

The Ambivalence of Peacebuilding Theories and Contexts

Human Rights and Conflict Resolution in Context: Colombia, Sierra Leone, and Northern Ireland

Eileen F. Babbitt and Ellen L. Lutz, eds.

Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009

Religion and Conflict Resolution: Christianity and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Megan Shore

Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009

When War Ends: Building Peace in Divided Communities

David J. Francis, ed.

Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012

Peacebuilding is the difficult work of creating the conditions in which it is possible for an achieved *negative* peace, often after prolonged and widespread violence, to become a sustainable *positive* peace. ^[1] One finds politicians, lawyers, activists, social psychologists, and religious leaders, to name a few, actively engaged in the work of peacebuilding. In a like manner, scholars from a variety of disciplines—political science, law, philosophy, theology, sociology, psychology, history—are actively engaged in studying peacebuilding. The academic discipline of peacebuilding is therefore an inherently interdisciplinary field.

Due to the wide-ranging interdisciplinarity of the field, there are a variety of theoretical approaches to the study of peacebuilding. In this review I will consider four of these approaches to building peace as they are presented in the three books reviewed. In reviewing these books two themes emerged across the various approaches: first, the need for a greater integration of various forms of social justice with retributive justice in post-settlement societies; and, second, the ambivalence of the various approaches to securing and building peace when applied in specific contexts. In other words, each book argued for the

necessary pursuit of social justice alongside legal and political goals, and each theoretical approach, when applied in the specific contexts examined, proved to have both positive and negative impacts on the creation of a sustainable peace.

Religious Conflict Resolution

Megan Shore begins her book *Religion and Conflict Resolution: Christianity and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* echoing R. Scott Appleby's influential claim that the "relationship between religion and conflict is an ambivalent one" (1).^[2] Thus, she takes as her starting point for exploring the role of religion in the South African TRC the claim that if a religion plays an influential role in violent conflict, which Christianity surely did in South Africa, then it should play an influential role in resolving the conflict and building the peace after it is over. In other words, because religions can fuel conflicts they must be a part of resolving these conflicts if that resolution is to be lasting. This, in fact, is the normative assumption of the field that has emerged known as religion, conflict, and peacebuilding.^[3]

Shore proceeds through her book by providing several working definitions for key terms. Indeed, much of her book can be understood as a negotiation of the arguments, in South Africa and more broadly, around defining key terms such as "conflict resolution," "truth," "justice," and "reconciliation." Importantly, however, she provides no definition of "religion." Here she is susceptible to the critique of William Cavanaugh that scholars of religious violence, and in this case peacebuilding, simply (and wrongly) assume that we all know what religion is when we see it. Her book was published in the same year as his *The Myth of Religious Violence*, but the absence of a definition for the first word in her title is still glaring in light of the amount of space she devotes to defining key terms.^[4]

However, despite being an exemplar of what Cavanaugh diagnoses as a problem in the discipline, Shore moves in a direction that Cavanaugh suggests the field should move—she talks about how a specific "religion," in this case Christianity, influenced both conflict and peace in South Africa. While she continues to use the word "religion" throughout her text, and therefore potentially creates confusion for her readers and implies that one can generalize to other contexts involving different religions, Shore's focus is upon the specific forms of Christianity that were influential in South Africa in the time of her study. This contextual and tradition specific analysis moves in the direction of avoiding the dangers of

talking about the generic category of “religion” even if she still uses language of “the religious” throughout the text. Clearly, however, the difficulties of talking about religion without providing a precise definition are evident.

Shore begins by mapping out the fields of conflict resolution and transitional justice and clearly presents the primary arguments made by scholars for the active presence of religion in these seemingly “secular” and “political” fields. The four assets she identifies as reasons for including religion in international conflict resolution are “the ambivalence of the sacred,” or the ability of religion to be a promoter of positive social goods like peace and reconciliation instead of simply a promoter of division and violence; the strong ethical norms contained within religious belief systems which can contribute to the creation of a moral community; the communication network that religious networks provide; and the strong role of religion in civil society. Thus, she concludes, with the emerging consensus of scholarship in the area in the last decade, that religion should be included in international conflict resolution for principled and practical reasons; namely, the power of religious ethics to motivate social actors toward peace and the human resources that religious organizations provide for communicating to and mobilizing large segments of the population.

