

# International Statebuilding and Agency: The Rise of Society-Based Approaches to Intervention<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper seeks to draw out an understanding of the role of the shift to the social or societal sphere in international statebuilding discourses. It suggests that this shift can be broadly located as taking place in the last years of the 1990s, with greater disillusionment with institutionalist approaches suggesting that Western or international actors could resolve problems of development, democracy and peace through the export of liberal institutions. As we have shifted away from ideas of “quick fixes”, “early exits” and understandings of the ease with which liberal values and institutions can be exported, so we have discovered the importance of society or of local agency on the ground. It is suggested here that this greater sensitivity to the “limits of liberalism” has facilitated a greater focus on the agency and choice-making of the subaltern subjects of international statebuilding. However, this focus on the agency of the non-Western or post-conflict “Other” has merely facilitated the evasion of Western responsibility for the outcomes of statebuilding interventions as well as providing a framework enabling more intrusive intervention, operating precisely upon this agency and its societal influences.

**Keywords:** *Civil society, International State building, Society-based Approaches to Intervention, Culture and Development, Problem of Autonomy*

## Introduction

In the 1990s, international intervention in the cause of peace and post-conflict reconstruction tended to assume that the problems lay in removing elite blockages to peace and development through the export of liberal institutional frameworks of democracy and the market – the so-called “Liberal Peace” approach.<sup>2</sup> In the statebuilding literature, perhaps the clearest example of the dissatisfaction with top-down institutionalist approaches, which assumed that the export of liberal institutions was enough

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an amended version of the invited presentation for the 11th Middle East Technical University (METU) conference on International Relations, “The World in Crisis”, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, 13-15 June 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See further, Susanna Campbell, David Chandler and Meera Sabaratnam (eds.), *A Liberal Peace? The problems and practices of peacebuilding* (London: Zed, 2011).

to guarantee a transition to liberal forms of peace, development and democracy, was that expressed in Roland Paris' 2004 book *At War's End*.<sup>3</sup> Paris argued that the export of liberal institutional frameworks could not be expected to work as a "quick fix" when the societies were not ready for liberalism. For Paris, the export of liberal institutions would not contribute to the construction of "liberal" outcomes of peace and stability, without further attention to society itself. Paris argued that Western liberal internationalists had underestimated the societal blockages at play through local agency, which prevented the effective operation of liberal institutional frameworks. In advocating "Institutionalization before Liberalization", he argued that, in fact, the introduction of liberal institutions could be highly problematic in societies held to lack the right ideational and cultural agency. In effect, liberal freedoms were held to be problematic and counter-productive in societies where agents were understood to be non- or a-liberal. In these cases, the promotion of democratic norms, was held to involve the initial limiting of political and economic freedoms. External interventions would have to act to restrict and regulate the political, social and economic spheres until behavioural and attitude changes allowed local agents to accept the necessary liberal norms.

Rather than starting from universalist liberal assumptions of the rational and autonomous subject, international statebuilding theorists argued that the liberal subject had to be externally constituted before liberal institutional frameworks could operate effectively. The lessons of the Balkans, the Middle East and of Africa were increasingly interpreted as the problem of too much liberal freedom – or too much democracy - rather than too little. The title of Paul Collier's 2010 book, *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*,<sup>4</sup> sums up the increasing awareness that statebuilding has to be done gradually and under the guidance of external interveners pursuing the new international agendas of agent-focused behavioural and ideational change, through extensive processes of societal intervention. Here, international relations theorists often posed the need to join with anthropologists to understand the agential or societal reproduction of barriers to liberal modes of being.

### **The Shrinking of the Liberal World**

It was through the gaze of sociological, society-based analyses, that the traditional liberal framings of modern political theory became increasingly marginal to the understanding of the problems and practices of international statebuilding. Already, in the early 1990s, sociological constructivists had

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<sup>3</sup> Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Collier, *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Democracy Places* (London: Vintage, 2010).

argued that there needed to be a fundamental break from traditional rationalist or structuralist understandings of state-society relations. With increasing disillusionment with the success of international intervention on the ground, they now argued that sociological or agency-based approaches could be just as useful in explaining the limits to change. The concern with the social construction of "irrational" cultural or ideational mind-sets, as the explanation for differences in economic, social and political developments, had been a preoccupation of society-based approaches outside the discipline of IR since, at least, the work of John R. Commons in the 1930s. For Commons, it was the system of shared societal understandings and behavioural expectations, which explained the success of some countries and the lack of development of others.

