Theorizing Post-Liberal Forms of Statebuilding and Order-Making Globally

Introduction

The global resurgence of illiberal and undemocratic rule has spurred a significant growth of scholarship studying these dynamics in various geographical contexts and academic disciplines. This body of thought has made important contributions to critical thinking and action against regressive political forces that have become established in Eastern Europe, Eurasia and globally. Yet, regressive and illiberal tendencies have become increasingly visible in the political mainstream, institutions and everyday experiences in societies that have been regarded as exemplary liberal democracies, as well. This casts significant doubt on the idea that illiberal practices and forms of ordering are merely temporary side effects of democratic transitions in the non-West. On the contrary, scholars from Max Weber to, perhaps most famously, the Frankfurt School of critical theory, remind us that dictatorial tendencies and charismatic logics of legitimacy and leadership are, after all, an inherent feature of modern politics. More importantly, decolonial scholars such as Quijano (2000) and Mignolo (2011) and their intellectual forebears (for example Williams, 1944; Fanon, 1961) have unpacked the violent and coercive character of modern capitalism and the liberal-democratic form of politics that merely serves to mask its true colonial essence. This line of thought foregrounds an approach of critical thinking about illiberal forms of politics – as well as corresponding terms of authoritarianism, patrimonialism and other deficiencies of political regimes. Such critical thinking, I argue, should prompt scholars to reconsider the conceptual apparatus, terminology and methodological and wider ramifications of their research in order to better grasp the complex processes of political change occurring in today’s world.
This chapter presents a post-liberal approach to studying political and social processes which is offered as an alternative to currently prevailing framings on the ‘illiberal’ and ‘authoritarian’ nature of political orders in the non-West. This idea is developed from arguments and analyses in literatures in political science, philosophy and security studies, research on political change after conflict and violent rule, as well as conversations on post-liberal peace and decolonial approaches in peace, conflict and security studies. While the chapter presents a necessarily selective reading of this wide range of disciplines and intellectual traditions, I chose to maintain this breadth in order to highlight the resonances and commonalities of these diverse bodies of thought and research that require more dialogue and synthesis with one another.

As already stated in the Introduction, the proposal of a post-liberal approach is by no means intended to downplay the forms of violence, exclusion and marginalization observable in the contexts analysed in this work or elsewhere. On the contrary, it seeks to exhibit these with equally accurate analysis and methods. The main difference between a post-liberal approach and analyses with an ‘illiberal’ or ‘authoritarian’ framing is that a post-liberal approach seeks to exhibit the conceptual slippage and reinterpretation, or reappropriation, whereby forms of ordering and maintaining peace and security that do not conform to liberal and democratic standards can, nevertheless, still be claimed to do so. In this sense, I offer post-liberal order as a term to describe situations where people, organizations and governments may claim that certain practices, repertoires and concepts are liberal-democratic according to a culturally or otherwise specific interpretation that is based on particular perspectives and experiences, while for some other actors or entities in the same context they may produce negative experiences and outcomes that make them disagree with such a labelling. A post-liberal lens seeks to grasp and unpack these multiple opinions and experiences and their contestation within statebuilding and social ordering processes. Both in the non-West, but increasingly so in the West as well, the main implication of post-liberal politics has been the limited acceptance or even rejection of liberal norms, practice and policy based on culture, and particularly non-Western cultures’ pronounced difference from ‘the West’, and welfare – the provision of which has proved elusive for the majority of populations in the non-industrialized world. The empirical analysis foregrounded by this post-liberal lens is developed in Chapter 3 through the concepts of heteroglossia and social imaginary, while the empirical part will show how forms of social ordering and statebuilding in Central Asia are post-liberal rather than illiberal. Meanwhile, the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how the post-liberal approach is relevant for capturing dynamics beyond the Central Asian and post-Socialist space, that is, for understanding and theorizing post-liberal ordering globally. The discussion also points to
political-economic and historical-institutional renderings of the argument for a post-liberal approach, which imply that free market economics and liberal-democratic politics, as well as the sets of policy prescriptions they entail, are not suitable for dealing with present-day challenges (see Lottholz, 2019a).

The chapter continues by first tracing post-liberal thought in the history of empire and liberal thought, political theory and philosophy and critical (and historical) security studies. In the second section, I review how the failures and transmutations of liberalism have become apparent in liberal interventionism broadly defined, ranging from post-war UN-led peacebuilding interventions to democratization, development and security assistance provided globally and across Eurasia more specifically. I also show how critical peacebuilding literature – including perspectives on post-Socialist Eurasia – has not substantially overcome the ‘paradox of liberalism’ and indicate how a critical examination of the inherent contradictions and regressive tendencies of liberalism and the capitalist system more broadly in the West offers a more fruitful way forward therefrom. In the third section, I develop a decolonial perspective in relation to recent conversations on post-liberalism and the potentialities of emancipation and governmentality in peace, conflict and intervention studies. Finally, I situate the field of ‘community security’ within the paradox of liberal ordering and vis-à-vis peace- and statebuilding interventions. I outline how discourses and policies in this domain have exhibited the same regressive and exclusionary tendencies as liberal interventions and political ordering throughout history.

**Post-liberal thought from imperial history to the present**

Following the end of the Cold War and with renewed force in the post-9/11 ‘war on terror’ and post-2008 financial crisis, a surge in literature can be found that critiques liberal political thought from both within and without. While not all of these debates explicitly use a ‘post-liberal’ framing, I will show how the arguments they offer are formative for the post-liberal agenda which has a long tradition within political studies and have received much attention in peace and conflict studies, as shown in the next section.

Historical studies and history of thought provide a rich repository of critical thinking about liberalism and its critiques. Especially informative are works on the history of empire which largely deal with the British and Anglo-American context (see Mehta, 1999; Muthu, 2012) but also have counterparts in continental European history (see Stoler, 2016) and in global historical perspectives in sociology (Bhambra, 2014; Go and Lawson, 2017) and IR (Hobson, 2012; Vitalis, 2015). These works strongly resonate with decolonial writings on the devastating fallout of colonial invasions in the name of liberalism (see Smith, 2008, pp 58, 66ff;
Mignolo 2011, pp xvff; Mignolo and Escobar, 2013, pp 391ff), but focus more on the inner contradiction of liberalism against this background. A key work at this intersection is Duncan Bell’s *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (2016). As Bell illustrates, there were numerous strands and approaches to liberalism in 19th-century imperial Britain, ranging from early liberals such as John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer to ‘new’ and more critical thinkers like John A. Hobson and Leonard T. Hobhouse. While these differed in their philosophical foundations and policy prescriptions, Bell bases his categorization on the fact that ‘all shared a commitment to individual liberty, constitutional government, the rule of law, the ethical significance of nationality, a capitalist political economy, and belief in the possibility of moral and political progress’ (2016, p 5).

The imperial critique of these liberalisms, then, is foregrounded by their endorsing attitudes to empire as ‘few rejected all its forms, and most … endorsed the formation of settler colonies’ (Bell, 2016, p 6) even in the case of later-day liberals (pp 355ff). The most significant insight offered by Bell is the transmutation and shapeshifting of liberalism between the mid-19th and mid-20th century:

For most of the nineteenth century, liberalism was commonly viewed as a product of late eighteenth-century revolutionary turmoil, but it was reimagined during the opening decades of the twentieth century, its origins pushed further back in time and its scope expanded massively, such that it came to be seen as the overarching ideology of Western modernity. This transmutation was profoundly influenced by the wars fought against ‘totalitarianism,’ both hot and cold. (Bell, 2016, p 9)

The profound reimagination of liberalism is further elucidated in James Traub’s analysis which argues that after the Second World War, liberalism became the American ‘chief export’ as the ‘dream of a liberal world order’ had been carried forward from Woodrow Wilson’s initial proposal in the First World War to Franklin D. Roosevelt’s securing of American influence through the building of a new transatlantic order (Traub, 2014, pp 225–30).

In a similar vein to Bell’s work, Domenico Losurdo’s *Liberalism: A Counter History* traces the ‘paradox of liberalism’ (2011, p 27) that is apparent in liberal thinkers’ and politicians’ complicity with, or support and practice of, slavery and colonial expansion. Losurdo also surveys the lineage that historians have traced from 19th- to 20th-century totalitarianism, captured in their analyses of the ‘American Holocaust’ (targeting the Amerindians), the ‘Australian Holocaust’ (on the Aboriginals) or the ‘late Victorian Holocaust’ in colonial India (2011, p 338). While not dismissing the liberal intellectual tradition in full, Losurdo stresses the need to keep unpacking the dialectic of liberal thought, that is the coexistence of personal freedom
as the highest good with enslavement as a legitimate means to maintain it (2011, p 343), and concludes that the ‘tragedy of peoples subjected to slavery or semi-slavery, or deported, decimated and destroyed’ was one which, ‘far from being impeded or prevented by the liberal world, developed in close connection with it’ (2011, p 344). This is a crucial point when considering present-day illiberal entanglements of liberal regimes. While international interventionism spearheaded by the US has thus been couched in a language about bringing ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’ from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush, it is abundantly clear that ‘political, economic and geostrategic interests of western states’ (Chandler, 2010, p 22) have usually been at the heart of the actions, ranging from military interference to development cooperation. The entwinement of ambitions of liberation with imperial dominance and exploitation, which might seem paradoxical to some and strategic to others, thus appears to span the entire history of liberal thought and policy.

