



**RETHINKING PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES**

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# A Requiem for Peacebuilding?

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# Revisiting the Local Turn in Peacebuilding

*Filip Ejdus*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the 2000s, the ‘local turn’ has decisively shaped both the study and the practice of peacebuilding. Notwithstanding fundamental differences that exist within the ‘local turn’ itself, the common ground of this theoretical and policy shift has been an increased analytical and normative value attached to local actors, processes and culture in both understanding, narrating and practicing international peacebuilding. Despite early enthusiasm about its emancipatory potential, however, recent critiques have increasingly questioned both the analytical value of the local turn, its normative underpinnings and its practical effects. The global crisis of liberalism has cast a dark shadow on the very concept of peacebuilding, although the jury is still out as to whether the local turn can save it from moribundity.

In this chapter, which will be first and foremost an exercise in stock-taking, I aim to revisit this intellectual and policy development and outline the origins of the ‘local turn’, but also to shed light on the diversity within it.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, I aim to raise some questions that I consider important for

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the future of the local turn and offer some ideas on how to move forward. The rest of the chapter unfolds as follows: in the first section, I trace how the ‘local turn’ emerged in the field of international development and then traveled to the field of international peace and security. Here I will also discuss some fundamental assumptions of the local turn and how they were translated into practice. In the second section, I distinguish mainstream appropriations of the ‘local turn’ from the critical approaches and outline the key criticisms leveled against both. In the conclusion, I discuss some promising avenues for future research that could help move this intellectually rich and politically progressive research agenda forward.

## 2 THE EMERGENCE OF THE LOCAL TURN

Where did the local turn in peacebuilding come from, what made it possible and how did it evolve over the years? In short, the emergence of the ‘local turn’ is a response to the global crisis of confidence in the ability of liberal global governance to export norms and institutions of the Global North into the conflict-affected Global South. The early signs of the crisis of the liberal order started to appear already during the Cold War in the field of international development. Hence, already in the 1960s, calls for ‘participatory development’ pioneered a shift from seeing developing communities as passive recipients of aid to viewing them as active participants.

These early critical voices were temporarily eclipsed when liberalism reached its historic zenith in the aftermath of the Cold War. The unprecedented self-confidence of the West was most emblematically captured by Francis Fukuyama, who wrote in 1989 that it was ‘not just the end of the Cold War [...] but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government’ (Fukuyama 1989, p. 4). Throughout the early 1990s, the Global North was hence elated with the idea that externally exported liberal institutions might be the panacea for a wide array of ‘new’ security challenges stemming from the chronic instability of the developing world such as migration, terrorism, crime, or disease. In a nutshell, this entailed erecting liberal institutions in conflict-affected areas even, if need be, by illiberal means such as the use of military force or the imposition of foreign rule. This was the primary task of what Michael Ignatieff called ‘empire light’, or ‘a condominium, with

Washington in the lead, and London, Paris, Berlin and Tokyo following reluctantly behind' (Ignatieff 2003, p. 17).

Parallel to this, the end of the Cold War transformed the meaning of international security and increasingly merged it with the field of international development (Duffield 2001). The UN support to peace and security was undergoing a thorough change as well. Traditionally, UN peacekeeping operations were about keeping the calm between ceasefires and peace agreements. With the Cold War hatchet buried, peacekeeping broadened to include new tasks of building peace and functional liberal states (Bellamy et al. 2010). Also, in 1992, in his *Agenda for Peace* the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali inaugurated 'the post-conflict peacebuilding' (Boutros-Ghali 1992). The aim of peacebuilding, as a logical follow-up to peacemaking and peacekeeping, was to identify and support structures that will strengthen peace and prevent fragile and post-conflict states from (re)lapsing into conflict (see Pugh 2020, this volume).<sup>2</sup>

In the background of this was the mounting evidence of failures to rebuild conflict-affected states according to the Western model. In the field of development, the earlier discussed paradigm shift toward the participatory development gained a new momentum as arguments against structural adjustment programs of the IMF and the World Bank became more vocal. The language of local ownership was hence introduced into the jargon of international development in a landmark document adopted by OECD in 1995, according to which: 'For development to succeed, the people of the countries concerned must be the "owners" of their development policies and programmes' (OECD 1995). A year later, OECD member states declared that 'local actors should progressively take the lead while external partners back their efforts to assume greater responsibility for their own development' (OECD 1996). Major international institutions soon followed suit and adopted a very similar policy language.