Sociological approaches, bringing a variety of endogenously or agency-constructed frameworks of explanation to bear on the reproduction of societal barriers to the diffusion of liberal democratic norms, have increasingly come to dominate the academic and policy agendas in the 2000s. This has particularly been the case in the fields of international peacebuilding and international statebuilding, where the discourse of democracy has shifted from that of "freeing" the subject from authoritarian elite regimes of regulation, to transforming the subject itself through a broad range of societal interventions under the rubric of the promotion of "good governance". These multi-level and multi-stakeholder initiatives are held to be necessary to enable the behavioural and ideational transformation of subjects through their participatory engagement in a wide range of policy activities. Other academic commentators have similarly focused on the "hybrid" outcomes when there are attempts to impose global democratic norms on non- or a-liberal societies, arguing, in effect, that the Western export of liberal institutional frameworks is undermined or blocked by countervailing societal practices and institutions.<sup>5</sup>

Here, critical international relations theorizing, about the Western export of "Liberal Peace" and the local societal or non-liberal barriers to its successful promotion, lays stress on local agency often at the deepest levels of "hidden transcript" - the cognitive and sociological institutional context in which shared meanings are produced and transmitted at the local societal level.<sup>6</sup> They call for more attention to the "local" and even "local-local" communicative transactions and to the specific cultural values and

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Roger Mac Ginty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> These works draw upon the ideas of James C. Scott, see, for example, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

“modes of life” of those in non-Western states and societies,<sup>7</sup> may seem a radical departure from traditional theorizing in international relations, but there are difficulties associated with the rejection of the universal rationalist assumptions of traditional liberal political science. Rationalist approaches tended to see ideas and choices as a product or reflection of rational interests, and therefore saw the structural or material socio-economic context as the key to understanding and addressing problems of difference and ideational contestation. Constructivist and other societal-based approaches, which eschew rationalist explanations, tend to explain differences in economic wealth or political institutions as the product of agentially-constructed ideational structures and choices. In these approaches, the reproduction of difference is more likely to be understood as a product of agential social or inter-subjective construction than as shaped by material or structural social relations. As Douglass North, John Wallis and Barry Weingast put it:

The task of social science is to explain the performance characteristics of societies through time, including the radical gap in human well-being between rich countries and poor as well as the contrasting forms of political organization, beliefs, and social structure that produce these variations in performance.<sup>8</sup>

For endogenous, agency-based approaches to social differentiation, the operation of market forces is no longer part of any causal explanation because material differences and social relations (though obviously important) are not, in themselves, adequate for explaining change but are often the product of pre-existing social institutional frameworks. Rather than economic orders, endogenous frameworks of thinking understand the world in terms of “social orders” as they allege that social norms or social institutional frameworks are key to shaping individual behaviours and beliefs which contribute to the perpetuation of differences and inequalities. The key research questions then become the different patterns of social order, which enable theorists to explain the “sociological” mystery of the political and economic limits of liberalism: why democratic norms are hard to promote, and “why poor countries stay poor”.

The endogenous agency-based approach to the problems of liberal limits was influentially articulated in development economics from the early 1970s. One outstanding theorist in this area was Douglass C. North, the

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Oliver P. Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace: The Infrapolitics of Peacebuilding* (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Douglass C. North, John J. Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.1.

Nobel prize-winning economist and leading World Bank policy-advisor. Perhaps his best known book, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*,<sup>9</sup> emphasized the importance not of formal government institutions (which were seen as relatively easy to change through external assistance) but informal institutions, particularly “attitudes and ideologies”; concluding, in good sociological institutional fashion that: “Informal constraints matter. We need to know much more about culturally derived norms of behaviour and how they interact with formal rules to get better answers to such issues (of how social orders evolve).”

In many ways, international relations was a disciplinary latecomer in rejecting rationalist framings, which is part of the reason why the transition away from Realism (in many academic centers) occurred so rapidly and with relatively little disciplinary reflection. The shared theoretical frameworks with other endogenous or institutionalist approaches in sociology, history and economics have meant that social constructivist theorizing has been easily accommodated in mainstream institutional policy perspectives regarding post-conflict transition. This can be usefully analysed by surveying the dominance of endogenous perspectives concerning the limited success of international statebuilding interventions and the articulation of the extension of international statebuilding practices through the realm of civil society interventions.

### **The Societal Problematic of Intervention**

This paper thereby seeks to highlight that the discourse of civil society is key to understanding the statebuilding discourses of intervention and regulation, which have developed in the last decade. In drawing out the links between the framings of previous endogenous or agency-based understandings of culture and of new endogenous approaches to civil society, it seeks to explain how the discourse of civil society intervention has been reinvented on the basis of the moral divide established and cohered through the discourse of culture and how the discourse of civil society contains a strong apologetic content, capable of legitimizing and explaining the persistence of social and economic problems or political fragmentation while simultaneously offering potential policy programmes on the basis of highly ambitious goals of social transformation.

In the policy framings of international statebuilding, the concept of civil society is used very differently from how the concept was deployed in traditional political discourses of liberal modernity. This paper will clarify some of these differences and highlight that, whereas for traditional

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<sup>9</sup> Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

conceptions of civil society, autonomous agency was seen as a positive factor, in the international statebuilding discourse, autonomous agency is seen as a problematic factor and one that necessitates regulatory intervention. Civil society discourse highlights the problematic nature of autonomy, understood as irreducible differences, which risk conflict if not regulated via the correct societal interventions.