While the Cold War itself would seem, from today’s retrospective, to have been a time of political and conceptual closure, that era saw its own critical considerations of liberalism and its political practice, such as Macpherson’s proposal of a ‘post-liberal-democracy’ (1964; see also Moody, 1983). This idea has been articulated into a line of post-liberal thought by John Gray, who is arguably the foremost thinker in political philosophy and political science. Gray’s essays and monographs have controversially engaged with both philosophical, policy and practical aspects of liberalism, and further tackled the ‘end of history’ determinism rapidly acquiring hegemonic status in the wake of the fall of Socialist regimes in 1989. In his key work Post-Liberalism: Studies in Political Thought (1993), Gray defines the post-liberal position as one which ‘rejects the foundationalist claims of fundamentalist liberalism’ (p 284), which would wrongly confer ‘liberal orders [a] universal or apodictic authority’ (p 284) while ignoring the fact that ‘liberal society … in the end [is] only one of many orders in which humans may flourish’ (p 243). Gray decidedly rejects a teleological notion of liberalism in favour of one that appreciates the historicity, contingency and particularity of liberalism and sees it as ‘feature[s] of late modern societies and polities’ (pp 284, 259), while appreciating ‘the narrower, but more substantial standpoints of real human beings in all their quiddities and miscellaneity’ (p 259). This particularist approach is very clear that, if we accept that there is no ‘apodictic supremacy’ of liberal over other forms of political and social organization, then we cannot ‘suppose that there is, or could be, any single measuring rod, on which the merits of different cultures or epochs’ – and the respective forms of social organization they have developed – ‘could be ranked’ (1993, p 325). Gray anchors this approach in the political philosophy of Isaiah Berlin, which espouses a non-teleological understanding of history (1993, p 292) and value pluralism footed on the incommensurability of
values and virtues as in Heideggerian plural realism or perspectivism, which permits ‘many true answers to the question, “What is real?”’ (Dreyfus 1991, pp 261–2, quoted in Gray, 1993, p 296). This approach, according to which ‘no single perspective is the right one’ and ‘no form of good life can be final or uniquely rational or natural’ stands in stark contrast to the naturalist epistemology of ethics (Gray, 1993, pp 312–13) of John Stuart Mill and later-day liberal theorists such as Dworkin and Rawls, whose ‘prescriptive doctrine’ Gray declares ‘dead’ (p 314) in both intellectual terms and as a political project (pp 260ff). Gray’s value pluralist approach provides conceptual grounding for attempts across the social sciences and humanities to capture the diversity and substantive differences in people’s worldviews and understandings of human existence, in other words people’s ontologies, which are discussed in Chapter 3.

In a parallel and more leftist project compared to Gray’s, Susan Golding has situated post-liberal thought along the lines of Laclau and Mouffe’s radical democratic theory and through a reading of Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*. Golding identifies the key problem in the fact that liberal-democratic theory could not successfully come to terms with what had been identified as one of the most fundamental prerequisites of a liberal-democratic state, namely, the creating and maintaining of a progressive society-state, that would be constituted by, and represent in all its diversity, the will of ‘the people’ and their fundamental equal right to creative self-development. (Golding, 1992, p 3)

She traces this problem back to early liberal thinkers such as Locke and Hobbes, who not only foresaw the creation of all people as equal in their universalist conception of human nature, but also predicted that as part of the competition in ‘a society rooted in the scarcity of goods . . . inevitably some of the people might take, given their insatiable “appetites”, more than their due and possibly, in so taking, prevent others from getting anything at all’ (Golding, 1992, p 5). Early liberals then, as argued by Golding, understood the resulting ‘cruelty of sociality’ emanating from such a mode of production, characterized by ‘disparities’, ‘meanness, exploitation, [and] alienation’, as ‘merely a reflection of the general nature of the [transhistorical] human condition’ (1992, p 5), which could be all but mitigated by a social contract that enshrined the ‘withdrawal from the [yet more anarchic] state of nature’ and ‘obligation to the sovereign state and a concomitant acceptance of inequality as the price for […] security and freedom’ (1992, p 6). As a way past the forms of exclusion, inequality and coercion in the late liberal-capitalist system already foreseen in early liberal thought, Golding offers Gramsci’s pragmatist philosophy as a way to ‘articulate a post-liberal-democratic theory, one that can “retrieve”'
the best parts of the liberal-democratic tradition and focus them on the context of a socialist discourse’ (1992, p 4).

These critical counter perspectives to the hegemony of liberal universalism and the ‘end of history’ proclaimed by Fukuyama (see Lottholz 2017a, pp 19ff for further discussion), which were developed further in other works (see Gray, 1989, 2000) was picked up and carried forward by other political scientists (see Talisse, 2005) to foreground critical thinking on political ordering processes in international intervention dynamics and IR more generally. A widely known reprise to Gray’s thought was Philipp Schmitter’s guess that next to ‘more liberal’ variants – with liberal principles extended further – and ‘pre-liberal’ ones – that is, a more traditional civic republican variant – a new development path of democracies could be a ‘postliberal’ one, which would see ‘invention of novel, even unprecedented, forms of representation and accountability’ to accommodate challenges of collective decision making in increasingly complex circumstances in economic and other policy fields (Schmitter, 1995, p 18). Discussion of post-liberal thought has received renewed attention in recent years, with some authors building on earlier work by Gray and Golding (see Milbank and Pabst, 2016) and others proposing the framing without grounding in previous work (Scholte, 2020). Meanwhile, this debate subsided between the mid-1990s and late 2000s and was only revisited in the wake of renewed global crises.

Important to mention in this regard are conversations about the aspect of economic liberalism under the label of ‘postneoliberalism’. Thus, Ulrich Brand and Nicola Sekler (2009b, p 6) proposed that postneoliberalism be considered ‘as a perspective on social, political and/or economic transformations’ brought about by actors who in one way or other ‘break with some specific aspect of “neoliberalism” and embrace different aspects of a possible postneoliberalism’. Mostly inspired by the experience of more labour-friendly and inclusive economic and social policies in Latin America (see contributions by Sader and Gago and by Szulwark in Brand and Sekler, 2009a), this discussion pointed to possible forms of alternative social organization, participation and resilience on the community level (see especially Sekler’s and Wichterich’s contributions). On the other hand, Sekler’s and Ceceña’s contributions also cautioned that the particularity, fragmentation and ‘plurality of approaches’ of lower-scale social actors foregrounds a ‘weakness in their capacity to change dominant power relations’ (Brand and Sekler, 2009b, p 8; see Buckel et al, 2010 for a similar concern). The rejection of neoliberal austerity and related policies by Latin American social movements and political leaders has inspired a by now comprehensive body of post-(neo-)liberal thought which has also fed into debates in peace and conflict studies (see Wolff, 2015, pp 280–1).

Another strand of literature which contributed significantly to the critique of liberalism has emerged in critical studies of security in the wake
of the global ‘war on terror’ since 9/11. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq posed a puzzle to democratic peace theory or appeared to reveal a ‘dark side’ to this idea, which Geis et al’s collection (2006) unpacked to show how, in Rengger’s words, and in resonance with critical perspectives from the history of liberal thought mentioned above, ‘the liberal democratic peace thesis … represents … an error common in the history of European political thought’ (Rengger, 2006, p 138). Andrew Neal’s examination of US counter-terrorism policies further revealed the paradox that, on the one hand, ‘the need to defend the liberal subject as a historical achievement is taken as a central principle of Western politics’ (Neal, 2009, p 2), while, on the other, this very idea of liberty and freedom is ‘immediately at stake in contemporary practices of violence, illiberality and exceptionalism’ (p 28) ranging from military intervention to detention and interrogation centres like the one in Guantanamo Bay. Dillon and Reid’s The Liberal Way of War (2009) sharpened the line of thought on the emerging ‘politics of security’ and its ‘state of emergency’ logic. Theorized through the works of Giorgio Agamben and Carl Schmitt (see also Huysmans, 2006; Williams, 2007; Neal, 2009) they argued that ‘the liberal way of rule … is as much shaped by its commitment to war’ as by a ‘continuous state of emergency and security as well as constant preparedness for war’ (Dillon and Reid, 2009, p 8).

