

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Title: Liberal Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka after the Military Conclusion of the Civil War

Researcher: Ramya Chamalie Jirasinghe, Student, Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Colombo

Supervisors: Prof. Amal Jayawardane, University of Colombo and Prof. Gamini Keerawella, University of Peradeniya

Background:

Can a liberal peacebuilding project enable a positive liberal peace after the military conclusion of a civil war in a State? This research explores postwar liberal peacebuilding in the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka after the military conclusion of the civil war against the broader context of liberal peace in Sri Lanka. Since the end of the cold-war, liberal peace has become the main policy framework that has been used by the International Community (IC) to engage with and intervene in conflict ridden states as a means for creating global peace by stabilizing States and strengthening global markets (Ikenberry 2009, Sabaratnam 2011:13). The process of this interventionist engagement is termed liberal peacebuilding: ‘...defined as those actions undertaken by international or national actors to institutionalize peace, understood as the absence of armed conflict (“negative peace”) and a modicum of participatory politics (as a component of “positive peace”) that can be sustained in the absence of an international peace operation,’ (Call and Cousens 2007: 2). In May 2009, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) militarily concluded a thirty-year civil war between the State and the militant separatist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). However, the conclusion of the civil war did not result in a genuine initiation of liberal peacebuilding by the GoSL, aimed at a resolution of the ethnic conflict. Neither did it spearhead a positive liberal peace on the island. The GoSL was openly antagonistic towards the IC, which pressured it to implement a postwar liberal peacebuilding project. There were two peacebuilding projects in postwar Sri Lanka: the GoSL’s peacebuilding project and the IC’s liberal peacebuilding project.

Research Problem:

The inability for a liberal peacebuilding project to enable a positive liberal peace in the immediate aftermath of the war in a State is not, in itself, problematic. A negative peace may prevail in the immediate postwar circumstances and has been accepted as the better alternative to war until the State can be strengthened to institutionalize positive peace under the right conditions. However, in postwar Sri Lanka, pre-existing and long standing governance structures for separation of powers were dismantled by the GoSL, the options for a resolution of the national question were narrowed,

rule of law deteriorated, the State moved towards illiberalism and contested the IC's efforts for peacebuilding. Yet, resistance, contestation and causing the ultimate collapse have been historically, the normative local responses to a liberal peacebuilding project in Sri Lanka. However, Sri Lanka has a long history as a State with a liberal framework as well as substantial liberal peacebuilding experience. This research problematizes Sri Lanka's postwar peacebuilding encounter against Sri Lanka's broader context of liberal peace and liberal peacebuilding. It raises the research problem in the form of a question as to why, despite a context of liberal peacebuilding learning and a liberal peace framework, the postwar liberal peacebuilding project from 2009-2015 could not initiate a positive liberal peace in Sri Lanka?

Theoretical Framework:

The above research problem has been developed from a 'power based' critical framework, rather than an 'ideas based' or a 'problem solving' framework (Cox 1981). The international relations and liberal peace critical literature emphasize the need to re-examine the assumptions of power, epistemologies and ontologies, such as sources of hegemony, historical continuities, local agency and the local conceptualization of concepts such as peace that inform a peacebuilding project in a host state (Hamati-Ataya 2013, Richmond and Mac Ginty 2014). This research is set within a critical theoretical framework of reflexivity that draws on an immediate set of events, the postwar peacebuilding encounter between the IC and the GoSL, to question the epistemological frameworks and ontological assumptions that dominate liberal peacebuilding in Sri Lanka.

Objectives

This research has the following objectives:

1. Analyze the process by which a liberal peacebuilding project in a host State is weakened.
2. Examine the contextual interface of the State and citizens and concepts of peace and agency in a host State in liberal peacebuilding.
3. Contribute empirical data for theory building and policy formulation.

Methodology:

Based within a critical methodological framework, this research uses a single-case study to explore the repercussions that the engagement between the IC and the GoSL over postwar peacebuilding had on liberal peace in Sri Lanka. The research then links the insights drawn from the case study to the wider liberal peace context through critical-constructivist analysis.

Preliminary Conclusions:

The research had made the following preliminary conclusions;

1. The IC's peacebuilding toolbox lacks mechanisms with which to engage with a host State that has stepped outside the liberal framework and to learn from past liberal peacebuilding learning and experience.
2. Contextual knowledge, especially historical patterns of governance, and the actualization of concepts such as 'agency' and 'peace' by the citizens are factors of crucial importance when embedding a liberal peacebuilding project to a State such as Sri Lanka.
3. Concepts of 'agency' and 'peace' are not ontologically stable, as assumed in peacebuilding policy and practice. Instead, they take different meanings in States that have been through a historical trajectory different to that of States with a backdrop of the Enlightenment.
4. The universalizing and de-contextualizing of the liberal thesis results in a continual epistemological trap for States such as Sri Lanka. It perpetuates a peacebuilding discourse within a reformist-solution frame without enabling the exploration of critical options for emancipatory social transformations that may point to a resolution of a conflict.

Key References:

Call, CT and Cousens, EM 2007, 'Ending Wars and Building Peace', *Coping with Crisis: Working Paper Series*, International Peace Academy, New York.

Cox, RW 1981, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 126 -155, viewed 27 July 2015, <http://mil.sagepub.com>.

Hamati-Ataya, I 2013, 'Symposium – Defining Theory Down', *End of IR Theory – Companion Symposium for the Special Issue of the International Journal of European Relations*, viewed 5 August 2015, <http://duckofminerva.dreamhosters.com/2013/09/defining-theory-down.html>

Ikenberry, JG 2009, 'Liberal Internationalism 3.0: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order', *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 71-87, viewed 3 April 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40407217>.

Richmond, OP and Mac Ginty, R 2014, 'Where now for the critique of liberal peace?', *Cooperation and Conflict*, viewed 10 September 2014, <http://cac.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/08/20/0010836714545691>

Sabaratanam, M 2011, 'The Liberal Peace? An Intellectual History of International Conflict Management, 1990-2010', in *A Liberal Peace? The Problems and Practices of Peacebuilding*, S Campbell, D Chandler & M Sabaratanam (eds), Zed Books, UK

Stokke, K and Uyangoda, J (eds) 2011, *Liberal Peace in Question: Politics of State and Market Reform in Sri Lanka*, Anthem Press, UK.