After providing this justification for the field of religious conflict resolution, Shore describes in two chapters the role of Christianity during the apartheid era in South Africa and in the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The ambivalence of religion (Christianity) in South Africa is clearly seen in the ways that Christianity both motivated racism and the creation of the apartheid state and motivated much of the resistance to apartheid and the desire for a “rainbow nation.” Importantly, Shore argues that because Christianity played such an important role in the conflict in South Africa, it was necessary for it to play a role in the TRC.

In the TRC, again, the ambivalence of religion (Christianity) is evident. Christianity played a positive role in the TRC inasmuch as it provided people with the natural language in which many victims chose to tell their stories. In this way, Christian language was unavoidable in a nation so thoroughly filled with Christians, and it provided a language in which victims were able to exercise their agency and tell their stories in the ways they deemed appropriate. Christianity played a more negative role, however, inasmuch as it functioned to exclude or marginalize those participants who were not Christian. While much Christian language has entered the common discourse of South African society, South

Africa was and is a religiously plural nation. Thus, there were times when Christian language, and even ritual, functioned to marginalize the non-Christian participants in the TRC.

Christianity was not only ambivalent in the official meetings of the commission, but, as Shore helpfully points out, in the definition, promotion, and achievement of “truth,” “reconciliation,” and “justice.” One way that this played out was in the forms of truth-telling that occurred in the Human Rights Victims Committee (HRVC) hearings and in the Amnesty Committee (AC) hearings. In the former, Christianity often provided the language that people used to tell their stories. The truth that often emerged in the HRVC hearings, where victims of human rights violations were asked to share their stories, were the subjective truths of those testifying. The AC hearings, however, because they were used to determine whether perpetrators were to receive amnesty for specific human rights violations, tended to resemble the legal discourse most often heard in courtrooms. Shore, then, is right to point out that the HRVC hearings became “the place where a personal, religious-redemptive discourse was authorized, while the AC hearings became a sphere primarily restricted to legal-forensic discourse” (85). In short, two different “truths” emerged due to the different contexts and missions of the different committees. These different truths competed for prominence through the TRC.

In a similar way, Shore goes on to show that the practical expressions and interpretations of “reconciliation” and “justice” in the TRC and South Africa were ambiguous, in part, because of the role of Christianity in the TRC. The competing visions of reconciliation, for example, were what Shore calls “religious” and “political” understandings: the former focusing on inter- and intra-personal reconciliation and the latter focusing on national unity. The integration of these visions of reconciliation produced in the TRC a desire “to promote reconciliation in the attempt to create a moral order in South Africa” (138). This is important, according to Shore, because reconciliation was not limited to interpersonal relationships nor flattened out into something more akin to tolerance or “minimal decency,” but named a new vision of the common good and a shared future. ^[5] Therefore, in Shore’s estimation “reconciliation,” in the end, proved to complement rather than contradict the various forms of truth-telling in the TRC and laid the groundwork for the pursuit of justice.

Transitional justice, the literature with which Shore is in conversation, is a field littered with

debates about the nature of justice, and the case of South Africa is the most cited case study for testing these arguments. The most prominent debate is over the place of retribution and restoration in transitional justice. It is no surprise, then, that Shore points out that there was ambiguity about the nature of justice in the TRC—specifically, there were many arguments over restorative and retributive justice. Unfortunately, this meant that other forms of social justice, such as reparations and democratic forms of justice like recognition and participation, were given short shrift. The lack of attention to these manifestations of justice is the most damning criticism of the transitional process in South Africa.

While much of the criticism about this ambiguity has been aimed at Christianity and its (improper) role in the politics of South Africa, Shore helpfully points out that these tensions did not arise primarily from Christianity because it is somehow opposed to justice and committed to mercy.

Rather, the confusion stems from the changing nature of South Africa's political and legal institutions. ... The confusion in the TRC should not be attributed solely or even primarily to a novel conflation of religious and political concepts in the Commission, but rather to a much larger societal uncertainty about the new role of religion and law in the lives of everyday South Africans" (146).