This securitarian critique of liberalism can be traced back to the Cold War through accounts of historians of security. In a much-acclaimed essay, Johannes Voelz has pointed out how in the late 1940s ‘liberal intellectuals tended to be conflicted about “security”’ because of the ‘excess of rationality and control’ – best captured with Weber’s iron cage metaphor – that ensuring security entailed (2014, p 255). Tracing the gradual co-optation and overcoming of this scepticism, Voelz argues that liberals’ ‘rituals of consent to a set of “American” values … simultaneously created the space for the U.S. state to systematically act out imperial violence that grossly contradicted what America purportedly stood for’ (2014, p 255). Adding to this debate, Timothy Melley argued that the ‘state of exception’, that is the strategy of defending liberty ‘through the suspension of liberty … finds haunting every democracy’ and has become a key feature of the ‘liberal imaginary’ (2015, p 150). Focusing on the abounding consumption of apocalyptic movies and other cultural genres, he observes:

[The] strange fact—that contemporary democracy increasingly imagines, plans, and even rehearses its own destruction—is but one reflection of the growing contradiction at the heart of contemporary life. On the one hand, modern liberal societies laud the ideals of participatory democracy, free speech, individual liberty, and governmental transparency. On the other, they grow ever more committed to the biopolitical regulation of life, the mitigation of
threats to public health and safety, and the restriction of liberties as a way of securing liberty itself. (Melley, 2015, p 150)

The critique of liberalism put forward by critical (and historical) security studies with a particular Foucauldian grounding (see Foucault, 2008; Dillon and Reid, 2009; Neal, 2009) is thus centred on the paradox that ‘security constitutes both liberalism’s ultimate legitimation of power and a distinctly liberal technology of rule’ (Voelz, 2015, p 23). While other debates such as those on liberal multiculturalism (see for example, Gilroy, 2004; Wade, 2016; Stoler, 2016) and migration (see below) or late settler colonial rule (see Povinelli, 2016) cannot be given justice within this discussion, the liberal dialectic between freedom and control, inclusion versus exclusion and life versus death is apparent in them too, so that they add to the picture of the contradictory condition and elusiveness of contemporary Western liberalism.

The debates reviewed above, and probably more so the decline of liberal-democratic politics in Western societies, have sparked critical reflections and reconsiderations of liberalism in more mainstream circles too, as exemplified in James Traub’s What Was Liberalism? The Past, Present, and Promise of a Noble Idea (2019) and, perhaps most widely received, Francis Fukuyama’s reconsideration of the liberal hubris of his ‘end of history’ thesis in Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment (2018). Yet, while this post-liberal discourse has taken shape, the next section shows that it has only been slowly received in scholarly debates on political change after conflict and violent rule.

The failures and transmutations of ‘liberalism’ in the non-West … and the West

Notwithstanding its apparent discontents and contradictions, the breakdown of the Soviet Union and other Socialist regimes in Eurasia elevated liberal ideology and policy programming to the ostensible guiding principle of Western-led world order in the 1990s onwards. Liberalism has thus come to inform attempts to reshape political regimes, entire social systems, and, more importantly for this argument, approaches to international peace- and statebuilding interventions in the aftermath of large-scale conflict. The new dominance of the liberal model also, inevitably, gave new significance to critique vis-à-vis liberal universalist thinking and corresponding policy and institutional prescriptions. More or less in parallel with the genealogy of post-liberal thought outlined above, this critique of the failures and transmutations of ‘liberalism’ in the non-West played out in the literature analysing international intervention, cooperation and assistance, such as peace and conflict studies, comparative politics and IR.
Within intervention studies, a key concept shaping the discourses of the 1990s and 2000s was that of ‘state fragility’, which foreign policy scholars Helman and Ratner (1992) identified as crucial factors when it comes to avoiding large-scale conflict and genocide. As the logical counterpart, Francis Fukuyama and other scholars-turned-policy-advisers proposed ‘state capacity’ as the key factor for rebuilding, stabilizing and consolidating post–conflict countries (2004; see also Rotberg, 2004), even if it meant that certain standards, such as the rule of law and democratic elections, had to be established and defended with military force before a further degree of political liberalization was allowed (Paris, 2004). This institutionalist approach to political ordering via top–down ‘statebuilding’ (Lottholz and Lemay–Hébert, 2016, p 1473; see Lemay–Hébert, 2009) was criticized both for its analytical misconception – particularly of state capacity as something that ‘can be gauged against a measuring stick whose endpoint is a variant of Weber’s ideal–type of the modern rational state’, and of state institutions as something that can be transposed across geographic locales and historical epochs (Migdal and Schlichte, 2005, pp 3, 11) – and for the often violent and exclusionary effects that Western-led interventions have produced (see Richmond, 2011).

The hegemonic consensus that such processes had to be informed by the main pillars of democratization, marketization, economic liberalization and the benchmarks of human rights, rule of law and good governance came to be termed, in reference to democratic peace theory, as ‘liberal peace’, which Duffield defined thus:

The idea of liberal peace … combines and conflates ‘liberal’ (as in contemporary liberal economic and political tenets) with ‘peace’ (the present policy predilection towards conflict resolution and societal reconstruction). It reflects the existing consensus that conflict in the South is best approached through a number of connected, ameliorative, harmonising and, especially, transformational measures. (2007, p 11)

While various scholars and policy makers have continued to defend and advocate for this approach (most notably Paris, 2010), scholars with an interest in ‘critical peacebuilding studies’ have endeavoured to exhibit the conceptual contradictions of this approach and of the associated programming and policies (see Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2009, esp. Introduction; Richmond, 2011; Campbell et al, 2011). The main point of this critique was the hypocritical and imperialist character of this consensus, as it declared to aim for the liberation and self-determination of the societies in question, but was in reality, according to critics: (1) ‘cold and unfeeling, lacking understanding or empathy’ vis-à-vis its target populations (Richmond, 2011, p 63); (2) only rhetorically encouraging
‘local ownership’ but not helping to realize it (Richmond, 2011, pp 3, 10, 83); and (3) not engaging with local needs and welfare (Richmond, 2011, ch. 4).

The circle of critical peacebuilding scholars around Oliver Richmond, Roger Mac Ginty and colleagues has offered important critiques of the failures and contradictions of the ‘liberal peace’, and, yet more importantly for this work and discussed in detail below, it has indicated the possibility of a ‘post-liberal peace’ that transcends the wrongdoings of internationally imposed ordering (Richmond, 2011; Richmond and Mitchell, 2011). In light of critiques of and engagement with these proposals (see Campbell et al, 2011; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2009; Chandler and Richmond, 2015), optimistic undertones about the emancipatory potential of post-liberal forms of peace have made way for a more pronounced focus on the regressive potential of the hybrid political orders assumed as carrying post-liberal peace (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2016) and for more in-depth research into how ‘everyday’ forms of peace can reshape and renegotiate the ‘liberal peace’ (Mac Ginty, 2017). Somewhat analogous to Bell’s reading of the transmutation of liberalism into the ideology undergirding US interventionism throughout the 20th century, critical voices in this debate also stressed the fact that the ‘liberal peace’ approach, contrary to its self-labelling or, more precisely, to academics’ denotation, has in fact been very top-down and imposing both in terms of its operating principles and the outcomes produced in interventions (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2015, p 176; Joshi et al, 2014, p 365). Echoing this, a number of contributions to the international peace- and statebuilding intervention literature, where von Billerbeck and Tansey (2019) have utilized the concept of ‘authoritarianism’ to classify unintended consequences and political trajectories of countries subject to intervention (see also Soares de Oliveira, 2011).

While peace, conflict and intervention studies have thus offered a number of important insights and conceptual advances, these perspectives have also been limited, most importantly, to globally renowned cases of post-conflict intervention, often after civil wars or large-scale conflict and led by the UN or the ‘international community’ at large. Therefore, this literature inevitably missed out on some aspects that research of ‘authoritarian’ or ‘illiberal’ forms of peace and conflict management in the former Soviet Union and Eurasia more generally has been able to capture. As Lewis (2017, pp 33ff) pointed out, the critical peacebuilding literature was still largely fixated on the possibility of emancipation or other forms of betterment in relation to the subjugation imposed by the ‘liberal peace’, while other actors who instantiate often worse forms of authoritarian post-conflict order – such as Russia or China – and their hijacking of discourses of emancipation and freedom remained disregarded. To this end, the collection Interrogating Illiberal Peace in Eurasia by Catherine Owen and colleagues argued that
how ‘illiberal peace’ results from ‘local and regional actors contest[ing] or transform[ing] globally promoted norms of conflict management and promot[ing] alternative ones’ to thus challenge ‘the western-led consensus known as the “liberal peace”’ (2018, p 3). David Lewis, John Heathershaw and Nick Megoran (2018) further elucidate this shift from liberal to illiberal peace by analysing authoritarian conflict management as a process which serves to ‘eschew genuine negotiations among parties to the conflict, reject international mediation and constraints on the use of force, [and] disregard calls to address underlying structural causes of conflict’ (2018, p 11). Instead, they argue that authoritarian regimes ‘rely on instruments of state coercion and hierarchical structures of power’ in their attempts to quell unrest and maintain peace and stability (p 12). Further attention has been directed toward the policies, practices and tactics of Central Asian regimes, as in Alexander Cooley and John Heathershaw’s Dictators Without Borders (2017), which provides insight into the repressive apparatuses and practices employed by governments and elites.

