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Analysing the Lord's Resistance Army Through Liberalism & Social Constructivism

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The Lord's Resistance Army: Analysing Conflict Resolution Based Upon Two Different Perspectives within International Relations

"Recent research emphasizes the importance of local conflict in most war and postwar situations. However, UN staff members' and diplomats' neglect of local conflict is a recurrent pattern in third-party interventions." (p. 275), writes Autesserre (2009) when discussing the policy of international organizations on conflict resolution. In his article, he elaborates on the role of international organizations in peacebuilding and international interventions, and he concludes that international organizations often overlook local factors and causes of conflict by using a top-down approach, which frequently results in the failure of peacebuilding. Therefore, Autesserre suggests a different approach to international conflict resolution (Autesserre, 2009, p. 249-280).

Just like Autesserre, I suggest a different approach to conflict resolution in which local factors of conflict will not be neglected. Therefore, this approach will be based upon the understanding of local features instead of using a state level of analysis. In this article I will submit arguments to support this different approach by analysing the conflict in northern Uganda with the rebel group named the Lord's Resistance Army. I will analyse the interference of the international community in this conflict through the perspectives of liberalism and social constructivism within the science of International Relations, using theoretical information from articles and other academic publications. This analysis will provide arguments in order to confirm my thesis that *In terms of international interference, it is advisable for the international community to approach the northern Uganda conflict by the perspective of social constructivism instead of liberalism*.

Section 1 will provide a brief overview with background information of the northern Uganda conflict, followed by sections 2 and 3 in which this conflict with its possible resolution will be examined through the perspectives of liberalism and social constructivism. In the final section, I will come to a conclusion based upon the results found in sections 2 and 3, and this conclusion will lead to the confirmation of my thesis as mentioned above.

1. Background information

In order to understand the analysis carried out in sections 2 and 3, one must first understand the features of the ongoing conflict in northern Uganda with the rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Therefore, this section contains background information regarding this conflict, and also explains the responsibility of the international community to respond to it.

When the incumbent president Museveni of Uganda overthrew the regime of the Acholi general Okello in 1986, the still ongoing conflict of the northern Uganda started. Right after this coup, Museveni started an armed conflict against the Acholi tribe and made its people retreat to the north of Uganda. This suppression and violence against Acholi civilians led to the rise of several resistance groups, with the LRA under the ruling of Kony as the utmost influential one. However, after seizing power the LRA turned against the Acholi people themselves (Baines, 2007, p. 99-101). This non-legitimate group is ever since known for committing human rights violations including inter alia the

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indiscriminate killings, the abductions of children, the use of child soldiers, the mutilations, the rape, and torture of especially Acholi citizens (Apuuli, 2004, p. 391-391).

Due to the severity of these human rights violations, the international community has the responsibility to protect the Acholi citizens as written in a report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (2001).

Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect (p. xi).

Thus, in the case of the northern Uganda conflict, the international community has the responsibility to protect and the competence to intervene in order to stop the human rights violations, since the Ugandan government is unable to exercise full control over its own territory (Akhavan, 2005, p. 403). In the following two sections, this responsibility to protect the victims of the northern Uganda conflict will be expanded through two different perspectives within the science of International Relations. These sections will also show the potential challenges or benefits the international community will face when using one of these perspectives within this specific conflict.

2. Liberalism

This section contains information about the response of the international community to the human rights violations in northern Uganda. Moreover, this response will be examined through the perspective of liberalism within the science of International Relations. Hence, the substantial meaning of this theoretical perspective will first be explained.

"...Liberalism seeks to project values of order, liberty, justice, and toleration into international relations." (p. 103), writes Dunne (2011) when explaining the basic principles of this theoretical perspective. According to him, particularly international institutions are capable of this projection, in order to protect international security. The positive conception of liberalism even advocates interventions in foreign territories to project these values in order to maintain or recover collective security. The harmony of interests between actors is a precondition to be able to cooperate, and is present due to interdependency. Cooperation and interdependency both exist since the presence of trade and international treaties, and will lead to absolute gains for all actors involved. The rise of a political community in the current global order is therefore understandable, and this community can subsequently protect values like human rights by creating international organizations and institutions to intervene when such values are broken (Dunne, 2011, p. 100-112).

