

Review - The Peace In Between

Written by Anna K. Jarstad

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ANNA K. JARSTAD, JAN 19 2013

The Peace In Between: Post-War Violence and Peacebuilding

Edited By: Astri Suhrke and Mats Berdal

London and New York: Routledge, 2012



It is often said that it is relatively easy to end a war compared to the tough job of building peace. However, there are inadequate theoretical and empirical studies on the conditions of post-war situations and the challenges of post-war peacebuilding. Especially neglected is the distinction between the different types of post-war situations. The volume “The Peace In Between: Post-war Violence and Peacebuilding”, edited by Astri Suhrke and Mats Berdal addresses this important research gap.

An inherent problem for studies on peace is how to define it. Most commonly, peace is defined by what it is not. Peace is seen in contrast to war, and war is defined as large-scale violence by organized parties. However, “The Peace In Between” shows that peace often is violent, sometimes even more violent than the war. This brings the reader to think harder about whether it is useful to talk about war and peace as dichotomous situations (or ends of a spectrum), or, whether it is better to describe them as two simultaneous, but analytically separate concepts. The book opens up a more nuanced analysis of violence during peace, and zones of peace in war.

The volume provides a broad spectrum of how international actors engage in peacebuilding and training for self-defence, as well as how local actors interact with each other after the war has ended. This often means continued violence, although the character of violence may take other forms than during the war. In the book’s introduction by Astri Suhrke, she identifies four types of post-war environments: the victor’s peace, the loser’s peace, the divided

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peace and the pacified peace. The victor's peace is a situation where the conditions of the post-war situation are imposed by the victors. The conflict is often constructed as ideological, the state power is unified and the victorious party has the monopoly of violence, represents the state internationally and sets the political agenda. Examples include Spain, Rwanda and Cambodia. The loser's peace is a situation where the peace conditions are challenged by losers. The party that have lost the war continues to have enough power to use violence to obstruct the peace, such as in the post-civil war period in the United States. Another case is Guatemala where the war ending did not provide any clear winner. The divided peace is characterized by power struggles among different factions also in the post-war period. Co-option of warlords, as in Afghanistan, is often used as a strategy to try to manage the situation, often without success. The pacified peace is usually a result of international interventions that include most warring parties and promote demilitarization, such as in Liberia. The pacification means that the parties generally accept the conditions of the peace.

The two first types, the victor's and the loser's peace, refer to the outcome of the war and who benefited the most from the peace – and the war –, while the last two types refers to the outcomes of peacebuilding (and/or international interventions). This means that the types could be overlapping. It is easy to think of cases of victor's peace resulting in divided societies (e.g. Sri Lanka), and it is also possible to imagine a pacified loser's peace. This potential overlapping of post-war environments could have been noted and discussed in this edited collection (see also the distinction between victor's peace, divided state, the Westphalian state and anarchy in Jarstad and Belloni 2012).

More importantly, it would have been fruitful if Astri Suhrke and Mats Berdal used these conceptual types to structure the book, perhaps in four different theoretical sections rather than the regional division now applied. It also seems that it would have been fruitful to have the separate authors, writing in this edited collection, more deeply reflect on these different types of post-war environments as well as the way they capture the essence of the post-war situation in their case studies. Structuring the book in this way would have created a more integrated volume.

The collection of cases, covering in total thirteen countries, shows an interesting mix of more historical cases as well as contemporary cases in different regions of the world. The cases of Spain and the American South shows that post-war violence is not a new phenomenon. The different cases bring up different forms and levels of violence. Afghanistan and Iraq show the importance of an analysis of patronage and patrimonial violence. While revenge violence played an important role in Kosovo, another chapter shows that in Congo (DRC) sexual violence is used not only as strategic weapon to subdue the civilians, but also has a bonding function and created cohesion within the military units. In Bosnia-Herzegovina segregation meant comparatively low levels of violence.

The book focuses less on peacebuilding and focuses more on post-war situations and the nature of violence after war. It successfully analyses different forms of peace and provides a nuanced picture of the nature of peace in between. The book provides a good overview of the state of the art, as well as several interesting case studies. It should be of great interest to both students of peace and conflict students, as well as policy makers.

Bibliography

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