The critical inquiry into the discontents of projects of political ordering reviewed above is vital for an open debate and analysis of the failures and transmutations of ‘liberalism’ across the globe. As the above-cited and other authors show, ‘authoritarianism’ can serve as a concept to scrutinize the political and societal trajectories of countries subject to external intervention and support. Nevertheless, the concern of this work is that the framing around ‘democratic’ or ‘authoritarian’ forms of post-conflict or post-regime change transitions reflects an imaginary of ideal-type liberalism and democracy that still informs most critical analyses. This continued predominance of the liberal imaginary raises some uncomfortable questions: What about the fact that the liberal-democratic principles upheld in so many international intervention and assistance cases have in the past years been compromised on multiple occasions within the European Union or in transatlantic relations, as well? How to account for the fact that the ‘liberal peace’—itself a term coined by academics—is not as liberal in its prescriptions and intervention approach as it supposedly claims? What if liberalism that is so often prescribed as a model for social, political, and economic development has in many ways never existed even in Western countries or anywhere else across the globe?

Scholarship adopting the ‘authoritarian’ and ‘illiberal’ framework for analysing politics in the global periphery, however, brushes over such questions and the contradictory facts they point to. In doing so, it can be argued that they, in the words of Nathalie Koch, ‘create moral geographies of the liberal and illiberal, the democratic and autocratic, the good and bad, which are inextricable from the actual conduct of geopolitics’ (2019, p 912). Such a critique may be limited as it attributes too much responsibility for unintended implications. At the same time, however, the productive effects of this scholarship beyond academic circles need to be taken into account.
and inspire attempts to undertake research and theorizing in a different way, which can help prevent and overcome the secondary effects of scholarship. As Koch argues, ‘by positioning authoritarianism as “Other” and [the West] as inherently morally superior, these narratives advance an Orientalist worldview, whereby authoritarian political configurations are portrayed as essentially foreign and “backward”’ (N. Koch, 2019, p 914). This view of Western scholarship on ‘authoritarian’ and ‘illiberal’ governance in post-Socialist Eurasia, effectively suggests that this scholarship is, similar to the critique of the ‘liberal peace’ (see Chandler, 2015), caught in a ‘paradox of liberalism’, as it cannot offer an effective way beyond present-day political impasse, or worse, ends up deepening forms of Western hegemony through othering and orientalizing tendencies. Apart from these inner, conceptual contradictions, Koch’s unearthing of the orientalist and othering effects of critiques of ‘authoritarianism’ and ‘illiberalism’ presents an effective extension of Meera Sabaratnam’s argument that the critique of ‘liberal peace’ is ‘haunted by avatars of Eurocentrism’ that preclude meaningful engagement with societies subject to intervention (2017, p 23). This approach then serves to identify ‘Western liberalism … as a source of oppression but also implicitly rehabilitate[s] [it] as the only true source of emancipation’, thereby remaining unable to imagine that ‘the targets [or subjects] of intervention can generate their own meaningful terms of engagement with interveners, nor critically evaluate the problems of modernity and development, rooted in their own experiences and knowledges’ (Sabaratnam, 2017, p 23).

In turn, this critique creates an opening for research that views regressive, exclusionary and potentially violent social processes in the non-West in an equally critical manner, but with framings that avoid the orientalist and othering effects incurred by many analyses so far. To offer an alternative to the simplistic and potentially orientalizing tendencies of scholarship on ‘illiberal’ and ‘authoritarian’ forms of political order, as well as those framed around the ‘liberal peace’, in this book I offer a critical reflection on Western liberalism and its illiberal undercurrents. This can serve to open a new angle on the analytic and political challenge of authoritarian and illiberal forms of rule, which will help to better appreciate how these forms of governance are co-constituted and co-produced by and with Western developed countries. This argument, which I further iterate at the end of this section, has a significant bearing on the understanding of parallel developments in Central Asia, the post-Socialist space, which spans from there to Eastern Europe, and for ‘illiberal’ and ‘authoritarian’ political regimes in global (semi-) peripheries more generally.

As a sizeable body of scholarship has shown, the problematic developments occurring in the non-West are in fact not confined to projects of liberal intervention and assistance. On the contrary, the critical stance on which the post-liberal approach is centred holds that tendencies of marginalization, exclusion and coercion to the point of violent conduct are inherent in
the capitalist system which is inextricably entwined with what have been imagined as Western liberal democracies. In this sense, the ideal-type liberal polities, institutions, practices and values that are seen to prevail in the Western, industrialized world are, to a significant extent, built upon and still maintained by coercive, exclusionary and violent processes. This is best illustrated through a perspective on the increasingly regressive and coercive ordering practices and mechanisms evolving within Western societies, alongside their external policies and relations with the non-Western world.

In the case of the former, the argument is best demonstrated in Insa Lee Koch’s analysis of the ‘legacy of coercion’ and intrusion of the state into people’s lives in her recent book *Personalizing the State: An Anthropology of Law, Politics, and Welfare in Austerity Britain* (2018). Focusing her anthropological inquiry on London council estates, Koch traces how life in these state-created but later on privatized and marketized spaces became ‘a marker of social exclusion and abject failure’, with people living in such estates being ‘among the country’s most vulnerable socio-economic groups’ (I.L. Koch, 2019, np). The gearing up of ‘coercive policies’ in the realm of welfare, such as profiling ‘at risk’ groups and targeting them with various measures such as means-testing for welfare or eviction in the case of ‘anti-social behaviour’, alongside politicians’ continuous failure to hear people’s expectations and accountability claims vis-à-vis the state, has thus, as Koch argues, ‘turned political citizenship into an experience of punishment’ (2019, np). This alienation of vulnerable and precarious population groups from politics at large and the nihilistic outcomes of the Brexit referendum and general elections since cannot, as Koch rightly argues, be explained by populist authoritarianism alone. Instead, they have to be seen as emerging together with, and as a reaction toward, the ‘daily authoritarian actions of a liberal state that has intervened in the most intimate realms of people’s lives’ (2019, np).

Putting this argument in a more long-term perspective from the post-Second World War corporatist compact to its disappearance from the 1980s onwards, Oliver Nachtwey has shown how the downward mobility of wide-ranging milieus of German society, both in economic and symbolic terms, has made them susceptible to populist political mobilization and gives rise to a ‘post-democratic politics’ and ‘authoritarian current that removes the liberal foundations of our society’ (Nachtwey, 2018, p 211). Using insights from Adorno and colleagues’ 1950 study *The Authoritarian Personality*, Nachtwey dissects how the present ‘neo-authoritarian tendency’ (2018, p 185) stems from the ‘evil twin of democratic revolt and is fuelled by a mixture of anti-democratic and religious–identitarian resentment’ (p 211). He further points to the gradual manifestation of an ‘authoritarian liberalism’ in the state welfare system, which activates and responsibilizes individuals to ‘not make demands on the welfare state’, so as to ‘supposedly benefit the community as a whole’ which, however, effectively reduces welfare rights
that had been presumed as a given in the bygone days of ‘social modernity’ (p 85). As recent election results and policy trends have shown, this trajectory has foregrounded a political consensus that has evolved from a marginal opinion of opposition factions and conspiracy theories toward informing mainstream political rhetoric, with right-wing parties de facto becoming the ‘new workers’ parties’ (p 85). Abrahamsen et al (2020) further show how the transnationally networked ‘New Right’ has been especially effective in shaping conservative political mainstream discourse and actual policies – most notoriously in the fields of migration and asylum – across a large number of countries worldwide. Considering this new right-wing tendency in the political mainstream in Western countries, the argument for a post-liberal approach is substantiated and its relevance for reflecting on the current and past substance of Western liberalism is highlighted.

The regressive and illiberal potential of European and Western societies generally is not limited to their internal dynamics. As explored above, the separating and distancing of other populations seen either as a threat to the existing order or as otherwise problematic plays out in the entire range of policies in domestic and external arenas. This is best exhibited in what Bigo and Tsoukala have called ‘illiberal practices of liberal regimes’ (2008) undertaken in Western counter-terrorism, interventionism and border regimes especially since 9/11. They attribute the increasing limits and violations of human rights by security services to ‘a solidly constituted security field of professionals of management of unease, both public and private, working together transnationally along professional lines mainly in European and Transatlantic “working groups”’ that have driven the ‘production and diffusion of (in)security at the transnational’ (Bigo and Tsoukala, 2008, p 4). The authors do not share the viewpoint that the new ‘governmentality by unease’, that is by the systemic production of evidence for threats and its elevation into political debates, is revealing the ‘true face of modernity … or … global capitalism’ (p 3) or ‘liberal society’ (p 8). Yet, both their own and analogous contributions from critical security studies provide fertile ground for such a reading.

