

Richmond, Oliver, 2016. *Peace formation and political order in conflict affected societies*. Oxford University Press, 264 pp. £ 21.99 (Paperback)

Following the current developments in peace theory, Oliver Richmond's *Peace formation and political order in conflict affected societies* confronts the long exercised practice of vainly replicating liberal democratic capitalist states across the world in order to pursue peace, which is the idea born in the aftermath of the Cold War. The author is challenging this Fukuyama-related notion by turning towards local dynamics of peace-making. He introduces the concept of peace formation and putting it in juxtaposition with the concepts of state building, conflict resolution, and liberal peace. The main thesis of this book is that the local actors are the one capable of mapping and properly addressing the root causes of a conflict due to the legitimacy they draw from their social environment, unlike international and state systems which impose in advance ill-suited solutions alienated from local contexts. Being a renowned scholar in peace, conflict and IR studies, but also an experienced practitioner on the field, Richmond introduces us to both sides of the coin – a theoretical framework from which peace formation arises and the consequences this concept has on further theoretical analyses, but also a wide range of elaborate examples of conflict affected societies and the courses of actions they have taken in order to transform the conflict by mobilizing local networks, i.e. by the process of peace formation. It could be said that this book is both a powerful critique and useful guide to peace scholars and decision makers.

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 sketches a conceptual framework for peace formation, by providing a reader with a comprehensive overview on contributions of feminist, critical, normative, cosmopolitan, postcolonial, subaltern and others studies to IR and peace theories, arguing that a post-structural approach is the one most open to peace formation. Chapter 2 continues to deal with theoretical postulates by discussing four possible opportunities for peace formation to develop: to stay in an informal shadow away from mainstream practices; to abide by the rules of liberal peace international architecture denying themselves the right to change it; to selectively choose one positive aspect of this architecture and ignore the rest; and to build a hybrid system with the greater stake in it, but at the same time recognizing current power relations. Notably, the author leaves no space for local agencies to revolutionary discard the status quo. That could be assessed as a precautionary and smart move or as cowardly and unambitious. With Chapter 3 Richmond leaves the theoretical debate and approaches the empirical analysis by starting to conceptualize the range of examples with a view of illustrating key peace formation

dynamics. Chapter 4 continues with examining empirical examples, but in more detail. By working on the case studies of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia, Richmond talks about the limited success and indirect effect that peace formation has had on the structures of those conflicts. In contrast to that, Chapter 5 brings the reader the examples of conflict affected societies in which peace formation has had direct influence on transforming the state and international dynamic, namely Kosovo, Somalia and Somaliland, and Timor-Leste. Both chapters are endowed with meticulous descriptions of various conflicts' developments that can even draw the attention of a reader not particularly interested in peace studies, but in international relations in general. Lastly, Chapter 6 analyses the response of international actors to the flourishing prominence of local agencies.

The main concept here, peace formation, in the author's words implies "relationships and networked processes in which indigenous or local agents of peacebuilding, conflict resolution, or development, acting in customary, religious, cultural, social, or local political settings, find ways of establishing peace processes and sustainable dynamics of peace" (p. 34). Peace formation is central to legitimise authority within the state, while at the same time it confronts direct structural power with subaltern and critical form of agency. It can be noticed that, for Richmond, peace formation is not merely a tool of a bottom-up approach, or a method of a local-scale agency, scaling up toward the state and international order. It is more than just a technical process. Richmond presents peace formation as value-oriented. He claims that it raises the issues of "relative material equality, recognition of various forms of identity, human rights, political representation and a rule of law, environmental sustainability" (p. 5). Peace formation is intrinsic to emancipatory peace. It draws on localised, everyday understanding of justice and reconciliation. It enables a complex positionality through which the decision makers can comprehend numerous ongoing efforts to rebuild peaceful political orders in conflict affected societies. Due to the peace formation processes, those political orders can be restored in a way that their policies and practices are more representative. The actors involved in peace formation emerge from the wide range of different forms of mobilisation through churches and religious communities, trade unions, political parties, media, sports and social associations, lobbying groups, CSOs, families, etc. (pp. 174–175) Obviously, peace formers represents a widening pool of political subjects which operate in every sphere of society, but what differentiates them from those who are not and cannot be part of peace formation is that they are a formative part of the process, since peace formation cannot be imposed externally. They nurture a memory of local historical peace practices, culture, customs, and identity.