As explained in section 1, major human rights values have been broken in the northern Uganda by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and the international community is responsible to react to this fact. Within the perspective of liberalism, the international community can respond by the use of international organizations in order to stop the violence against Acholi citizens. The International Criminal Court (ICC) is such an international organization and "is the first permanent, treaty based, international criminal court established to help end impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community" (International Criminal Court, 2014). From the perspective of liberalism, it is therefore understandable that the ICC issued a warrant against the most prominent actors of the LRA in October 2005, in order to stop the human rights violations (Baines, 2007, p. 99-101). Unfortunately, this warrant proved to be counterproductive since the ICC underestimated the complexity of this conflict (Allen, 2010, p. 242) because of inter alia the assumption that international law is to be superior over national law. Hence, the ICC neglected local factors in the process for peace by implementing their top-down policy (Roth-Arriaza, 2006, p. 7), because its warrant stood in the way of the Juba peace talks, held between the Ugandan government and the LRA (Atkinson, 2010). To wit, surrender became a less appealing option for the LRA because of the existence of the warrant, since surrender would lead to international prosecution by the ICC. This resulted into the continuation of the conflict (Brubacher, 2010, p. 265). The idea that a warrant, handed out by an international institution like the ICC, would lead to peace, thus, has been proven wrong in this case since the warrant only impeded conflict resolution. The use of treaties and warrants by international organizations, as advocated by the perspective of liberalism, is therefore not always the right pathway to achieve peace. Hence, in the next section I will introduce an alternative approach to conflict resolution by again analysing the northern Uganda conflict, albeit

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through a different perspective.

3. Social constructivism

This section in turn, provides an overview of the response of the international community to the human rights violations in northern Uganda as well, albeit examined through the perspective of social constructivism within the science of International Relations. Therefore, the substantial meaning of this theoretical perspective will also first be elaborated. Barnett (2011) writes the following:

Several decades ago many scholars and jurists objected to the very idea of humanitarian intervention because it violated sovereignty's principle of non-intervention and allowed great powers to try to become sheep in wolf's clothing. Over the last fifteen years, though, there is a growing acceptance of humanitarian intervention and a 'responsibility to protect' –when states are unable or unwilling to protect their citizens, then the international community inherits that responsibility (p. 162).

In this quote he shows the key points of social constructivism, because he explains the actors' interests as formed by collectively held ideas. He stresses that the interaction of actors is organized and forced by social structures. Hence, this theoretical perspective is based upon the attempt to understand these structures to fathom problems, in order to be able to solve them. Social constructivism examines the status quo by denaturalizing what is taken for granted, and tries to produce alternative trajectories (Barnett, 2011, p. 159-163). Within this perspective, threats to values and the repatriation of these values are examined, in order to maintain international security (McDonald, 2002, p. 277-295).

As shown in section 2, local factors like the Juba peace talks have been neglected, which resulted into the continuation of the northern Uganda conflict (Atkinson, 2010). Unlike the liberalistic perspective, social constructivism focusses on the understanding of those local factors within a conflict (Barnett, 2011, p. 159-163). Examining those factors within this conflict, one will find that citizens of Uganda prioritize the ending of the atrocities and therefore are less interested in international justice guaranteed by the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Baines, 2007, p. 94). Taken this into account, it would make more sense to focus on those local factors like the Juba peace talks, since potential peace agreements became more likely through this way, instead of focussing on the prosecution by the ICC of those who violate international values like human rights. Therefore, the ICC disregarded national pathways of peacebuilding, which possess a more comprehensible notion of justice (Roth-Arriaza, 2006, p. 11-12). The International Crisis Group (2010), just like Autesserre (2009) as discussed in the first section, advocates focus on local factors of this conflict and thus recommends involved international actors to focus on local solutions with sustainable development programs, in order to stop the atrocities in northern Uganda. Subsequently, the advice of McDonald (2008) in his article on constructivism within security studies, can be taken into account as well, since he claims that peace talks have a greater chance to succeed when one is concerning local factors and by avoiding a state level approach of analysis.

In the following, final, section, the results found in this article will be summarized and compared. It will therefore be possible to ratify my thesis as stated in the introduction.

4. Conclusion

In order to confirm my thesis, section 1 contained background information regarding the northern Uganda conflict. With this information in mind, one was able to understand the analysis as carried out in sections 2 and 3. These analysis showed the failure of the liberalistic approach when it came to intervention in order to stop the atrocities in Uganda. To wit, the warrant, as handed out by the International Criminal Court, is an example of how this approach is visible within this conflict and how it only impeded conflict resolution. This is just one example of the application of liberalism in this conflict, but nevertheless, it provides a clear overview of how this approach in itself can be counterproductive and how this might lead to the continuation of the atrocities. In section 3, a different theoretical perspective was introduced, in which local factors like the Juba peace talks would not have been neglected. Supported by academic articles, I argued in favour of this approach since it is more likely to succeed to end the human rights violations in Uganda. Therefore, I suggest the application of social constructivism in order to

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understand local conflict, instead of solely using a state level approach of analysis of conflicts, as often done by international organizations. This because the understanding of local features in conflicts will more likely lead to the recovering of security and human rights values. Thus, I can hereby positively confirm my thesis.

This thesis only applies to this specific conflict with its analysis and arguments as stated in this article. In order to generalize this thesis, one must analyse other conflicts as well. It is advisable to do so, since it will provide the international community with adequate information and insights of interference in conflicts in order to properly fulfil their responsibility to protect.

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Date Written: January 2014