The legacy of counter-terrorism since 9/11, and even more so EU border policies in the context of the recent ‘refugee crisis’ have indicated the degree and scale of brutality which Western states are ready to accept when it comes to policing borders. Nick Vaughan-Williams’ work, for instance, has drawn on Bigo’s and Louise Amoore’s work to point out how, in the wake of 9/11 and technological advances, borders have become more mobile and flexible than in classic, geopolitical understandings and that this requires a new biopolitical approach to understanding their workings beyond state territorial boundaries (Vaughan-Williams, 2009, pp 59–60; see Foucault, 2008). Further, in the wake of the ‘refugee and migration crisis’, Vaughan-Williams unpacked the ‘thanatopolitical dimension of contemporary
humanitarian bordering practices’ (2015, p 47), showing how they operate through a politics of death – figurative or literal – which turns out to stand in relation to the lives of European citizens (see Esposito, 2012). Whether through violent abuse and ‘push backs’ on the Croatian border (Davies et al, 2018) or the drowning of people trying to cross the Mediterranean (Abdul Karim, 2020), the abundant evidence of the price that Europe and the Western world in general is ready to pay for political and economic stability cannot go unnoticed. The ambiguous, if not supportive, position of the West vis-à-vis illiberal practice in non-Western regimes casts additional doubt on the liberalism it preaches. It is especially obvious in cases where Western states have either failed to effectively challenge autocracies or even actually supported and enhanced them, both of which was the case in Arab and Gulf countries before, and in the course of, the Arab Spring for example (Börzel, 2015, pp 520ff). The reluctant reactions to human rights abuses in countries such as Saudi Arabia or Turkey, alongside reliable weapon deliveries to them by the US, UK, France and Germany (Stavrianakis, 2019) are a further case in point. Taken together, these perspectives thus reveal the ‘dark side’ of European and Euro-American modernity as they have long been discussed in decolonial research (see Mignolo, 2011) and exhibit the violent grounding and embeddedness – both in the historical and present-day perspective – of Western ‘liberal’ regimes.

The populist and xenophobic currents and related tendencies toward control and violence that have dominated public discourse and policy trends in Western societies bear testimony to the inherent authoritarian and nationalist potential of the Western capitalist order. An alternative post-liberal perspective helps to better grasp and reflect on this trajectory of contemporary late-modern liberalism and its global manifestations. On the other hand, using the category of ‘illiberal’ or ‘authoritarian’ in discussing Central Asian or other political regimes in Eurasia and elsewhere would understate or distract from the illiberal nature of the contemporary capitalist system as a whole, and specifically that of Western states, which are routinely – and, as argued above, paradoxically – categorized as less illiberal and better able to sustain liberal-democratic principles and values. The post-liberal approach helps to avoid such a Eurocentric and one-sided approach and to reconsider the suitability of the term ‘illiberalism’ for such inquiry. The next section explores and situates this concept in more detail.

**Theorizing post-liberal peace: emancipation, governmentality and decoloniality**

Having reviewed the inner contradictions and transmutations of liberalism both from a theoretical and empirical perspective, this section sets out in more detail the post-liberal approach proposed in this book.
Emancipation vs governmentality?

The two thinkers at the forefront of debates on post-liberalism within peace, conflict and intervention studies, Oliver Richmond and David Chandler, can both be associated with the strands of critical literature reviewed above. Based on largely discourse-focused analyses (see Chandler, 2006, 2010; Richmond, 2009, 2011), they have put forward their conceptions of ‘post-liberal peace’ (Richmond, 2011) and ‘post-liberal governance’ (Chandler, 2010) which are informative for this work. Richmond’s conception essentially foresees a way to mitigate the shortcomings of the liberal peace. He invokes de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) as a lens to focus on issues that really preoccupy people in post-conflict societies, for instance ‘issues of rights, needs and welfare’ (Richmond, 2009, p 331; 2011, ch 5), which would lie beyond the scope of liberal peacebuilding. The recognition of and engagement with such local, ‘subaltern’ points of view would then enable interventions focused on recipients’ needs and a renegotiation of post-conflict peace- and statebuilding (p 331).

Chandler’s approach to post-liberalism emphasizes how the emergence of statebuilding as a paradigm has given rise to post-liberal governance with largely problematic and negative implications for political struggle and resistance (Chandler, 2010). Here, ‘post-liberal’ emphasizes that the autonomy of individual states in the international order is limited in the post-Cold War world. Developed in reaction to contemporary civil wars and conflicts, international norms and principles such as the *Responsibility to Protect*, ‘good governance’ and commitment to transparency, anti-corruption and human rights are constituting a default design for new states that are being built after conflict, which predisposes the way they will be integrated into the international system. Analysing the policies of specific liberal peace actors, for instance the European Union and its involvement in South-Eastern Europe (Chandler, 2006; 2010, ch 5), Chandler shows how this path-dependency is discursively constructed and consolidated by immense amounts of aid and other assistance in the legal, governance, security and military sectors. The way in which such contingencies are downplayed and naturalized leads him to argue that the European Union is a case of *Empire in Denial* (2006), under whose aegis peripheral and post-conflict countries have no real choice but to conform to all the standards and expectations thrust upon them by Western states. In this sense, Chandler’s work points out how in the contemporary international order, a truly liberal governance, where states and sub-state actors can freely choose the development paths and policy templates they want to pursue, is not possible and probably never has been.

In these two authors’ collective discussion on post-liberalism (Chandler and Richmond, 2015), Chandler contests the emancipatory potential that Richmond sees in this concept. He concedes that ‘everyday’ voices of
ordinary people in post-conflict societies may play a role and have some emancipatory potential, as Richmond argues, given the fact that this everyday and ‘local’ perspective has already been incorporated into peacebuilding interventions since the 1990s (Chandler and Richmond, 2015, p 19). However, he denies the agential potential of the societal sphere and social interaction – where, according to Richmond, a solution to the current deadlock may be found. This post-liberal framework, he argues, ‘despite its claims to “deeper” and more “bottom-up” or “social” understandings of post-conflict peace, remains entirely within the world of superficial appearances’ (Chandler and Richmond, 2015, pp 19–20). Drawing on Louis Althusser’s (2008 [1970]) work about the ideological embeddedness of the subject, Chandler argues that the subject is already embedded in ideology through ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ and various cultural and religious institutions, and even through social practices in the private sphere, all of which are shaping the subject’s cognitive and ideational understandings (Chandler and Richmond, 2015, p 18). Therefore, the barrier to shaping more emancipatory, just and peaceful societies cannot be overcome by disclosing the everyday perspectives and needs of populations. It is exactly there, Chandler contends, ‘in the “materiality” of the mind-set of the subject, understood to be false, imaginary or ideological, due to the problematic societal practices in which they are embedded’ where the problem lies in the first place (2015, p 20).

Against this impasse situated in the subjectivities produced by technologies of government in the post-liberal social order, Richmond holds that the ‘liberal peace’ has already been subject to ‘a reconstitution of responsibility in which hybrid political dynamics might lead to a hybrid form of peace … which involves agonistic mediations of difference … in which inequalities are teased out and responded to by policy’ (2015, p 11). Richmond’s optimism that ‘if the international [sic] peace and statebuilding … collapses when its subjects refuse that direction’ (2015, p 9) is not shared by Chandler, who remains sceptical of such a potential for a critical, reflective agency. Chandler has thus argued that critical peacebuilding literature is caught in a ‘paradox of liberal peace’ as it continues to believe that ‘local culture holds the key’ for building more suitable and emancipatory forms of peace (Chandler, 2015, p 27). In light of this disagreement, the binary ‘emancipatory versus governmentality’ appears to be a useful way to discuss the implications of post-liberal forms of peace- and statebuilding and has also been used, for example, in Graef’s work on Liberia (2015, pp 31ff). However, as I show in the following section, it is the appropriation of the idea of emancipation that helps to justify and legitimize forms of authoritarian governmentality and biopolitical subjectification. My argument for inquiring post-liberal forms of social ordering is thus grounded in a common concern with Chandler’s sceptical stance on the possibility of emancipatory action and
agency. It is important to again flag Sabaratnam’s dissection of how both of these approaches and the wider critique of the ‘liberal peace’ discussed above perpetuate a Eurocentric perspective as they ‘emphasise the distinctiveness and importance of Western behaviour and primacy whilst occluding the space outside it’ (Sabaratnam, 2017, p 27) and are unable to capture the ‘historically blurred, intertwined and mutually constituted character of global historical space and ‘culture’ (p 30; see Lottholz, 2018c, p 702). To overcome this limitation and elucidate the ideological embeddedness of the subject and of the global institutional and governance architectures at large, I propose a decolonial angle to the study of peace, conflict and intervention.

