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The Distinction of Peace

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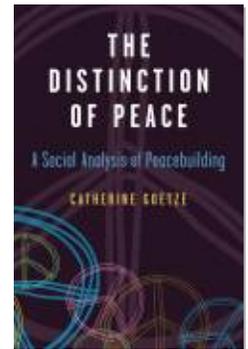
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Conclusion



In March 2004, riots broke out all over Kosovo. Kosovo Albanians attacked Kosovo Serbs in the enclaves and neighborhoods where they had remained after the first violent wave of expulsion in summer and autumn 1999.¹ In winter 2014 and spring 2015, young Kosovo Albanians emigrated massively from the region and illegally crossed the borders into European Union countries.² Ten years apart, both events exemplify the difficulties of peacebuilding: a precarious peace agreement, one that reflects international diplomatic haggling more than local conditions of violence, is administered by an international elite that pursues a strict liberalization program (including the forced privatization of state-owned companies) and legitimizes weak and corrupt governments, which, in turn, suffer from porous governance and are unable to provide any perspective to their citizens in the face of rising levels of unemployment and poverty. As Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing writes,

rubbing two sticks together produces heat and light; one stick alone is just a stick. As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power.³

The friction created by international peacebuilding is, indeed, heat and light, yet rarely peace. Even if physical safety is (re)established after conflict (and the riots of 2004 showed that this was not the case), peace-

building rarely founds peace—if peace is to be understood in any way as a measure of collective well-being, stability, and prosperity.

This observation was the starting point into an inquiry as to the conditions of possibility by which peacebuilding is continued even though it rarely fulfills its promises. Far from being only an international policy, peacebuilding is a versatile practice around which a social field has emerged over several decades. It is a global socio-professional field in which global power relations are enacted and reproduced in multiple ways: in professional practices and values, in political struggles and discourses, and in the everyday lives and professional careers of peacebuilders. Peacebuilding continues because it has become for a large range of people and organizations, at many different social levels, a way of earning a life and leading a professional career. However, the field analysis revealed that the evolution of peacebuilding not only represents the making of a profession but also the creation of a specific culture and habitus with its own codes, references, discourses, norms, and rules. This culture resembles strongly the middle-class culture of the new liberal professions of the nineteenth century in Europe and America. This resemblance is not a coincidence given that the social structure of the field reflects largely the Western middle classes—in its social outlook as well as in its more institutionalized patterns, for example, in the emphasis on education and the subsequent privilege of a small circle of educational institutions.

Subject to the pressures of neoliberalism, peacebuilders have interpreted the spirit of capitalism into an ethics of continuous professional reinvention and projectist entrepreneurship. The diffuseness and weak institutionalization of the field has stimulated the expansion of personal networks as means of professional development. The cult of the entrepreneurial self—the man or woman of vision, initiative, creativity, and merit who constantly reinvents him- or herself—is sustained by the highly individualist and individualizing working and living environment of highly mobile cosmopolitans. Contrary to its universalizing discourse, such cosmopolitanism is highly particular and presupposes an education and socialization in a limited number of institutions and social contexts.⁴ The field sustains its own dynamics through this particularism.

Consequently, the field is self-referential and its reproduction is quite independent from the local (however defined). Its autoproducting dynamics make the field immune from fundamental criticism and also to a large extent against external shocks. Even though the field is under constant scrutiny and subject to a large variety of scholarly research,

changes to peacebuilding practices remain internal to the field, incremental, and do not question fundamentally its social structures or its *doxa* and *nomos*. Even violent attacks on peacebuilders such as the 2003 car bomb attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad, which killed twenty-two people, including the special envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello, do not shake the field in its foundations. They simply lead to reinforced security procedures that produce ever more material manifestations of the peacebuilders' separateness from the local environment. Hence, the building of walled compounds secured with barbed wire and by roadblocks, and the increased use of armored vehicles that are not allowed to stop en route, are extremely visible forms of the field's closure.⁵ They are also material manifestations of the domination peacebuilders and the peacebuilding field seek over the local political fields.

This is not to say that peacebuilding may not produce positive results for the populations that fall under its practice or that living conditions may not be significantly improved compared to the situation during or before the war. Yet the results on the ground are, indeed, of lesser importance for the explanation of peacebuilding than its internal dynamics. The problem of peacebuilding is not so much that it does not produce the peace it claims but that it reproduces unequal global structures of domination through the way the field is internally constituted. When the question is asked of what global power structure is materialized and expressed in peacebuilding, the field analysis clearly shows that the dominance of the liberal and cosmopolitan culture of Western states is undisputed and, for the moment, fully resistant to any contestation. The peacebuilding field is exemplary for the way European middle-class sensibilities and cultures of the self have survived the onslaught of neoliberalism, which has rendered the world of work ever more precarious, and marginalized large parts of society that do not have the cultural (especially educational) and social capital to move with ease in global and social networks.