In other words, a society in which religion had historically played a prominent role in public and political life was transitioning to a more traditional liberal democracy in which such "overlap" between religion and politics is treated with suspicion. Thus, it was "politics" as much as Christianity that was at fault for the confused application of religious norms in public life. ^[6]

In all three instances of competing practical definitions—over truth-telling, reconciliation, and justice—Christianity played an ambivalent role. As should be expected in a nascent democracy, public discourse around defining such key terms is contested, and when a significant proportion of the population is religious one should expect religion to play a part in this discourse. And, though ambivalent, there are times when the influence of religion can prove to be beneficial. It is hard to imagine, for example, South Africa being able to move toward the creation of a new moral, as well as political, community without the influence of Christianity. Indeed, Shore concludes her study claiming that though "the role of

Christianity in the TRC was undeniably ambiguous ... its inclusion in the process was a necessary [though partial] step in a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy” (180).

Human Rights and Conflict Resolution

In *Human Rights and Conflict Resolution in Context*, also published in 2009, Eileen Babitt and Ellen Lutz compiled a variety of theoretical and historical pieces, focusing on Colombia, Northern Ireland, and Sierra Leone, to compare human rights and conflict resolution approaches to responding to violent conflict. This setup presents the approaches as two significantly different approaches to ending conflict and building peace. And, while the editors leave it to individual authors to assign the parameters of what they consider “human rights” and “conflict resolution” approaches, they do say that, in general, conflict resolvers are those who work toward achieving negotiated settlements with a minimum loss of life and human rights advocates tend to limit “their activities to shaming, negative publicity, and judicial condemnation of responsible individuals” (1).

The three extended case studies are helpful because they highlight the ambivalence of both human rights and conflict resolution approaches to building peace across quite different conflicts. They span three continents and address conflicts as diverse as drug violence in South America to civil war in West Africa to religious violence in Europe. Each case study includes a historical analysis of both human rights and conflict resolution efforts and an essay integrating these approaches and drawing lessons from each case. I will focus in this review, for reasons of relevance to the other books reviewed here, upon the essays on Sierra Leone and the last full chapter, written by Michelle Parlevliet, which compares South Africa to Northern Ireland.

In the late 1990’s Sierra Leone was in a violent civil conflict between the rebel group Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by Foday Sankoh, and the state. Due to the weakness of the state’s military, they were supported by the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). In addition, RUF was supported by the regime of Liberian president Charles Taylor, who would later be indicted by the International Criminal Court on war crimes charges for his participation in the conflict. The conflict did not come to an official end until November of 2000 when the RUF agreed to the Abuja Agreement, a cease-fire, and to abide by the Lomé Peace Agreement, which had been signed in July of the previous year.

Leading up to and throughout the conflict the national and international human rights communities had been reporting human rights violations by all parties in the conflict. The National Forum for Human Rights, a coalition of human rights focused NGOs established in 1996, was well organized and was an important actor in organizing human rights organizations and reporting on abuses. In addition, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone and the Sierra Leone Bar Association were active and influential. Finally, there was also a government-established National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights, which was funded by the United Nations Development Program. In short, there was a robust and vibrant coalition of national NGO, religious, legal, and political actors committed to human rights advocacy throughout the conflict. These national actors were complemented by a large international presence in the form of the United Nations and international NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Reports detailing violations of human rights and shaming those responsible for them were timely and well known.

The human rights community was also active in ways other than reporting abuses. They played an active role in crafting the Lomé Agreement and the Abuja Agreement. Specifically, Article 26 of the Lomé Agreement, which stipulates the creation of a truth and reconciliation commission, was directly influenced by the lobbying of the human rights community and their desire to prevent future impunity. However, they were unsuccessful in inserting the word “justice” into the commission’s title.

At the same time that the human rights community was at work reporting abuses and advocating for a settlement that would ensure justice, conflict resolvers involved in the peace process focused their energies on ending the violent conflict. The two primary achievements of these processes were the Lomé Agreement and the Abuja Agreement. An especial difficulty of the peace process was convincing a variety of actors that “seeing the negotiating process through to a final document is not the same as seeing a peace process through to a final resolution” (123). Creating a positive peace has proven more difficult than achieving a negative peace.

