discussed in the final section, violence, conflict, and a lack of contentment have become exceedingly common features within the liberal world itself. The financial crisis has ravaged quality of life across the West, leading to mass demonstrations, often violent in nature (as in the case of Athens) across the liberal world. Moreover, the summer of 2011 saw one of the major capitals of the liberal world descend into chaos, with rioting and looting occurring across the boroughs of London and sprawling out into other UK cities.

This essay believes, therefore, that these are not the actions of a liberal world at peace, but rather, they are evidence of the hypocrisy of the Western world's imposition of the liberal peace. How can liberalism be expected to provide conditions for peace in the Global South when it cannot do so within the borders of existing liberal states? And whilst a solution for a sustained global peace is difficult, if not impossible, to find, it is clear that the enforcement of liberalism is not that solution—that liberalism is not conducive to peace.

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