**Toward a decolonial perspective on post-liberal order**

Given the shortcomings of peace, conflict and intervention research at large, and especially in light of the contradictions faced by critical peacebuilding scholarship itself, it appears that a more critical reflection on global peace- and statebuilding intervention along the lines of decolonial theory is possible, desirable and necessary. As already stated in the Introduction, what I have in mind, in line with Mignolo and Walsh’s (2018, p 11) formulation of the decolonial angle as an ‘alternative’ or ‘option’ among a number of approaches, is a way of approaching peace and conflict research which is more firmly embedded in the awareness of global history and its current reinscriptions, and, accordingly, a way of doing research differently in terms of engaging with communities and actors in a given context. As the links to the history of empire and critical theory in the discussion above indicate, the post-liberal lens that I am proposing can be squarely situated within, or at least toward, such a decolonial approach, which strongly resonates with these traditions while also reconceptualizing them. While my discussion is focused on recent and earlier historical perspectives on the violent foundations and corresponding contradictions of liberalism, the effects of colonial invasion and conquest in its name, and its positioning alongside Christian, Marxist and other civilizing missions are well documented in the decolonial scholarship of Mignolo, Escobar, Smith, Quijano and early pioneering works of C.L.R. James, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon and many others. Building on the wider decolonial critique, or rather dissection, of liberalism and recent contributions on decolonial perspectives in peace, conflict and intervention studies, the following key aspects of this approach inform the present study.

A decolonial perspective shows how peace- and statebuilding programmes reproduce and stabilize political and economic dynamics going back to the Cold War and colonial times (Tümer and Kühn, 2016; Sabaratnam, 2017). A decolonial approach to peace research goes one step further than critical peacebuilding scholars in that it does away with the implicit assumption that
peace- and statebuilding interventions can somehow ‘fix’ societies in such a way that they can evolve sustainably and stably and attain levels of wealth and well-being comparable to industrial countries. As political economists have long established, the limits to planetary growth and exploitation have already made it impossible for all non-developed and non-industrialized countries to reach the level of economic growth (and hence welfare) of the developed world (see Held, 2007). Indeed, although some have argued that so-called ‘emerging powers’ might be able to challenge and ameliorate inequalities between developed and under-developed nations, it has become obvious that the roles and agendas of these powers are fairly similar to those of ‘older’ industrial countries, as they mostly dominate and reproduce the peripheral status of smaller, non-industrialized countries.

A decolonial perspective inquires the ways in which the creation, establishment and reproduction of modernity in the form of the nation state, its institutions and corresponding forms of knowledge, in other words the Enlightenment or modern ‘episteme’ – produces adverse effects on people’s well-being – material, physical, mental, spiritual and otherwise (Mignolo, 2011). It inquires how, on the contrary, the adoption and consolidation of modern forms of social organization lead to the expansion, entrenchment and reproduction of a capitalist system of production, which places people into hierarchical relations of an exploitative and coercive character, thus entrenching precarious livelihoods. Decolonial thought seeks to unpack both the current state of the relations of production and social reproduction (namely sustenance of livelihoods) and the historical processes leading up to the establishment, consolidation and normalization of these relations, which Anibal Quijano has termed ‘coloniality of power’ (2000) while Walter Mignolo offers the term ‘colonial matrix of power’ (2011, p 2). In Mignolo’s words, decolonial thinking is

a relentless analytic effort to understand, in order to overcome, the logic of coloniality underneath the rhetoric of modernity, the structure of management and control that emerged out of the transformation of the economy in the Atlantic, and the jump in knowledge that took place both in the internal history of Europe and in between Europe and its colonies. (2011, p 10)

This very basic understanding of decolonial thought (see Sabaratnam, 2017, ch 2; Lottholz, 2019b; Kušić et al, 2019 for further discussion) foregrounds two key aspects for rethinking social order and more practical steps toward it. First, rather than merely stabilizing and pacifying societies and integrating them into global frameworks of governance and capitalist production, the ultimate end of action from a decolonial standpoint is the positioning of societies and people in a way that heals their ‘colonial wound’
POST-LIBERAL STATEBUILDING IN CENTRAL ASIA

(Sabaratnam, 2017, p 143), defined as ‘the fact that regions and people around the world have been classified as underdeveloped economically and mentally’ (Mignolo, 2009, p 161; see Anzaldúa, 1999) and, it may be added, have been subjected to policies of subjugation, dependency and exploitation. How could such healing be imagined? Meera Sabaratnam argues that decolonizing intervention along such lines means to abandon ‘central intellectual assumptions’ and thus ‘remake a terrain for solidaristic engagement and … a redistributive postcolonial ethical order, which recognises forms of collective historic responsibility’, including through ‘historically engaged reparations’ (Sabaratnam, 2017, pp 142–3). She further suggests that this goal can be reached, at least partly, by more consequentially avoiding duplication, repetition and tokenistic technical assistance, by better complying to the existing agreements on aid harmonization and ownership and fighting against Western countries’ hypocritical stance on agricultural subsidies and offshore finance (2017, p 144). Rutazibwa, in her proposal for ‘decolonizing international development studies’, suggests reconceptualizing aid and development as reparations as a way of ‘moving from the idea of generosity and superiority to one of restitution and justice’ and ‘decentring and displac[ing] … power epistemologically, while at the same time foregrounding the material, those tangible issues that allow or prevent (quality of) life’ (2018, p 172). These arguments point to a horizon of decoloniality within the existing international order and based on progressive initiatives therein, even though sustainable changes in this direction still seem hard to achieve and leave unaddressed the necessity to reconfigure or dismantle the capitalist system in part or in its entirety (see Lottholz, 2019b).

The second and more immediate concern of decolonial thought is on the level of knowledge production, where it foresees more inclusive approaches that uncover and tell the stories of people and societies marginalized, silenced and dehumanized in Western and Eurocentric accounts of history and social science in general (Mignolo, 2011, p xxx; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, p 208), and in peace- and statebuilding intervention in particular (Sabaratnam, 2017, pp 23–34). This has most significantly been accomplished in the work of the scholar and activist Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008) and in cognate scholarly cooperation with indigenous resistance movements (see Rutazibwa and Shilliam, 2018, pp 8–9). Drawing on these perspectives, Sabaratnam develops strategies to overcome the usual limitations of social research and to reconstruct the ‘political subjecthood’ of the targets of intervention in Mozambique (Sabaratnam, 2017, pp 41–54). She does so most effectively in her engagement with the peasantry, demonstrating how they suffered from agricultural development assistance programmes promoting ‘production for the market’ (2017, pp 96–7), and how their initiatives for price stabilization and input subsidization were suppressed by international donors (p 107). In a similar vein, Mechthild Exo’s study of Afghani grassroots organizations
seeks to ‘giv[e] presence to [her partners’] perspectives which have been treated as insignificant and non-rational, and therefore as non-existent’ as they contradict the orthodoxy of the liberal peace and capitalist modernity (Exo, 2017, p 18). Adopting Smith’s relational epistemology, in which ‘knowledge is based on the building up of respectful, reciprocal, caring, social and emotional relations’, Exo gives up the ‘authority of scientific writing’ and the ‘privilege to have the last word’ (2017, p 12) and instead chooses to ‘document’ and ‘(re-) narrate … the histories, positions and future visions of peace of her partners’ (Exo, 2017, p 76). This dialogical approach to knowledge production based on activist involvement with partner organizations is, as I argue elsewhere (Lottholz, 2018c, p 705), a key take-away of decolonial thought for peace, conflict and intervention research. It certainly needs to be acknowledged that Exo’s and Sabaratnam’s research does not present indigenous struggles for self-determination and liberation as the accounts of Smith (2008) or other researchers from indigenous communities. Nevertheless, their readings of Smith alongside other indigenous and decolonial thinkers offer important entry points for rethinking both social and political theory and methodological approaches employed therein.

As I discuss further in Chapter 3, this decolonial perspective on questions of peace and conflict and on how to engage with communities subject to intervention has also strongly influenced the present study. Thus, following the works discussed above, I have taken a cooperative and dialogical relationship with interlocutors and participants as a guiding principle and important feature to avoid an extractive and one-sided knowledge-production process. As I show in further detail in the next chapter, the research findings and conclusions about the ‘illiberal’ ‘authoritarian’ or ‘post-liberal’ nature of political systems and their ordering practices also depend on how and how much researchers engage with people in a given society. Debates on this aspect suggest that reliance on survey methodologies and quantitative indicators can be problematic in this regard, as people’s understandings of and associations with concepts and framings used can differ and thus bias results (Lottholz et al, 2020, especially McGlinchey’s contribution). Political anthropological research on Kyrgyzstan (see Ismailbekova, 2017) further affirms this argument as it shows how people develop a flexible relationship toward transgressions of democratic principles which they justify with hopes for a better economic future to be reached by the electoral outcomes and decisions taken in the negotiated mechanisms that are not entirely, or not at all, liberal-democratic.