Civil society will be understood less as a really existing set of institutions and practices or as a sphere of policy intervention, than as a discursive framework capable of producing meaning, i.e. as a policy paradigm through which the problems (and solutions) of statebuilding intervention are interpreted. The earlier racial or cultural problematization of the post-colonial subject and moral framing of difference was reproduced in the paradigm of civil society, which reproduced the apologia of essentialized differences at the same time as understanding irrational or sub-optimal social, economic or political outcomes on the basis of agential choices made by autonomous subjects. The civil society framework, views post-colonial societies from the standpoint of self-governing individuals (as in the liberal-democratic model) rather than as submerged and subjugated by collectivities of race, nation or religion (as in the framings of race and culture) and, to this extent, may appear to be more progressive. However, as argued below, this would be misleading.

### **The Differentiation of Culture**

After the Second World War, overt articulations of racial understandings of international divisions were largely discredited by the experiences of Nazism, the successes of anti-colonial struggles, the decline of the European colonial powers and the Cold War competition of the Soviet Union. However, the inequalities of the international sphere were not overcome. In many ways, the arguments of racial distinction were taken over through the replacement of the concept of race by the concept of culture.<sup>10</sup> This discourse of apology in the essentialization or reification of difference took the form of discourses of cultural difference. Cultural differences were given the same determining weight as earlier distinctions of race, on the basis that cultures were separate, homogeneous and with their own paths of development. Path dependencies were key to understanding culture in reified terms of dependency upon the past rather than as reflective of the social relations of the present. The hold of the past over the present thereby enabled a moral rather than a racial critique of the capacity of the colonial (and post-colonial) other.

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<sup>10</sup> Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

As Edward Said noted in *Orientalism*, social and political movements of non-Western societies were interpreted in cultural rather than political terms by colonial theorists. These interpretations always highlighted the psychological and non-rational underpinnings of demands and protests, which were seen to express the hold of tradition or the need to express identity, often in reaction to the civilizing impact of the colonial project.<sup>11</sup> This moral critique of the non-Western subject was based upon a culturalized framing of the subject as less rational than the liberal rights-subject of Western democracy. Culture played an important role as apologia for colonial power and the limits to which colonial authorities were able to marginalize resistance to their rule. In this context, opposition was understood to be the product of a clash of cultures rather than as a product of colonial frameworks of domination. This understanding of a clash of cultures took its sharpest form in the theorization of the problems of "transition" or of "hybridity" as an inevitable consequence of Western influence.

Hybridity was seen to be a problematic consequence of colonial influence undermining traditional forms of social relations without establishing Western norms and values. Instead, the clash of cultures was seen to result in a "spiritual", "moral" or "cultural" vacuum.<sup>12</sup> Colonial intervention had resulted in the dilemma or contradiction of creating a maladjusted society, lacking the stability of either traditional society or of modern society. It was in the discourses of imperial apologia in the late 1940s that much of the statebuilding and statebuilding discussions of transition (in the 1990s) and hybridity (in the 2000s) have their intellectual roots.

One of the key concepts denoting the problematic nature of this clash of cultures was that of "marginal man": the product of both colonial intervention and traditional culture, but a hybrid product, inhabiting neither culture but exhibiting the problems of this cultural clash. The theory of marginal man was first explored by Robert Ezra Park, one of the leading American sociologists in the interwar years and a former President of the American Sociological Society.<sup>13</sup> Park explicitly raised questions about the moral integrity of the marginal man, developing the notion that an individual suspended between two cultural realities is marginal, resulting in difficulties in establishing a stable identity. His work on the problems of hybridity was more fully developed, in the colonial context, by his student Everett

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1985), p.236.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Furedi, *Colonial Wars and the Politics of Third World Nationalism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994), p.123.

<sup>13</sup> Frank Furedi, *The New Ideology of Imperialism: Renewing the Moral Imperative* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), pp.52-53.

Stonequist, who explained different reactions to colonial domination as the product of maladjustment.<sup>14</sup>

Where the discourse of race expressed the confidence of imperial rule and the essentializing of difference, the discourse of culture expressed the decline of the imperial project and a defence against the shifting international norms, which expressed more sympathy for the claims of the colonial subject. The elitist assumptions of Western superiority were no longer reproduced in the discourse of race, but those of the psychological problems of the (post-)colonial subject and of cultural hybridity: these moral, psychological and cultural frameworks reflected the shift from naturalizing and legitimizing external rule to ways of negotiating imperial withdrawal, suggesting that the limited progress made to democracy and self-government and in terms of economic and social progress could be explained through the path-dependencies of culture and the irrational outcomes of the cultural clash between the "liberal" West and the traditional values and beliefs of the colonial Other. This early societal discourse of culture as apologia can be drawn out in relation to the three key themes of what will become the statebuilding discourse: development, conflict and democracy.