While in many ways the work of the human rights community and the work of the conflict resolution community were mutually beneficial, there were tensions and disagreements between these actors. Specifically, the name, function, and scope of the truth and reconciliation commission were contested issues. Naomi Roht-Arriaza helpfully points out

that while “almost all those involved in the Sierra Leone peace process could readily agree to a truth commission” (143), the particulars of the commission would be consistently debated, and the official understanding of the commission evolved over time. In Roht-Arriaza’s account, the truth commission evolved from being understood primarily as a *precursor* to justice to a *substitute* for justice and finally, with the advent of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, as a *complement* to justice (143-144). As in South Africa, debates about the nature and extent of justice came to hold a prominent place in debates about the commission.

In integrating these various accounts of human rights and conflict resolution approaches to ending conflict and creating a sustainable peace, Andrea Bartoli and Thomas Bundshuh highlight the convergence and divergence between these approaches and the impact on the ground these approaches generally have. For instance, they point out that the primary focus of human rights advocates is “monitoring, investigating, and reporting the human rights situation, lobbying governments, and bringing perpetrators to justice,” while those in conflict resolution “generally have a more positive outlook on human nature” and work “to mobilize what is good in people and make it available to construct peace” (156). They also point out, however, that both human rights advocates and conflict resolvers “are concerned with justice, but in different ways,” and that they both “share a dependence on the parties to the conflict, the political constraints, and the need for external resources and support,” which makes them both “contingent on the complexities of the conflict at hand” (156-7). In other words, while having distinct approaches and philosophical starting points, both human rights advocates and conflict resolvers work toward a vision of justice but are constrained by the particularities of a given conflict in such a way that neither side is ever fully satisfied with any particular peacebuilding process.

In Sierra Leone, this was most evident in the human rights community’s insistence that the truth and reconciliation commission could not be a substitute for justice. In this formulation, only criminal trials could do justice. Thus, they viewed the removal of “justice” from the title of the commission as a major setback. Eventually, the concerns from human rights advocates about compromising justice were allayed with the creation of the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Conflict resolvers, on the other hand, have found it difficult to secure a lasting positive peace because they were unable to include robust provisions and institutions in the peace agreement designed to address the violation of economic, social, and cultural

rights. The culturally appropriate righting of economic wrongs and the building of civil society and just democratic institutions are vital pieces to transforming conflict and building peace. However, the focus upon the extent of criminal prosecutions has meant that the language of human rights has applied primarily to violations of bodily integrity. This is a common problem in transitional societies, but it is, for Bartoli and Bundshuh, a particularly important one in Sierra Leone. ^[7]

Thus the authors insightfully point out that both conflict resolvers and human rights advocates are part of an “epistemic community,” along with international and national government, business, and other actors, that “produces knowledge that will be used politically” (180). In Sierra Leone, because of the high levels of disenfranchisement in the society, they believe that this epistemic community should have emphasized civil society and provided “the means to realize people’s economic, social, and cultural rights” (181). They argue that the greatest challenge for both conflict resolvers and human rights advocates “is to situate their intervention in the context of a transitional passage that integrates different facets of justice” (183) and does not focus on retributive justice.

Michelle Parlevliet, in her excellent penultimate essay, “Icebergs and the Impossible: Human Rights and Conflict Resolution in Postsettlement Peace Building,” pushes in the same direction as Bartoli and Bundshuh. Specifically, she emphasizes the need for thinking beyond criminal prosecutions and the crafting and signing of peace agreements toward integrating social, economic, and cultural changes to secure a positive, rather than merely negative, peace. Drawing upon her own experience in South Africa and drawing upon the essays concerning Northern Ireland, Parlevliet identifies “three particular dynamics” that can undercut such peacebuilding work: underconnection, underrealization, and undervisioning.