While the primary engagement with and contribution to decolonial debates is thus along methodological lines, the decolonial grounding of the theoretical contribution and the critical perspective on forms of ordering is no less important and builds upon a long tradition of decolonial thought.
in post-Socialist Eurasia. Thus, while decolonial thought and its practical iterations in Latin America or Africa are based on readings of European colonial conquest, the long 16th century and more recent US imperial ordering, the Eurasian landmass presents an even more pronounced multiplicity of subsequent imperial ordering projects and the ordering logics and legacies they have inscribed (see Nurulla-Khodjaeva, 2016). Yet more significant than this multiplicity of Persian, Turkic or Arabic influences are the distortions and erasures that more recent civilizing missions by the Russian and Soviet empires have wrought in their effort to divide and rule the people from the Caucasian, Central Asian and other peripheries (Tlostanova, 2010, ch. 3; Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2012, pp 83ff). This hegemonic nature of post-imperial order is best illustrated in the fact that the legacy of the Soviet Union is itself highly ambiguous in most peripheral contexts, as it certainly exhibited the traits of a violent colonial endeavour (Tlostanova, 2010) but also brought so many achievements and benefits that a unanimous condemnation of the Soviet past, let alone its equalization with the fate of colonial domination has not happened in any of the post-Soviet and post-Socialist societies (including their intellectual circles) (Abashin, 2014).

Given this contested status of the colonial legacy of Socialism, it could be argued that decolonial thought in the post-Socialist space still has to be articulated. In trying to contribute to this articulation, the argument I am trying to substantiate here is that the Socialist period, as suggested in Madina Tlostanova’s work (2010, 2018), cannot be viewed solely in terms of its repressive and violent character that reduced it to a ‘second rate’ modernity-coloniality in analogy to decolonial scholars’ work. Rather, and especially in light of the effects of the neoliberal transition, social justice, public provision, equality and peace across categories of difference and international solidarity appear to be of continued importance in shaping the contours of decolonial ways of being, acting and knowing (see Kušić et al, 2019, p 21). My discussion in Chapters 4, 5 and the Conclusion will revisit this critical perspective of the Soviet and earlier imperial legacies and the critique of modern social ordering, including ‘liberal peace’ interventions, that they foreground.

‘Community security’ as discourse and practice of peace- and statebuilding

Having set out the theoretical contribution of the monograph – that is a post-liberal approach that critically unpacks the contradictions and unintended consequences of liberal ordering, in this section I now introduce the practical domain of community security as a setting for the study. While it would appear at first glance that community security is of central importance for peace, conflict and security studies, the
relative absence of this concept at least from the literature on peace- and statebuilding interventions indicates a gap that this research aims to fill. Sketching out the situatedness of the field between immediate post-conflict peacebuilding intervention on the one hand and development and democracy assistance on the other, I point out its role and implications for building, extending, consolidating and maintaining functions of state power. Being dominated by concepts of crime prevention and community policing as well as corresponding practices of surveillance and order maintenance through patrolling and other measures, it can be argued that this is a domain that helps to maintain state power and structures. As critical literature throughout the 1990s and early 2000s has established, these concepts, mechanisms and practices thus reproduce governmentality, whether in Western or non-Western contexts. The counter-model to such governmentality is the idea that community security practice can also include ways of (re-)ordering and steering society in more positive ways, such as by identifying and treating causes and factors of crime and conflict or by encouraging and strengthening solidarity to mitigate and help people deal with them. The latter might include methods more directly related to crime and security, for example crime prevention, education about different criminal practices and how to avoid them. To illustrate this tendency toward governmentality, I review the emergence and development of ‘crime prevention’ from the 1980s until the early 2000s to then indicate the corresponding circulation of the concept of ‘community policing’ in global development and cooperation contexts.

Community safety as crime prevention and neoliberal governmentality

As far as English-language literature is concerned, the field of community security seems to have been dominated by concepts and corresponding priorities of crime prevention and ‘community policing’ which prioritize ordering and disciplining over substantive aspects of people’s safety and human security. A survey of academic debates around ‘community safety’ illustrates the trade-off between, on the one hand, ambitions to empower and give voice to communities and, on the other, to employ communities’ knowledge and forms of social ordering and regulation to deliver results in the reduction of crime and disorder. This ‘top-down’ logic is apparent in two ways: first, while ‘community safety’ and ‘crime prevention’ have been used as mutually supportive goals of local government and public management programming, a skewing of the agenda in favour of ‘crime

1 Search results for ‘community security’ and analogous terms in standard peace and conflict journals or book series are few and far between.
prevention’ is obvious. One of the few publications dealing with community safety explicitly acknowledges its de facto synonymy with crime prevention as it ‘emerged out of burgeoning interest in locally driven and preventatively focused approaches to the governance of crime, low-level disorder and security’ (Henry, 2012, p 413). The aspect of safety as something semantically different from the absence of crime – such as not being subject to threats of crime or other infringements on the personal sphere that do not fit criminal justice frameworks – is conspicuously absent from works that proclaim they devote attention to both community safety and crime prevention. In the Handbook of Crime Prevention and Community Safety, the editor admits that ‘the [book’s] coverage certainly [also] includes associated crime harms as well as crime per se. Yet it does not extend to issues unrelated to crime’ (Tilley, 2005, p 7). Furthermore, one of the most comprehensive genealogies of community safety (Hughes, 2013) does not mention any significant efforts to develop the concept of community safety in an equally meaningful way as the aspect of crime prevention. For this, Hughes offers the explanation that, in contrast to crime prevention, community safety was widely perceived to be too vague and neither ‘susceptible to [sic] technicist-cum-administrative measurement of success or failure, nor focused on clearly targeted crime and victimisation events’ (Hughes, 2013, p 27).

However, this focus on measurable results at the expense of unpacking the intricacies of policy implementation in communities means that secondary effects of social exclusion and ‘othering’ of certain groups within respective communities have been under-appreciated. Most instructive in this regard is the observation that in the UK, ‘much of the impetus for community-based “solutions” were crucially likened to and inscribed in a broader racialised discourse about managing the “race and crime” debate in which black communities throughout the 1980s were often pathologised and “othered”’ (Hughes, 2013, p 25). Various contributions have declared this problematique of ‘otherness’ to be the main pitfall of the new interest in community-based forms of public management: it is in fact impossible to appropriately represent a community, as communities are always hierarchized and already structured by power relations, which are reproduced in communal practices (Crawford, 1998, p 244; Hughes and McLaughlin, 2003, p 7). This leads to irremediable tendencies to civilize or assimilate people who do not comply to a certain standard of behaviour – something that might be regarded as an unavoidable side effect but is nevertheless unpleasant for affected parties and brushes aside the structural reasons and sources of people’s inadequacy (Young, 1990; Young, 1999).

This perspective is reflective of a broader synthesis between critical sociology, criminology and public policy perspectives and critical studies on governmentality which evolved in the course of the 1990s (see Young, 1990; Rose, 1999, 2001). These scholars drew attention to the new moral discourse
on the significance of *community* as the central unit of social life; a locus of political legitimacy, for facilitating grass roots democracy and local problem solving. This new discourse of ‘communitarianism’, most clearly expressed in the writings of Amitai Etzioni (see 1993), was taken up most prominently by Tony Blair’s New Labour movement which promoted problem solving and crime prevention on the community level in its 1998 Crime and Disorder Act, among other legislative initiatives (Crawford, 1998, p 237). This approach was deconstructed by scholars working with Foucauldian and specifically governmentality frameworks, such as Nikolas Rose:

Community, rather than the ‘social’ is the new territorialisation of political thought, the new way in which conduct is collectivised … in a double movement of autonomisation and responsibilisation. Once responsibilised and entrepreneurialised, they would govern themselves within a state-secured framework of law and order. (1999, pp 475–6)

This critique of communitarianism as ‘the new social contract’ (Rose, 1999, p 475) admonishes the responsibilization and autonomization of communities, in other words equipping them with budgets and decision powers to manage their affairs, which is done in ways that naturalize both the constraints within which this empowerment of communities takes place and the limits to social and economic development. This indicates not merely a decentralization, dispersion and pluralization of social control (Hughes and McLaughlin, 2003, p 5), but also a transfer of responsibility and accountability for the overall economic and societal conditions in which local politics are conducted.

This shifting of responsibility to communal and non-state actors is reflective of the rise of what Chandler calls a post-liberal form of governmentality (2010; Chandler and Reid, 2016): budgetary responsibility and decision-making powers are devolved to the communal level and the responsibility for ensuring employment and social reproduction are discursively appointed to individual households (Chandler and Reid, 2016, ch 2) while demands for redistribution and social welfare are fended off with invocations of policy conditionalities dictated by the global economy. In other words, the decentralized and community-based approach to social ordering and crime prevention emphasizes each community’s own responsibility to facilitate not only the solution of problems, but also the design and implementation of measures that prevent social problems in the first place.

Many of the concepts used in peace- and statebuilding, democratization and other forms of assistance and intervention – for instance ‘ownership’, civil society involvement and community-based activism and service provision (see Lottholz, 2021) – have already been applied in some way in the community safety and crime prevention policies and practices in the UK, US and
other Western countries, or even in their historical experience of imperial domination. A critical analysis of community security thus foregrounds a perspective on the reasons, origins and widely used justifications for the decentralization, responsibilization and entrepreneurialization of communities by central authorities, and the implications such moves have for wider patterns of social ordering. Conversely, the rolling back of the welfare state and dereponsibilization of central state structures has been part of a neoliberal shift toward discourses about global competitiveness and budget discipline (see Crawford, 1998) that are a well-known part of the ‘liberal peace’ template to intervention and assistance (Joshi et al, 2014). While these dynamics have become all too obvious across the Anglo-American world but also in Europe, the global circulation of discourses and practices of community security has led to similar dynamics of ordering and crime prevention that operate on identitarian principles and thus reproduces existing forms of neoliberal governmentality.