### **Culture and Development**

In the post-1945 world, the international agenda was dominated by decolonization and while the concept of culture played a similar role to that of race, the questions of controversy were less those of rule and the justifications for political inequality, than those of economic and wealth division between the former colonial powers and the post-colonial world. By the 1970s and the end of the post-war economic boom of European reconstruction, the economic and social divisions between the "developed" and the "developing" world had become greater and were the subject of a number of critiques which understood the problem to be that of the world market system which reproduced the inequalities of power and opportunity despite the formal equalities of the international states-system.<sup>15</sup>

Douglass C. North, as noted above, developed the framework of social institutionalism as a direct apologetic defence of the status quo, asserting that, rather than capitalism, culture was the key to understanding developmental inequalities. North tackled the framings of the critics of underdevelopment directly through the assertion that there was no such thing as the logic of capitalism but rather many capitalisms, dependent on

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<sup>14</sup> Everett V. Stonequist, *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961).

<sup>15</sup> For example, Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967).

their institutional and cultural context.<sup>16</sup> The important point to highlight is that culture came to the fore along with disillusionment with the extent of economic and social progress in the post-colonial world. The shift from economic and social explanations to the realm of the cultural reflected the lowering of policy horizons, as culture operated as a limiting factor for international intervention. For North, there was little that international intervention could do as even institutional reform at the level of state policy would only have a limited impact unless the informal values and norms of post-colonial societies were in line with these policy goals. There was therefore little that could be done to externally assist post-colonial development as “informal constraints that are culturally derived will not change immediately in reaction to changes in formal rules” and it was this “tension between altered formal rules and the persisting informal constraints” which produced counterproductive outcomes.<sup>17</sup>

### **Culture, Conflict and Democracy**

During the Cold War, the apologetic framing of the problems of the post-colonial world was framed defensively, attempting to exculpate the colonial powers and explain the reproduction and institutionalization of inequalities independently of the impact of the workings of the world market. This culturalized framing of difference and inequality was given greater weight in the first decade after the end of the Cold War as the end of super-power rivalry opened up the post-colonial world to more extensive international intervention.

Culture was a vital framing justifying new frameworks of intervention in the 1990s. However, culture operated as a way of legitimizing intervention, in an international context where traditional views of sovereignty and non-intervention were formally dominant, rather than as a comprehensive framework for international engagement in the paradigm of international statebuilding. In this respect, culture already appeared to be a limiting framing in the 1990s. Perhaps the best examples of 1990s’ discussions of the role of cultural difference can be seen in Mary Kaldor’s conception of “New Wars” and Francis Fukuyama’s views of the role of culture in relation to civil society in democratic transitions. Here we see culture play the role of legitimizing external international engagement but also limiting it.

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<sup>16</sup> Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*; see also Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), pp.164-165.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

Kaldor developed the concept of "New Wars" to describe conflicts in the post-colonial world in ways which constructed a moral divide between the understanding of war and conflict in the West and in the non-West. The binary of old and new war has little to do with the spatial framing of conflict as intra-state rather than inter-state, for example, the US or Spanish civil wars would be construed as old wars rather than new wars.<sup>18</sup> Following Kalevi Holsti's analysis of "wars of the third kind",<sup>19</sup> Kaldor drew a moral distinction where old wars were rational, constitutive of a collective or public interest and politically legitimate whereas new wars were understood to be irrational, driven by private interest and politically illegitimate. This moral divide then enabled Kaldor to argue that illegitimate political representatives had no right to hide behind the rights of sovereignty and that external humanitarian intervention was morally necessary and legitimate, casting international interveners as interest-free enforcers of emerging international legal norms rather than as undermining international law.

Like Kaldor, Fukuyama also used a culture paradigm, in the 1990s, to explain the limits to democratic transition and the restrictive nature of international recognition and institutional integration, suggesting that those former-Soviet states which were not being engaged with (such as Belarus, Ukraine and Russia) lacked the cultural preconditions for transition. In calling for a lowering of expectations about the speed and extent of post-communist reform, he advocated an apologia based on the problem of underestimating the cultural gap:

...social engineering on the level of institutions has hit a massive brick wall: experiences of the past century have taught most democracies that ambitious rearrangements of institutions often cause more unanticipated problems than they solve. By contrast, the real difficulties affecting the quality of life in modern democracies have to do with the social and cultural pathologies that seem safely beyond the reach of institutional solutions, and hence of public policy. The chief issue is quickly becoming one of culture.<sup>20</sup>

Fukuyama stressed that while civil society may be a precondition for democratic transition, "civil society in turn has precursors and preconditions at the level of culture".<sup>21</sup> For Fukuyama, the understandings needed to

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<sup>18</sup> Mary Kaldor, *Old and New Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), pp.13-30.