According to Parlevliet, underconnection occurred in Northern Ireland in two ways: a lack of connection between the work of state negotiators and community intervention efforts, and a limited connection between addressing symptoms and root causes. Underrealization refers to the “limited implementation of rights provisions contained in the [Good Friday] Agreement” as well a narrow interpretation of human rights. Undervisioning, finally, refers to the lack of a shared vision for a common future between the primary parties and communities in the conflict. In other words, practical and principled “narrowness”—in including actors, in envisioning and implementing the proper scope of human rights

provisions, and in the lack of a shared vision for a peaceful future—has hampered the peacebuilding process in Northern Ireland, as remarkable as portions of it have been.

In explicating these theses and comparing Northern Ireland to South Africa, Parlevliet uses the image of an iceberg. “The top of the iceberg, pointing above the waterline, represents violations of rights resulting from violent conflict. . . . Below the waterline, however, is the bottom of the iceberg, which symbolizes human rights violations as causes of conflict” (254). In Northern Ireland human rights violations both served to fuel the conflict (by parties justifying their violence as retaliation for violations of their rights) and were the result of the conflict. In a similar manner, the rhetoric of rights both fueled the conflict and served as a tool in negotiating peace. Like Christianity in South Africa, then, human rights discourse is an ambivalent tool in conflict situations.

Drawing on the image of the iceberg, which she reminds us is much larger underneath the water than above it, Parlevliet insists that a “postsettlement environment is not necessarily also a postconflict one” (257). Rather, “postsettlement may be *postviolent* conflict, but not *postconflict*” (257). In this formulation, the settlement is only a first step toward securing peace. The longer, and harder, work is addressing not only explicit violence (above the water line), but also structural and cultural violence (below the water line).

Importantly, Parlevliet is explicit that these forms of violence, and the means used to address them, are interdependent. Her goal is not to suggest a focus *only* on positive peace and ignore agreements that bring about negative peace. Rather, she lifts up the necessity of the traditional work of human rights advocates and conflict resolvers alongside the work of peacebuilders. To combat all three forms of violence, it is necessary to connect and realize the mechanisms, procedures, and actors that address each form on its own terms and in connection with the other forms of violence. This requires a “broader interpretation of rights” (275) that recognizes they “exist in a social context and are reciprocal” (276). Connecting these various spheres of social life makes it possible to shape a peaceful society. Doing this “involves an internalization of rights norms, values, and principles so that they guide people’s behaviors, attitudes, and belief systems in relation to the self, others, and the state” (276). In this way, Parlevliet suggests a kind of peacebuilding virtue ethic that recognizes that the creation and sustenance of positive peace requires the formation of peaceful social actors through peaceful social institutions.

Finally, Parlevliet helpfully points out that a key difference between Northern Ireland and South Africa was the presence of a common social vision in South Africa. Whereas negotiations in Northern Ireland focused on the achievement of a negative peace, and the various parties still often envision different ends (a united and sovereign Ireland or remaining within the United Kingdom), South Africa's transitional government consciously and publicly pursued a "rainbow nation" and *ubuntu* society that includes all parties in the conflict. In Megan Shore's words, they worked to create a moral, and not merely political, community. By focusing on the achievement of negative peace, undervisioning in Northern Ireland, according to Parlevliet, does not address cultural violence and, therefore, acts to undermine the good work being done combating explicit violence and structural violence. In response to the hurdles of underconnection, underrealization, and undervisioning, Parlevliet proposes the pursuit of positive peace through connection, realization, and visioning that, when done well, can "constitute the parameters for a *peace-building* system that incorporates the merits of human rights and conflict-management approaches and insights in the postsettlement phase" (288).

Again we find a strong argument for embracing a holistic peacebuilding approach to securing peace in postsettlement and transitional societies. We also find that approaches to securing such peace, in this case human rights and conflict resolution approaches, are more complicated and oftentimes ambivalent than theory suggests when applied to specific contexts of violent conflict. For instance, the language of rights in Northern Ireland both fueled the violence and was instrumental in enabling the completion of a peace agreement. Thus, the various authors in *Human Rights and Conflict Resolution in Context* push us to pursue multiple means toward the end of secure peace while recognizing that all approaches will be inadequate in one way or another. Thus, as Michelle Parlevliet says, "The idea of transforming destructive conflict into sustainable peace founded on a culture of human rights more often than not requires a leap in imagination and belief" (288).

