

Review - Local and Global Dynamics of Peacebuilding

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SIMON TAYLOR, APR 13 2014

Local and Global Dynamics of Peacebuilding: Post-Conflict reconstruction in Sierra Leone

By: Christine Cubitt

London and New York: Routledge, 2012

In this recent study on Sierra Leone, Cubitt offers a detailed examination of liberal peace-making efforts in Sierra Leone, following the civil war (1991-2002). Cubitt rightly notes that there are altogether far too few “deep empirical studies” (p. 3) which test individual peacebuilding missions and this work is one such effort to bring analytical weight to bear on the important topic of post-conflict reconstruction. In this manner, *Local and Global Dynamics of Peacebuilding* can be seen as a detailed examination of the Liberal Peace critiques of Richmond, Mac Ginty and Paris, applied to a single particular case.

Cubitt’s stated aim for the book is two-fold. First, local priorities for peace in Sierra Leone are explained by

investigating the conflicts and its antecedents, and by rigorously analysing the efficacy and propriety of broad-based international support for recovery in the context of the war history and cultural concerns for building peace among locals. (p. 3)

In this way, peacebuilding is placed within the context of the war, local concerns, and international interests. Second, Cubitt seeks to determine the impacts of the specific processes and reforms, through a rigorous analysis of how these were developed and applied in the post-conflict environment of Sierra Leone. This also includes an analysis of the conditionalities imposed on the country that shaped the reforms of the country’s political, economic, and social life. For example, international financial institutions were concerned with reforming the revenue collection systems over the delivery of services, which resulted in capacity and resources being diverted to tax collection at the expense of service delivery (pp. 78-79). Ultimately, Cubitt argues that the promises made by the International Monetary Fund, United Nations, the Government of Sierra Leone, and many other International Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations in developing the reform processes – that is, in terms of economic, political, and social reforms – have not delivered. The critique given by Cubitt is not a wholly damning one, as successes and benefits are given their due credit in the book, where appropriate.

This final assessment is arrived at via six detailed chapters. Cubitt’s initial chapter offers a “comprehensive explanation of the political history” (p. 4) of Sierra Leone in order to determine the complex causal factors of the war and collapse of the state, as well as to aid in understanding the complexities of Sierra Leone after the war, i.e. the local peace priorities. From here, Chapter 2, a “close interrogation” (p. 35) is conducted of the key documents that shaped and determined Sierra Leone’s post-conflict reconstruction (Lomé Peace Accord, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report conclusions, National Recovery Strategy of 2002-2003, and the UN’s Development Assistance Framework), in order to determine the commitments made in the peace settlement and the longer-term implications for a sustainable peace. Chapter 3 examines some of the conditionalities on which the post-conflict reconstruction plans were based and how these relate to the peacebuilding challenges. This chapter also explores the dimensions of liberal peacebuilding in terms of economic, political, and social reforms to create liberal free-market, multi-party democracies with active civil societies. The review of these documents and processes is competently handled, raising and critiquing the essential elements of the liberal peace project. The strengths,

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weaknesses, and shortcomings of the project are effectively discussed and can serve as an accurate summation of liberal peace debates as well as the key documentation governing Sierra Leone's transition and recovery.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present a mix of qualitative and quantitative data (e.g. interviews, survey data, economic statistics, and cross-sectional voting results) to support the central argument that the reality of reconstruction has not lived up to the promises made. Each of these chapters focuses on one of the key elements of liberal peacebuilding as detailed within the relevant reconstruction plans, and how these plans manifested in reality. Noted in each chapter are the successes, failures, strengths, and weaknesses in detail, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Chapter 4 examines the economic reforms implemented in Sierra Leone with the focus on government management of the economy, in particular natural resources as public goods and also in terms of wealth distribution, such that, despite national economic growth, living conditions for much of the population have not improved, especially so in rural areas. Chapter 5 focuses on the post-conflict political reform, assessing the efficacy of three principle formulations of accountability: elections, the rule of law, and civil society. Cubitt notes that although the democratisation effort in Sierra Leone is widespread, and despite the fact that perhaps it has also been more of a success than in other countries, it remains nonetheless shallow as many of the same patrimonial relationships endemic before the conflict still persist. Finally, Chapter 6 analyses the social dimensions of reform in order to determine how the new Sierra Leonean state has been able to alter its relationship with the people and in constructing a new social contract. Cubitt notes that although the state has pursued a number of initiatives to bring about a more pluralistic and egalitarian system (for example, through gender mainstreaming), the vast majority of the Sierra Leone people remain marginalised and excluded. This is especially so for those outside the primary urban centres of Bo, Kenema, and Freetown, in particular.

Cubitt's overall assessment of the reforms discussed in these three chapters is that "the stated goals of the reforms bore little resemblance to empirical realities on the ground," (p. 111) and the reforms have largely resulted in "disempowering rather than empowering the masses" (p. 114). Furthermore, Cubitt often notes that when confronted with choices between externally imposed or locally determined priorities, the external priorities tended to hold sway for a variety of reasons, such as the lack of local capacity and a reliance on funds from external donors. These faults may lie within the system of post-conflict reconstruction projects and their funding, as Cubitt at one point concludes that the aim of them should be to get "the structures right from the start" (p. 174).

Elements of the analysis could I feel have been enhanced with the inclusion of a post-colonial theoretical critique, in particular when examining an ethnically stratified class structure in Chapters 1, 4, and 5. This allusion too fraught with power dynamics and so often referred to between the local and external actors, could have been more accurately framed within such a critique in order to demonstrate that Sierra Leone is not an isolated case in this regard. Additionally, Cubitt aimed to provide a "comprehensive" account of the political history of Sierra Leone in order to provide the context of local dynamics of the peacebuilding for the reader; however, the examination begins only with the colonial era. It would have been interesting to note how pre-colonial aspects may have also factored into an assessment of the development of local peacebuilding priorities.

Overall, this book offers a unique, in-depth case study into the realities confronting post-conflict reconstruction plans, especially for how local priorities are often undermined through various processes including: externally determined values and policies, a lack of local and external capacity, and an insufficient understanding of local and national capabilities. Even though it is a country-specific examination of the application of the liberal peace process, the book does offer lessons to be learnt for other cases of post-conflict reconstruction, such as seeing opportunities to reform institutions not usually covered by the liberal peace project, in particular the judicial system. *Local and Global Dynamics of Peacebuilding* is a recommended read for researchers and students in post-liberal peace-making, peace, and conflict studies as well as practitioners in relevant and related international organisations.

About the author:

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Simon Taylor formerly worked for the South African Foreign Service and is now a PhD Candidate at the University of St Andrews, researching types of combatants in conflicts in Africa.