<sup>19</sup> Kalevi J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.19-40.

<sup>20</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The Primacy of Culture", *Journal of Democracy* (Vol. 6, No.1, 1995) pp.7-14.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

explain the slowness of cultural change require the expertise of sociologists and anthropologists rather than political theorists.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Reinvention of Civil Society**

Culture played a similar role to race in essentializing difference during the Cold War and early 1990s, in that it acted as apologia for differential treatment. Central to the continuity of discourses of race and culture and those of the more extensive interventionist frameworks of international statebuilding would be this privileging of difference over universality. The extension of international statebuilding is dependent upon the dismissal of universal social, economic or political frameworks of understanding. The precondition for the reinvention of civil society as both explanatory factor and sphere of policy-making is the understanding that the problems of post-colonial or post-conflict society are a product of difference located within the historic path-dependencies of social structures and institutions. There is thereby no universalizing logic, within which we can understand the actions and political expressions of these societies within the same framings as those of the Western liberal-democratic subject, held to be capable of rational political and economic choices, thus constituting the problematic of non- or a-liberal agency.

The key to understanding the role of the concept of civil society in the framing of international statebuilding is in how post-colonial or post-conflict societies come to be understood as open to manipulation or change through policy-intervention. In fact, the institution-building at the heart of international statebuilding is focused on a reframing of traditional liberal democratic conceptions of civil society rather than any shift in the formal understanding of the operation of state-level institutions. For this reason it is important to spend a little time on what could be called the post-liberal framing of civil society and the governance framing of policy objectives which accompanies it.<sup>23</sup>

The first point to establish is that the shift from cultural framings of the problems of colonial and post-colonial societies to a civil society framing operates on two levels: that of ideas or understanding, the comprehension of the nature of the problems themselves, and the practical or policy level, of the kinds of external policy responses which might be appropriate to address these problems. On both these levels, it would be wrong to understand the civil society framing of problems or policy interventions as being narrowly focused upon something which we might seek to describe as civil society as

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p.7.

<sup>23</sup> See David Chandler, "The EU and Southeastern Europe: The Rise of Post-Liberal Governance", *Third World Quarterly* (Vol.31, No.2, 2010).

a real sphere or set of relations. Foucault's work on biopolitics usefully draws our attention to the transformation of civil society framings as both ideational (operating as a "network" or "grid" of "intelligibility", i.e. as a way of understanding the problematic of post-colonial or post-conflict society) and as facilitating a set of practices, making possible a series of policy interventions, which follow from civil society becoming a sphere of statebuilding intervention (becoming "governmentalizable").<sup>24</sup>

The second point, which Foucault also draws our attention to, is that this framing of civil society depends upon inverting or transforming the classical liberal doctrine of civil society as a sphere in which the autonomous subject interacts. For Enlightenment theorists, civil society was conceived in political and juridical terms, as Foucault notes, "civil society is absolutely indistinguishable from political society", for example, in classic liberal framings, such as John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*.<sup>25</sup> This view of the rights-bearing autonomous subject of civil society is also clear in the classical treatment in Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* in which civil society is the political reflection of Adam Smith's economic analysis in which the autonomous interaction of rational interest-bearing individuals results in the collective development of the social good.

The foundational basis of the classical rights-based liberal framing of civil society is the autonomous interaction of subjects free from governing intervention. The rights- and interest-bearing subject of liberal theorizing exists prior to the institutions of government and civil society is understood to be grounded in human nature as an indispensable and constant factor of human existence.<sup>26</sup> The difference between civil society and political society is not in the subjects comprising it but the lack of a formal contract establishing or constituting sovereignty, the reciprocal relations are the basis of market relations and liberal-democratic forms of political-legal relations but exist independently and prior to these.

The subject of civil society – the autonomous rational individual - is the foundational subject of both halves of the liberal equation of government, the subject of both rights and interests. With regard to both, the individual subject's pursuit of self-interest coincides with the collective good as interests converge either through the market mechanism or through the reasoned debate of the political sphere. The liberal subject is not open to government intervention, but rather, establishes the rationality of *laisser-*

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), p.252.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.297.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.298-9.

*faire*.<sup>27</sup> This subject is very different from the post-colonial or post-conflict subject who is assumed to be unable to pursue their interests or rights in a civic way, which contributes to the collective good of society. In this framing, the problems of post-conflict or post-colonial societies are understood as problems with the frameworks or institutional contexts of these societies, as reflected in the choices made by individuals. This enables these choices to become understood as being amenable to policy intervention.