Liberal Peacebuilding

A fourth approach to building peace after violent conflict is *liberal peacebuilding*. Liberal peacebuilding consists primarily of introducing democratization (especially in the form of free periodic elections), marketization (in the introduction of a neoliberal free market economy), and the building of public institutions (such as schools and hospitals). This

approach works with the assumptions that national and regional conflicts pose threats both to international peace and western political and financial interests; thus, the creation of more liberal states is viewed as a way to end violence *and* to integrate more state actors into a global economic and political system. Indeed, the two ends are viewed as necessarily mutual.

Critics of this approach are legion. Some argue that this approach misunderstands the most urgent needs of those affected by violent conflict. Rather than the creation of goods for the international market, for example, what people emerging out of violent conflict often need most urgently is medical care and the reintegration of divided communities. Other critics say that the liberal peacebuilding approach is too “top-down” and creates a culture of dependency upon international actors and resources. And other critics, and the most damning of all criticisms, accuse liberal peacebuilding of being an inherently imperialist or colonialist project that continues the centuries-long exploitation of the world’s poorest, especially in Africa. In order to interrogate these claims, David J. Francis and the authors of the essays in *When War Ends* focus on the case of Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone is held up by many as an example of a case of postsettlement peacebuilding and transitional justice that the international community finally “got right.” Indeed, Bryan Crawford-Garrett explicitly defends this thesis, with the qualification that Sierra Leone has struggled “in the attempt to address the underlying causes of the war, foster institutions, or consolidate democracy” (122). Carla Castañeda, on the other hand, questions whether the “trickle-down peace” of liberal peacebuilding is reaching the lives of Sierra Leone’s poorest or directly contributes to the difficulties that even defenders like Crawford-Garrett identify. However, to discuss the details of the case of Sierra Leone is to get ahead of ourselves.

The first substantive chapter of the book is Roland Paris’s essay “Saving Liberal Peacebuilding.” In this essay Paris sets out to defend liberal peacebuilding from its detractors, especially those who view it as a neo-colonial project. While recognizing that “efforts to promote liberal democratic governing systems and market-oriented economic growth ... have been more difficult and unpredictable than initially expected,” Paris disagrees with the “hyper-critical school of scholars and commentators who view liberal peacebuilding as fundamentally destructive or illegitimate” because their criticisms “are both unwarranted and imprudent” (27-29). Indeed, he insists that liberal peacebuilding missions have done more good than harm.

Paris's argument moves along two main lines: first, that critics either misstate or overstate their case, and, second, that there is no viable alternative to liberal peacebuilding. Indeed, he insists that many of the criticisms, such as the critique that liberal peacebuilding is too "top-down" and does not foster local agency, emerge out of liberal principles themselves. Thus, he asks whether these critics are really liberals in disguise. Paris, therefore, suggests that critics should position themselves as reformers rather than dismantlers of liberal peacebuilding.

According to Paris, one key reason for the strong turn against liberal peacebuilding is a widespread reaction against the United States' action in Afghanistan and, especially, Iraq. For many critics, Iraq is the ultimate evidence for the claim that liberal peacebuilding is an imperial project. However, Paris rejects this criticism as an instance of "conflating post-conquest and post-settlement peacebuilding" (39). He insists that the "conditions of birth [of a transition] are important" (39) and draws a distinction "between UN peacebuilding and the American-led 'war on terror'" (40).

In addition, Paris argues that there are distinct differences between European colonialism and contemporary international peacebuilding missions. Specifically, the flow of resources in contemporary missions is not from exploited peoples to the colonial power, but from wealthier states to poorer states. Also, unlike during the colonial period, no UN peacebuilding mission has designs to take over a nation and take away its independence. Rather, the goal of these missions is peaceful independent states. This does not mean that critics are mistaken in their specific critiques of this or that peacebuilding mission or policy, but it does mean critics are wrong to equate contemporary liberal peacebuilding with European colonialism. "Observing that there are *echoes* of colonialism in peacebuilding," Paris insists, "is quite different from asserting their *equivalence*" (41-42), and making the difference clear is vitally important.