The peacebuilding field is formed by capital configurations that translate easily into other globally dominant fields, namely those structured in a similar way around cultures of professionalism and the entrepreneurial self, for example, the field of global management and business, parts of the NGO world, or the national civil services of globally important states. These fields are simultaneously globalized and localized so that the peacebuilding field stretches well into local politics, society, and culture, yet it does so only under the specific conditions of the field's *doxa*, which, in turn, reflects much of the world's domi-

nant discourses of individual and “minimal” human rights, cosmopolitan liberalism, individualism, and their associated discourses of merit, achievement, self-invention, creativity, autonomy, and so forth. Hence, peacebuilding is, indeed, intervening, and it is doing so much more fundamentally than the façade of “international administration” would lead us to believe.

When Khrushchev argued that “there are no neutral men” he expressed this thought entirely in the language of the world-political conflict of the day. However, Hammarskjöld’s response and the eulogy the journalist Walter Lippmann wrote on the UN Secretary-General quite astutely responded in terms of their social habitus:

The Soviet government has now come to the conclusion that there can be no such thing as an impartial civil servant in this deeply divided world, and that the kind of political celibacy which the British theory of the civil service calls for is in international affairs a fiction,⁶

writes Lippmann in 1961. According to this view, there is a neutral habitus, that is, a social behavior, that is not only dissociated from political ideology but also from the discussion over power, authority, and domination in general. The field analysis in this book has shown that such a habitus does not exist, but that, on the contrary, political ideology is inextricably inscribed in peacebuilding’s practice and discourse. Far from being neutral, peacebuilding is entirely political in the way it is made possible socially, by the way it is done practically, and by the way it is understood and justified by its actors’ discourses.

Actors in the field are also not disinterested but heavily involved in reproducing the field’s structure. They do so when trying to reproduce their own position and dispositions in the field (their material livelihood as well as their habitus). This is a conflictual and differentiated process. The class of peacebuilders is by no means monolithic. Dissent, resistance, and struggle exist inside the field. Yet these conflicts, competition, and the equally existing assimilation processes take place within certain limits. These limits are set by the *nomos*, *doxa*, habitus, and rules of the game of the field. The *nomos* and the *doxa* of the field do not encumber its internal dynamics of distinction and assimilation; rather, they set the outer limits of the field’s competition. Within these limits actors will strive to distinguish themselves by contending with others’ dispositions and by advancing or defending their own. As the section on habitus has shown, the field’s competition is about far more than simply the distribution of

material benefits. In order for fundamental changes to happen, such internal struggles over power and authority need to come together with external pressure on the field, either through rivaling fields and actors, or through shock-like events that shake the foundations of the field.⁷

The book developed on the background of the question of which global power structure peacebuilding is the image of. Clearly, the power structures of the peacebuilding field are conditioned by the dominance of Western, liberal, and neocapitalist forms of knowledge and practice. No principle of fair national distribution, as it is practiced at the UN, can by itself break this dominance, as the assumption of Western (and by consequence “white”) superiority is tacitly and, often, unconsciously institutionalized in the professionalization of the peacebuilding field. The terms of recruitment and career advancement, the daily practices of work, and also sociability, the requirements of self presentation and communication—all these practices and ways of doing seem mostly inauspicious at first sight. However, the preceding analysis of the field’s network structure, its enormous reliance on educational capital, its closeness to the business and NGO fields, as well as its inherent habitus, all reproduce social structures and cultures that privilege the European and North American historical traditions of ordering society and politics.

It is not only the power/knowledge of peacebuilding that is at stake, as any Foucauldian analysis could argue on the grounds of the last two chapters; beyond the epistemology of the world that privileges European (and by consequence, North American) traditions of thinking about politics and society, peacebuilding reproduces social relations and ways of living together in society that reproduce and normalize Western social history and experience in general, and the organizational experience of civil administrations under neoliberal, entrepreneurial pressure in particular. It is this capacity of the field to exist without acknowledging its local environment that (re)produces its power.

It is also this unidirectional force of absorption that makes it appear uncomfortably close to colonial practices of the past. If we are to accept Valentin Yves Mudimbe’s characterization of colonialism as a threefold process of

the domination the physical space, the reformation of the natives’ minds, and the integration of local economic histories into the Western perspective, the latter by the manner of managing ancient organizations and implementing new modes of production,⁸

then peacebuilding does, indeed, stand in the tradition of colonialism. It does so not because it would explicitly carry imperial intentions. It does so because it imposes its forms of managing social organizations and because these forms of social organization crucially depend on essential institutions of the modern, bureaucratized, liberal/neoliberal, capitalist, and universalized process of globalization.

Importantly, the peacebuilding field's mode of reproduction seems to be autodynamic and not in need of othering; Orientalism is a by-product, not a necessary condition of the peacebuilding field. The professional ethos of the field crucially defines its "rules of the game" and hence creates the well-functioning auto-referential dynamics of the field. And because this ethos and its accompanying habitus are highly internalized and normalized, it does not appear to anyone in the field that the impetus to save lives can, in fact, lead to the destruction and negligence of lives and people. This is particularly obvious for the fatalism of saving lives and its discourse of nonviolence, which generously conceals the violence of military interventions, for example, in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Libya, and the violence of peacebuilding itself, for example, if peacekeepers are accused of human rights abuses and sexual exploitation.