The third crucial point to highlight is that the policy interventions, which can impact on these choices, do not necessarily have to be restricted to the narrow sphere of what might be described as civil society in "reality". In the civil society paradigm of international statebuilding, international policy practices assume that the rational choices made by post-colonial and post-conflict subjects are irrational due to the institutional context and that this institutional context can be reformed in specific ways to facilitate the choosing of different choices. In this way, the divisive context of policy-making hierarchies can be legitimized (as in racial and cultural understandings) but the problem of the autonomy of the post-colonial subject is brought to the fore. In the civil society approach there is no assumption that external interveners can make policies on behalf of the post-conflict subject.

The task of international statebuilding intervention, in this paradigm of understanding, is that of the indirect influencing of outcomes through institutional means. The framework of civil society enables management at a distance, where intervention is understood as necessary but never as sufficient as the post-colonial subject is the means and ends of intervention. Civil society will only have been achieved when this subject makes the "right" or "civil" choices revealing a rationality and maturity with regard to collective interests. The task of international intervention is to help facilitate this through policy intervention at the level of institutional frameworks facilitating the compatibility of individual choices with collective outcomes.

Civil society becomes central to the international statebuilding paradigm of understanding only when this classical liberal framing is transformed: when civil society becomes a sphere of external or international policy-intervention rather than an unproblematic sphere of autonomy as under rationalist framings of the liberal polity. Civil society becomes a way of understanding social problems and policy interventions on the basis of reconceiving cultural discourses, which understood problems as deeply rooted and not amenable to policy intervention. In fact, policy intervention only becomes possible with the expansion of civil society as a framework for understanding and managing social problems. By removing civil society from

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.270.

the political-juridical framing of rights-based liberalism it opens up “a new object, a new domain or field” for policy intervention,<sup>28</sup> on the basis of which post-colonial and post-conflict society can become the object of policy.

Foucault points towards how civil society is transformed. Whereas cultural understandings (as racial framings before them) understood social problems as being the product of collective identification and belonging, the civil society framework privileges the individual and understands social outcomes as the products of individual choices. Civil society becomes the mediating link in which individuals respond to “environmental variables”.<sup>29</sup> Methodologically, the shift from the collective of race, ethnicity or culture, to the privileging of the individual, enables civil society to be formulated as a sphere of intervention.

The statebuilding policy framework depends on the relationship between the state and society being inverted. Rather than society being natural and the state as the product of societal relations, the state is prior and society and social relations are seen to be the product of state-shaped institutions at both formal and informal levels. In this way, society (of interest pursuing individuals) is held to be highly malleable. This malleability is based upon viewing social and political outcomes from the viewpoint of individual choices. As Foucault notes, in the shift from culture to civil society “we move over to the side of the individual subject” but not as the subject of rights but as an object open to policy interventions.<sup>30</sup>

The transformation of cultural framings of conflict in post-colonial or post-conflict societies into civil society framings can be highlighted through a comparison of Kaldor’s 1990s new wars thesis with the “greed and grievance” framework developed by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler in the mid-2000s.<sup>31</sup> It could be argued that the intention of the Collier thesis is little different from Kaldor’s: that of morally delegitimizing political actors in contexts of post-colonial conflict, however, Collier’s reconstruction of conflict in the rational choice framework of institutionalist approaches facilitates a much broader or holistic range of policy interventions than does Kaldor’s.

Rather than morally distinguish the post-colonial context from that of the West, making it seem merely “irrational” or “backward”, the rational choice framing of Collier seeks to develop an understanding of post-colonial societies in the universalist terms of economic frameworks of individual

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.295.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.269.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.252.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”, *Oxford Economic Papers* (Vol.56, No. 4, 2004), pp. 563-595; Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler and Dominic Rohner, “Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War”, *CSAE WPS* (No.10, 2006).

choices. In their critique of theorists who sought to understand conflict in the rational terms of political rights (struggles over grievances) Collier and his Oxford University-based team sought to understand conflict in terms of individual economic interests. In this framing, grievance no longer becomes explanatory or a legitimating factor, it is the opportunity for rebellion that has explanatory value. Essentially, if finance is easily available (for example, due to easy access to primary commodity exports) and there is little opportunity cost (i.e., few other avenues to earn income, if access to secondary education is low and the economy is stagnant) then conflict "entrepreneurs" will arise who do not necessarily have any stake in furthering the interests or needs of their alleged constituents.<sup>32</sup>

Conflict is entirely removed from the political-judicial framing of modern liberal understandings. For Collier's project: "where rebellion is feasible, it will occur without any special inducements in terms of motivation",<sup>33</sup> "motivation is indeterminate, being supplied by whatever agenda happens to be adopted by the first social entrepreneur to occupy the viable niche".<sup>34</sup> Once conflict is understood as the product of the choices of individuals, within an economic (rather than a political) framework of understanding, the possibility of reshaping the institutional context, and therefore the outcome of decision-making, arises. This approach of indirectly influencing the conduct of individuals on the basis of this shift from a rights-based to an economic or rational-choice framework of understanding is the civil society approach which has displaced cultural framings within the policy-practices of international statebuilding.