If the comparison between liberal peacebuilding and imperialism is mistaken, what are we to make of the specific critiques made against liberal peacebuilding? According to Paris, we are to recognize them as places for reform of the liberal peacebuilding project. Investigating criticism from Michael Barnett, David Chandler, and others, Paris says that these criticisms "are rooted in a distinctively liberal set of values, emphasizing self-government, political participation and representation, and limitations on governmental power" (48). In their

critiques they offer no alternatives that are not consistent with such liberal values, according to Paris. Thus, he claims that “there seems to be no viable alternative to some version of liberal peacebuilding” (49). In short, they do not offer something new. Rather, their suggestions are calls to be more faithful to the principles that guide liberal peacebuilding.

Paris’s argument is compelling and forceful. Several of the other authors in the volume interrogate his claims through case studies of Sierra Leone. The major theme that emerges is consistent with the themes we have discovered in our other three approaches: liberal peacebuilding has an ambivalent effect in transitional societies, and it obscures or does not carry far enough the need for robust social and cultural transformations. Thus, as Carla Castañeda says, government discourse in Sierra Leone “has assumed that macro-economic stability at the national level will trickle down into community and social peace, in the fashion of a ‘trickle-down peace’” (123). In this reading, the creation of a negative peace through the establishment of democratic elections and a neoliberal economy “is intended to trickle-down as social, political and cultural security/peace” (124). The invisible hand of the negative peace created by liberal peacebuilding, then, will naturally guide the creation of a positive peace. Against this reading, in concert with Shore, Parlevliet, and others, Castañeda insists that “peace is not a linear process nor does it follow economic logic” (125) and, therefore, requires changes across social spheres and in contextually appropriate ways.

Specifically, in Sierra Leone the relative “success” of democracy and free market economics has not resulted in decreased hunger or increased access to adequate health care. Macroeconomic growth does not necessarily impact the lives of everyday people. Indeed, and Castañeda suggests this is the case in Sierra Leone, too much macroeconomic growth without on-the-ground felt impact can deepen the tensions that originally erupted into violent conflict. By focusing on the technical problems of having fair elections and an increasing presence on the global market, a shared vision of the common good has been neglected. Thus, she suggests “an encompassing peacebuilding discourse that privileges social and distributive action at the same level as it does macroeconomic growth that builds peace intentionally, not by trickle-down proxy” (142).

Subsequent chapters of *When War Ends* look specifically at the need for greater emphasis on the betterment of public health and increased higher education in Sierra Leone as means toward this end. And the book concludes with M.A. Mohamed Salih’s conclusion that “Sierra Leone’s peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts have made the social subservient

to the liberal, with major deficiencies in responding to the social problems which contributed to war in the first place” (181). Thus, “[w]hile democratic and human rights objectives have been achieved under liberal peacebuilding arrangements, it has failed in addressing the fundamental social problems confronting the poor in post-war societies such as Liberia and Sierra Leone” (183).

Liberal peacebuilding, then, like the human rights approach discussed earlier, contributes to the creation of a short-term negative peace, but can be counterproductive to securing a positive peace when not coupled with social and cultural changes. Liberal peacebuilding, like human rights and conflict resolution, is ambivalent when applied in specific contexts.

Conclusions

In reviewing three truly excellent texts on the contextual application of theoretical approaches to peacebuilding, two key themes have arisen: first, there is a need to address social and cultural—and not simply legal, political, or economic—factors if a society is to achieve a lasting positive rather than short-term negative peace; and second, no one theoretical approach is wholly adequate in isolation, and, when applied too bluntly, it can actually contribute to future violence as the conflict continues to evolve. There is ambivalence in all peacebuilding activity. Context is vitally important to any peacebuilding effort.