It is also observable for two other effects of international administrations and peacebuilding, both of which come dangerously close to Mudimbe's definition of colonialism, but which have not been intensely discussed in this book. Peacebuilding deeply affects property relations in the intervention society either directly, as UNMIK did when imposing the privatization of state-owned enterprises, or indirectly, through refugee resettlement or even more subtly when supporting the U.S. occupation of Iraq and the restructuring of property rights there.⁹ Again, such policies and practices do not arise from planned colonization projects; rather, they arise from a field-specific habitus, *doxa*, and *nomos* that, all the while defending liberal ideas of autonomy and freedom, does not allow any alternative vision of politics, society, or economy.

Similarly, the domestication of the native does not only take place in direct interventions that seek to reeducate spoilers, for example, in cases where the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina dismissed elected politicians considered too extreme, but more subtly in the integration of locals (people) and the local (a real and imagined space) into the peacebuilding field. The right of passage remains the professional ethos of peacebuilding, and, in this, most important is the educational and cultural capital that confers the authority to speak in the field. As the field is fuzzy at its boundaries it retains an integrating force

by absorbing external influences; yet serious challenges are kept at bay through various forms of delegitimation—serious critiques or alternative habituses simply do not fit in, and they might not even find their way into the field as the actors who carry the critique will have abandoned integrating the field long before. Peacebuilding is a field of power that reflects unequal relations in the world by its exclusionary authority.

Yet peacebuilding is not quite the same as nineteenth-century colonialism. After all, the declaratory object of peacebuilding and its *raison d'être* is not the exploitation of virgin territories. The countries and societies in which peace is built are also not those “undiscovered” lands set apart from globalization and modernity that Africa or parts of Asia were in the seventeenth century. There is neither a colonizing country, nor an open, explicit competition over territories, as the scramble for Africa represented. The state-sovereignty framework does not seem to fit the practices of peacebuilding. The “local,” however defined, is an integral part of globalization, and peacebuilding remains only one field among a long row of other global and transnational fields—a relational web largely unexplored. The interlocking of societies, economies, politics, and spaces is much more complex and multifaceted, not least because many territories are formally and legally independent, with important consequences for the agency of the “local.”

Indeed, something new is created in the encounter of the global—international peacebuilding—and the local—the postconflict environment. Yet the newly created spaces and its culture and power relations stand in multiple and complex relations to each other, with the global quite clearly dominating the local. Peacebuilding does reproduce the structures of Western domination on all three levels mentioned by Mudimbe; it does so in a very different world setting and with a different outlook than nineteenth-century colonialism, most notably because forms of resistance and integration have substantially changed over the past hundred years, as Tsing’s notion of “friction” well indicates.¹⁰ All too often the “local” and “international” are represented as juxtaposed, opposed, and more or less clearly delimited spaces. Yet from this book’s analysis these gray zones might better be understood as spaces of distinctive professional practices and habituses, which, in turn, reflect distinctive patterns of capital configurations that transgress nation-state boundaries; they are socially determined.

Such an approach may capture more palpably the power relations among those who intend to build peace and those whose peace is built. The power of the peacebuilding field does not lie in its capacity to force

policies upon people. Its power lies in its paradigmatic capacity to reproduce a dominant model of making a living and of living a life; a model that is, itself, suspended and reproduced in powerful global structures. The space in which this model is deployed is well guarded through a large set of formal and informal institutions, through expectations of behavior and discourses, through clear limits to authoritative and admissible ideas and debates, and through a deontological ethics that delegitimizes a wide range of dissenting and alternative voices and practices. It limits the peacebuilders' capacity to reach out and engage with others more generally. Yet this is also the political space in which the globally recognizable peace is negotiated. This is not a definite process, exactly because multiple social logics are at work beyond the simple fulfillment of a given policy. Rather, it makes sense to see peacebuilding as one of those spaces that have popped up a little bit everywhere in the world with the globalization of the past two decades, and which in multiple and various ways have opened political spaces beyond nation-state borders.

The exploration of this book has shown that field analysis is an extremely useful tool to draw out global power structures and the ways people, ideas, institutions, practices, and discourses are in- or excluded in global politics. Field theory allows a multilayered analysis and considers a large range of expressions of such power structures; importantly, it allows constant contextualization. It is evident that nothing analyzed here happens simply like that and would be without alternatives. Field theory quite usefully allows retracing the conjunctural history of behaviors, discourses, practices, and policies that are, all too often, taken for granted. It will certainly be useful for the further exploration of peacebuilding's overlaps with other global policy areas, and of its effects on wider circles of people than those working in peacebuilding.