### **Civil Society and the Problem of Autonomy**

Whereas the liberal-democratic tradition argues that social conflicts can be resolved through rational deliberation and institutional reforms, the statebuilding paradigm does not assume that conflicts within civil society can be resolved through democratic processes and therefore opens up the sphere of civil society to policy intervention in order to structure institutional frameworks which can contain conflicts. This active, interventionist approach to civil society argues that external intervention by government or external actors is necessary to challenge or disrupt irrational or counterproductive forms of political identification through the process of multiplying frames of political identification. In this respect, interventionist civil society policy has become central to international statebuilding as a framework in which political and social collectivities are understood and engaged with as

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<sup>32</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War", pp. 563-595.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

products of irrational mind-sets shaped by the past but as open to transformation.

In this framing, civil society intervention is often presented as a way of challenging criminal, ethnic, regional, or nationalist conceptions of political identity and providing a policy framework through which these identifications can be substituted with a variety of alternative identifications, such as those of women, youth, unemployed, small businesses etc. The precondition being that these alternative identities transgress and cross-cut those which are considered to be irrational and problematic. This multiplication of political identities is then held to pluralize the political process, with barriers to progress in statebuilding goals overcome through the means of civil society intervention.

As Audra Mitchell and Stephanie Kappler highlight, this framing of civil society as a sphere of policy intervention, draws upon internal Western discourses critiquing liberal rationalist approaches (much as earlier colonial discourses drew upon internal Western elite concerns).<sup>35</sup> Concerns with difference and the inability of the liberal-democratic process to overcome particularist and conflicting identities have been expressed clearly by critics of the rationalist assumptions of modern framings of the political. Perhaps, most influential in this respect have been agonistic frameworks, which suggest that conflict is inevitable and that differences are irreconcilable through liberal democratic frameworks<sup>36</sup> but that conflict can be accommodated and transformed through civil society intervention with the goal of multiplying political identifications. This has been expressed by, for example, William Connolly, in terms of the development of "agonistic respect",<sup>37</sup> or by Chantal Mouffe, through reviving the left/right distinction.<sup>38</sup> The key point about the agonistic critique of rationalist approaches to democracy was that civil society becomes problematized as a sphere of irreconcilable difference at the same time as it becomes transformed into a sphere of policy intervention. Transferred to the sphere of international intervention, in the statebuilding policy framework, a whole set of policy practices open up, based upon the thesis that through engaging with and transforming uncivil post-colonial or post-conflict societies – irrational antagonistic conflict can be transformed into rational agonistic contestation.

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<sup>35</sup> Audra Mitchell and Stephanie Kappler, "Transformative Civil Society and the EU Approach to Peacebuilding", paper presented at the *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* conference "After Liberalism" (London: London School of Economics, 17-18 October 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>37</sup> William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005).

Through institutionalist practices, external intervention is held to be able to build or constitute civil societies as a basis upon which the problems of societal development, inclusion and security can be resolved.

As noted above, with regard to the moral or cultural understanding of the problem of post-colonial society, the starting assumption is that civil society lacks the rational or civic qualities of civil society in the West. The focus of policy analysts is on group, ethnic, religious or regional identifications, which are understood to be products of the past or path-dependencies of conflict, or colonial or Soviet rule. Civil society is understood to be hybrid in the sense of reflecting the divisions or traditions of society but as open to intervention and transformation through informal institutional change (change of the norms and values of society). The statebuilding discourse of civil society intervention is very different from that of the 1980s and early 1990s where writers and commentators tended to juxtapose civil society as a sphere of pristine values and civic norms vis-à-vis the sphere of formal politics and state power, which was seen to be self-seeking and exclusionary. Civil society as a sphere of external intervention is necessarily hybrid and the field of both strategic calculation and tactical engagement; as Timothy D. Sisk notes:

Strategically, the promotion of civil society cannot occur in a platitudinous fashion that sees all civil society as an inherent good for peace and democratization. Quite the contrary, there needs to be a sharp strategy of differentiation in civil society promotion by which international donors are quite discriminating in identifying three types of non-state actors to support: those that cross-cut identity lines or fissures of conflict..., those that are moderate but reflecting primarily one perspective or protagonist social group, and those that are more extreme but which, through coaxing and inclusion, can become moderate...<sup>39</sup>

In the statebuilding literature, the goal of external intervention is to transform civil society forms of voluntary association from existing and divisive forms (of bonding social capital) to pluralist and inclusivist forms (of bridging social capital).<sup>40</sup> The clash of cultures, in the self-understanding of international statebuilders, is played out in the policy interventions that attempt to transform traditional (non)civil society into a civic polity in which

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<sup>39</sup> Timothy D. Sisk, "Peacebuilding as Democratization: Findings and Recommendations", in Anna K. Jarstad and Timothy D. Sisk (eds.), *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.255.