The first theme raises the issue of why these varied theoretical approaches continue to fall short at the social and cultural level. The emphasis on negative rights in international human rights law is one possible reason. The assumed global triumph of liberal economic policies after the end of the Cold War is another. The imposition of western models of governance on non-western societies and cultures is a third—and more can be proposed. A common underlying theme across these and other possible reasons, in my view, is the commitment to an overly individualistic conception of the human being. In other words, the philosophical anthropology that undergirds social contract and libertarian visions of justice and the common good has so permeated the social imaginaries of the majority of the world’s governments that it is hard to think in categories such as *social* justice, *restorative* justice, and *common* good.

This is why Shore and Parlevliet’s reflections on the positive influence of religion and a

shared vision of the common good in South Africa are important. It is also why Shore's insight into the awkward integration of the religious desire to restore a moral community with "the changing nature of South Africa's political and legal institutions" (146) is so important. There was a fundamental tension between the Christian and ubuntu visions of persons and the common good and the liberal vision embodied in the work of the Amnesty Committee. In other words, religion in politics was not the problem. Rather, fitting religion in western-style legal and political institutions proved to be an awkward fit, and where the fit was incompatible, social, cultural, and economic rights were ignored in favor of civil and political rights. Christianity's vision of a common good and the South African ideal of persons-in-community proved capable of existing in the political life of South Africa in the HRVC hearings. However, in the amnesty hearings and the distribution of reparations, this voice was muted. More theological and philosophical work needs to be done on the best way to integrate visions of the human being capable of integrating social, cultural, and economic rights with civil and political rights. Otherwise, while everyone recognizes the need for social justice and cultural change for lasting peace, our institutions will remain committed only to liberal legal, economic, and political ideals.

Each of the theoretical approaches to peacebuilding reviewed here—human rights, conflict resolution, and liberal peacebuilding—has demonstrated the lack of ability to effect the necessary forms of social and cultural change required for a sustainable peace. However, none of their advocates have seen a way to advocate for these positions from within their predetermined theoretical frames. Rather, they have pointed out the failure of these frames and stated the necessity for moving beyond them without necessarily challenging the assumptions that underlie these approaches. Challenging these assumptions, I argue, is a necessary step in creating institutions capable of moving toward a sustainable positive peace.

The second major theme is the ambivalence of all theories and instances of peacebuilding. This is not a reason for despair, but for sustained attention to interdisciplinary and contextual peacebuilding practices. Each approach is vitally necessary for securing a positive peace, but each is incapable of securing such a peace on its own. And, when single-mindedly pursued, each approach is capable of creating the conditions for new violence rather than the conditions for future conflicts to be negotiated nonviolently. It is not only, as R. Scott Appleby has taught us, religion that is ambivalent in times of violent conflict and

its resolution. Human rights, peace treaties, and liberal institutions also have an ambivalent influence. This is an important reminder that human social life is always a messy affair. There is no universal approach to transforming violent conflict into nonviolent conflict. Rather, we grope as if blind toward a peaceful future using, with care, whatever tools are available across every sphere of human life. And, as Michelle Parlevliet has reminded us, while chipping away at the iceberg of violent conflict, we hope and strive for the “impossible”—an enduring, positive peace.

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1. 1. Scholars in peace studies make a distinction between *negative* and *positive* peace. Generally speaking, negative peace is the absence of explicit and physical violence. For instance, a ceasefire has been reached in a war. Positive peace is the creation and existence of conditions in which the causes of violence, such as social injustice and intergroup hatred, cease to exist or are able to be managed by nonviolent means.
2. 2. See R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).
3. 3. For a review of the field of religious peacebuilding and the influence of Appleby’s work on the field see Atalia Omer, “Religious Peacebuilding: The Exotic, the Good, and the Theatrical,” *Practical Matters* 5 (2012): 1-31.
<http://practicalmattersjournal.org/issue/5/centerpieces/religious-peacebuilding>.
4. 4. See William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
5. 5. For the most compelling account of political reconciliation as “minimal decency” see Rajeev Bhargava, “Restoring Decency to Barbaric Societies,” in *Truth v. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 45-67.
6. 6. In reality, of course, what this demonstrates is the insufficiency of definitions of religion and politics that assume their segregation.
7. 7. It was a problem in South Africa as well. See generally Fiona C. Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), and Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*

(New York: Image/Doubleday, 1999).

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