Even though local agency is the main focus of Richmond's work, he inevitably reflects on its antithesis – a state. Throughout the whole book the author examines the correlation between peace and state with a view of challenging the prevalent notion in IR that a state is the most reliable factor in peace engineering. In the very introduction he starts with an intriguing thought – not only is a (liberal) state not a precondition for peaceful society, but institutions, law, state and international community have historically emerged from the processes of peace formation within societies, "by their cooperation over non-violent

approaches to dealing with political problems, mostly related to the fair distribution of resources” (p. 4). He argues that the complexity of the modern world is not to be encompassed by liberal or neoliberal notions of state. Today’s state systems are far broader, reflecting diversity and uncertainty, “demanding for justice, rights, material equality, and sustainability“ (p. 24), or at least that is what the author believes. His answer to this complexity is precisely peace formation which, with its radical demands, offers a kind of peace that transcends the modern (neoliberal) state framework. In short – he believes that a state is enabled internationally but constituted locally.

When referring to the international level and the influence of peace formation upon it, Richmond’s stance is that without peace formation “internationals distribute material and epistemic resources as simulacra of peace” (p. 176). The author’s experience as a practitioner in the field is evident through picturesque portrayal of internationals’ role in transforming post-conflict societies. He says that they are “trapped in urban cores that generate their own reality, make hurried visits to sites of conflict, see them via tarmac roads and focus on their own project orientation. (...) They try to be diplomatic and not offend those who hold power, and are mainly focused on their own professional concerns.” (p. 43). When talking about the ways in which international actors approach conflict transformation process, based on the experience of DR Congo and UN peacekeeping mission that he had witnessed, Richmond explained: “the local was unknowledgeable, and only those who spoke the language of development, business, and security were plausible partners” (p. 88).

The layers of analysis through which this book review is written, local, state, international, are more fluid, intertwined constructions than rigid categories. Richmond himself admits this complexity of today’s world. When using *local*, he doesn’t consider it to be a physical, geographic space, a part of territorial sovereignty. Instead, it stands for transversal networks in which we all take part. According to the author, peace formation in its broadness embodies the state, regional and transnational networks. Moreover, he does not romanticize mystical powers of the local, but consider it to be only one of the three bedrocks of emancipatory and legitimate peace, alongside with “the representative state, and international system of law, norms, and institutions” (p. 176).

Sporadically, Richmond tends to present certain claims with no strong argument backing them, as if they are self-evident. For instance, “private ownership in conflict-affected societies may disrupt the subaltern capacity to network” (p. 27). Similar happens in subaltern agency versus state debate. Even though he is not an anarchist, claiming that local actors cannot replace the state through horizontal systems of governance (though not explaining why), Richmond portrays the state as, by definition, inevitably bad. While not making an effort to differentiate among various types of state, he claims governmental power to be socially and culturally insensitive, limited by ideological, national and cultural biases. He also tends to be somewhat repetitive. This does not affect the quality of his overall argument just the sharpness of the argument’s structure. Notwithstanding the minor mistakes, this book undoubtedly evidences the existence of peace formation and the modes in which it affects and it could affect the state and international order.

This book is a clear call to decision-makers that contemporary politics has to stop focusing on governing effects and start working on addressing causes. Richmond argues that the only way to do so is by recognising and supporting the potential of subaltern local-scale agencies. He successfully proves this thesis with a series of persuasive theoretical and empirical arguments, demanding that peace formation must guide conflict resolution, conflict transformation, state building and peacebuilding. In today's context of raging neoliberalism, the rise of populism, emerging efficient capitalist states alienated from democratic values and procedures, and severely deepening inequalities, Richmond's peace formation provides answers to the ongoing debates of the disconnection between governments and their peoples. If we would choose to simplify his answers they could be summed up as the following – communities, people and needs, over power, interests and norms. However, Richmond is not only focusing on policy-makers. It is evident that he calls for a postcolonial turn in IR and peace theory by acknowledging that liberal peacebuilding is “neo-colonial practice aimed at legitimating Western interests” (p. 10), that trickle-down strategies have been continuously failing to bring about a change and that Eurocentric readings of social dynamics hide true power relations. The influence of Foucault's efforts to deconstruct discourses is evident here.

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