<sup>40</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

social and political divisions are submerged, mitigated or disappear. For this reason, civil society cannot be left to its own devices: "effective international action requires identifying and working diligently against those civil society groups that are deemed not constructive to peacebuilding aims, either because of their irredeemably extreme nature and positions or because they have other interests or activities...that work against progress toward peace or democracy".<sup>41</sup>

Civil society is seen as the sphere capable of generating the solutions to problems of conflict, the barriers to development or to democracy. The focus on local agency in the sphere of civil society, rather than social or economic transformation, builds on the moral and cultural discourses of empire with their emphasis of maladjustment and psychological framings of social and political questions. The problems are perceived to be in the hold of the past over the minds of post-colonial subjects rather than the social relations of the present. The precondition of civil society intervention is the assumption of the irrationality of the informal institutional frameworks - of the mindsets - of post-colonial subjects; their problematic agency.

These irrational mindsets are held to be capable of transformation through policy intervention; it is held that irrational values and identities can be challenged by education and social interaction, which encourages the pluralization of political identities. It is for this reason that civil society intervention takes two main forms.<sup>42</sup> Firstly, there is support for "democracy groups", NGOs engaging in policy advocacy or civic education, which directly promote the politics of inclusion and civic principles. The second group of internationally-funded NGOs are those which, while not directly advocating democracy and civic values, attempt to pluralize political identification on the basis of ascribed identities held to be capable of breaking down primary collective affiliations, such as those of women, youth or small and medium business enterprises. In post-conflict situations, often any framework for engaging people across ethnic or ideological divides is considered productive for changing people's mindsets and breaking them from the hold of dominant and problematic political identities.<sup>43</sup>

Despite being a framework making a broad range of policy interventions both possible and legitimate, the discourse of civil society is flexible enough to also offer an understanding of the limits to policy success or to societal transformation (as with the previous discourses of race and of culture). As Carothers and Ottaway note, civil society intervention, as a key

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<sup>41</sup> Sisk, *op.cit.* in note 39, pp.255-6.

<sup>42</sup> Roberto Belloni, "Civil Society in War-to-Democracy Transitions", in Anna K. Jarstad and Timothy D. Sisk (eds.) *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Statebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> David Chandler, *Bosnia: Faking Democracy after Dayton* (London: Pluto, 1999), p.40.

framing of policy-making, evolved with the extension of statebuilding mandates and goals in response to the perceived failures of democratic transition in the mid-1990s.<sup>44</sup> During the Cold War there was no discussion of civil society intervention as part of democracy-promotion, intervention was limited to indirect support for economic development or support for moderate political parties against political extremes. There was little support for societal movements, which were often seen to be too much under the influence of leftist programmes. The exception was in Eastern Europe where social protest opposed communist rule. The end of the Cold War enabled greater societal intervention as well as associating civil society movements with democratic transition.

Civil society becomes a focal point of international intervention and the statebuilding project because it posits a framework in which international engagement can be legitimized on the basis of the agency of the post-colonial subject. Cultural frameworks posit autonomous agency as problematic and act as apologia for the limited success of external intervention but cannot provide a framework of legitimacy for intervention or for a set of policy prescriptions. In civil society interventions, the agency of the post-colonial subject is both apologia and means and the goal of intervention. Intervention in civil society is seen to be the precondition for the effective of conflict-free exercise of the agency of the subject, with civil society - harmonious or conflict-free interaction - as the goal of intervention.

## Conclusion

International statebuilding is increasingly operating on a holistic paradigm of preventive intervention and indirect regulation, external intervention not to control states or societies but to enable them to transform local agency perceived as problematic – as the “root cause” of the problems being addressed. The discourse of culture which replaced that of race, as an agency- rather than structurally-based explanation for inequality, fitted uneasily with the interventionist framework of international statebuilding. The emphasis on differential cultures worked on the endogenous production of societal differences to provide an apologia for economic and social inequalities but provided little purchase for regulatory intervention. It is only once cultural differences are reinterpreted as social constructs, which can be shaped and reshaped through institutional intervention, that civil society becomes a central concept within the international statebuilding policy framework.

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, “Introduction: The Burgeoning World of Civil Society Aid”, in Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers (eds.), *Funding Virtue: Civil Society and Democracy Promotion* (Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000), p.7.

The focus upon civil society maintains the role of endogenous, agency-based understandings in rationalizing difference and inequality on the basis of distinctive societal “path dependencies” created in specific contexts of interaction between states and societies, but also - through positing these differences as the agential choices of the individuals within those societies – opens up society as a sphere of external policy intervention. Civil society enables difference and inequality to be articulated and explained but locates these distinctions as products of the agency of these societies themselves. In taking over a modern liberal concept, which had a positive framing of individual autonomy, the statebuilding discourse tends to be much more judgmental and moralistic about drawbacks to policy interventions at the same time as expanding the interventionist policy remit of international statebuilding beyond that possible through the framework of cultural division.

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