The global spread of community policing and its discontents

Discursive patterns and governmentality tendencies of the community safety and crime prevention debate were not constrained to the Anglo-American world. The key concept that helped propel the new public policy approach with the community to the centre of attention and action was the concept of ‘community policing’, which, dating back to the colonial epoch (Hönke and Müller, 2012), was particularly popular in public policy from the 1970s onwards. Especially since the end of the Cold War, organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or the UK-based international NGO Saferworld – whose work in Kyrgyzstan is analysed in Chapter 5 – have been among the most significant advocates of community policing (see UNDP, 2009; Saferworld, 2007, 2014). From Latin America to Southeast Asia, a burgeoning field of transnational transfer and circulation of ideas, concepts, practices and technologies in the realm of security has unfolded and become a major part of global assistance and cooperation (Müller and Hochmüller, 2017).

While a range of definitions exists, Denney and Jenkins capture the consensus that ‘community policing’ or ‘community-oriented policing’ is ‘a more bottom-up approach to policing’ premised on ‘the importance of connecting the provision of safety and security to local needs’, rather than simply implementing standard procedures and protocols (Denney and Jenkins, 2013, p 7). Based on cases of relative (though not uncontested) success in Western settings such as Northern Ireland, community policing became a major Western export, especially from the 1990s onwards. In their analysis of this Western export practice, Mike Brogden and Preeti Nijhar (2005, pp 4ff) note that the demand for it – and thus the basis for creating a
whole ‘cottage industry’ of consultants, experts and educators – was not so much created by the needs in the targeted localities, but much more by the constellation of the good governance and ‘security and development’ agendas promoted by Western states and donor organizations that created an immense global market for ideas and practical approaches to community policing.

Alongside other scholars (see Ryan, 2011; Albrecht and Kyed, 2014), Brogden and Nijhar draw attention toward the problems and trade-offs of community policing, echoing the critiques of governmentality scholarship and critical perspectives on security sector reform. Their ‘ten myths of Anglo-American community policing’ (Brogden and Nijhar, 2005, ch 3) raise the problem discussed above of doing justice to all members of a community (2005, pp 49ff); the reverse problem that community security initiatives might backfire when authorities cannot or do not want to provide the accountability demanded from the population (pp 52ff); and the fact that more fundamental institutional change on the national level is unlikely to occur thanks to community policing initiatives (pp 76ff). They also criticize the universalist and Eurocentric thinking that underpins the philosophies of many community policing advocates, who take an imagined Western model of Weberian legal-rational state institutions and their adaptation via community policing for granted, while ignoring other philosophies and practical approaches at social ordering and securing economic exchange, livelihoods and well-being (pp 79ff). These criticisms both resonate with more recent analyses. Thus, the key challenge, if not the impossibility, to holistically grasp the opinion of a community as the basis for collective action, creates the risk that community policing projects may reproduce, first, inequalities between communities, as some communities are better endowed with time, money and skills to participate in projects and fulfil their criteria such as report writing, internal mobilization and so on (Denney and Jenkins, 2013, p 33; see Luckham and Kirk, 2012). Second, community policing may reproduce power structures and inequalities within communities: if people in a locality have already established certain patterns and modes of doing things, then these naturalized hierarchies are unlikely to be challenged, so that women, young people and minority groups run the risk of not having their points of view adequately included in community policing programming (Denney and Jenkins, 2013; see Jackson, 2011).

Furthermore, echoing the critique of the responsibilization and thus autonomization of communities and the corresponding shifting of responsibility from governmental and state agencies to the decentralized level (see Rose, 1999), Denney and Jenkins (2013, p 33) have identified the risk that the ostensible empowerment of communities to deal with their problems on their own may distract attention away from reforms at the national level that would improve the accountability of police and security forces in the first place. This is reflective of a broader trend of making communities adaptable
and resilient to the shocks and externalities stemming from economic and political conduct which, especially in developing countries, often takes forms that are disconnected from people’s livelihoods and interests (see Chandler and Reid, 2016).

In sum then, the main problem this section raises is that, rather than reconfiguring security and social ordering mechanisms toward the specificities of the respective context, community security or policing arrangements may also reproduce existing power relations, hierarchies and forms of exclusion in a given community. As community policing or community security practitioners need to operate on the basis of a clear analysis of problems and ways to tackle them, the question is how capable such initiatives are to address, or at least be aware of, more fundamental, yet not immediately obvious, reasons for security risks and crime, such as social injustice, corruption, or organized crime. While practitioners — whether they are working for the authorities or volunteering on behalf of residents — may not be able to tackle or even identify such underlying, more fundamental problems, their responsibility for the maintenance of social order and security can foreground a dilemma between performing this role according to protocol and addressing the underlying problems. This dilemma of representation and of appropriate action resonates with the post-liberal framework proposed in this study, which is wary of the possibility of building well-functioning institutions and practical routines on the basis of Western templates when the worldviews and practical knowledge of people in a given context are not taken into account or even ignored, and hard to grasp in the first place.

**Conclusion: Theorizing post-liberalism globally**

This chapter has covered a large range of disciplines and literature to demonstrate the significance and wide presence of post-liberal thinking. Rather than focusing on Central Asia or the post-Socialist space, it has shown how the post-liberal approach is relevant for capturing dynamics in the West as well, and how post-liberal governance and order-making have to be understood in their global dimensions and entanglements.

The line of argument in favour of a global approach to post-liberal ordering runs throughout the literature discussed here, as all of these works indicated a level of self-contradiction in Western liberal political (and philosophical) thought and the various foreign policy and cooperation approaches of Western countries. This is best captured in references to the ‘dark side’ of Western modernity, which various authors across fields refer to explicitly — such as Mignolo (2011), Geis et al (2006) but also Wade’s critique of liberal multiculturalism (2016) — or implicitly, as scholars in critical security studies and critics of the ‘liberal peace’ approach to international
intervention. Another thread linking the latter critique with other literature is the argument grounded in Michel Foucault’s work on biopolitics and governmentality (2008), through which various authors have unpacked the apparatuses and technologies of ordering which have subjugated and hierarchically categorized social groups and individual bodies in post-civil war or large-scale conflict situations, in peripheral regimes more generally, and, most notoriously, at the borders of the European Union. Although Foucauldian security studies have been critiqued for under-appreciating aspects of race, a common ethico-philosophical lineage between them and decolonial thought cannot be dismissed full course and deserves more attention in future scholarship.

In this light, as stated at the outset, the post-liberal approach to statebuilding and order-making proposed here can be squarely situated as part of the attempt within peace, conflict and intervention studies to forge a synergy with decolonial thinking and to thus rethink the idea of international interventions and assistance from the point of view of their subjects. This can implicate, as discussed, more solidaristic engagement and improvement of existing intervention practices (Sabaratnam, 2017), the consideration of reparations in light of colonial injustice (Rutazibwa, 2018) or the support of grassroots organizations which reject Western military intervention as completely inadequate (Exo, 2017), which is not necessarily unproblematic, either. The analysis in the empirical part of the book is not geared at formulating such more ‘practical’ perspectives and suggestions. Yet, it takes them and the decolonial approach underlying them as impetus to question whether and how assumed end points of statebuilding and security assistance, such as liberal democracy and capitalist free market development, need to be rethought and possibly discarded. Furthermore, decolonial thinking informs an attempt to capture the legacies of violence and ordering, and the current forms of conflict and exploitation, which foreground present-day dynamics of ordering and security to thus view these in a more complex register.

Through this decolonial approach toward capturing and analysing post-liberal ordering, I seek to move beyond the present status quo, which is largely characterized by a ‘paradox of liberalism’ that has been carried forward from historical liberal thought into today’s scholarship on ‘liberal peace’ and ‘illiberal’ and ‘authoritarian’ forms of ordering. As I have argued in line with critiques of this scholarship, the paradox lies in the fact that current critiques of liberal interventionism (broadly defined) and its failures cannot offer an effective way beyond political impasse, or worse, end up deepening forms of Western hegemony through othering and orientalizing tendencies. Although recent perspectives on illiberal peace in post-Socialist Eurasia have managed to move beyond the optimistic attribution of influence and ‘agency’ to ‘the local’ and the realm of the ‘everyday’ to somehow reshape and redirect international interventions toward more suitable outcomes,
this scholarship faces its own limitations as it focuses on macro-level dynamics while under-appreciating the role of bottom-up forces and global entanglements in co-producing illiberal order (see Lottholz et al, 2020). The next chapter provides further conceptual and methodological grounding for this argument as it unpacks the complexity of social ordering through the concepts of heteroglossia – that is, the coexistence and interaction of multiple meanings – and the ‘social imaginary’, alongside the cooperative and dialogical approach to research taken in this project.