In the field of peace- and statebuilding, the pitfalls of the liberal hubris also started to become obvious. As the 1990s drew to a close, UN's failures in Somalia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda and its limited success in Haiti and Cambodia proved how unfounded the early post-Cold War enthusiasm was. Growing evidence was indicating that the Western model of governance had limited traction in conflict-affected countries. Consequently, it became increasingly clear that without a local buy-in, international support to peace could not achieve effective and sustainable results on the ground. Hence, the 2000 Brahimi Report to

the UN Security Council fully endorsed the language of *localism* and made the case that the participation of local authorities is ‘critical in determining the successful outcome of a peace operation’ (Brahimi 2000, p. 5). Finally, in the early 2000s, the fiasco interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan provided another impetus for the local turn.

A set of additional factors propelled the ‘local turn’ in peacebuilding. First, as Mac Ginty and Richmond pointed out, it was the rise of practitioners from the Global South to the leading positions in institutions of global governance and the increased assertiveness of local actors on the ground (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, p. 776). Localism in the practice of peacebuilding was also compounded by the revival of the local traditions in opposition to globalization (Bräuchler and Naucke 2017). Finally, the ‘local turn’ in peacebuilding was also amplified by the rise of localist political discourses across the political spectrum in the West (Featherstone et al. 2012; Mohan and Stokke 2000). While the new left construed the local as the site of grassroots resistance to the onslaught of the global capitalism, for the new right it has become a bulwark against big government. By privileging the local as the key site of civic engagement that fosters democracy, legitimacy, and agency, these diverse localist political discourses have also facilitated the emergence of a new agreement around the legitimacy of all things local in international affairs.

So, what is the local turn all about? In a nutshell, as I argue in this chapter, the local turn has been revolving around two fundamental assumptions. The first is that local is important analytically for theorizing peacebuilding. To begin with, it needs to be taken seriously if conflicts are to be properly understood and resolved. Severine Autesserre, for example, demonstrated how international peacebuilders got the conflict in the DRC wrong because, instead of focusing on the local dynamics of the conflict, they relied on their experiences from previous posts, in other conflict zones, where the national level of analysis was dominant (Autesserre 2010). However, if peacebuilding is to be accounted for, the local needs to be addressed seriously. In contrast to the liberal peace paradigm, which construes international peacebuilding as a linear process leading to the creation of states that are ‘stable, democratic, peaceful, prosperous, inclusive’ and with ‘extremely low levels of political corruption’ (Fukuyama 2011, p. 14), scholars of the ‘local turn’ assume that the process is rather non-linear, ‘hybrid, multiple and often agonistic’ (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, p. 764, see also Chandler 2013). In short,

without shifting our focus to the local dynamics of conflict formation or peacebuilding we cannot properly understand either of them.

The second fundamental assumption of the ‘local turn’ in peacebuilding has been that the local is relevant for the practice of peacebuilding. To be more precise, the ‘local turn’ has been based on the premise that international support for peace is viable only if it relies on a certain degree of local leadership, support, resources and commitment (Donais 2012). This is most visible in the lack of local legitimacy of the international interventions that substituted for local administrations, as was the case in East Timor or Kosovo (Lemay-Hébert 2011). The degree of local ownership necessary remains contested, however, and three distinct approaches have emerged over the years. The first approach construes local ownership as a ‘top-down’ enterprise, a small-scale franchise of externally designed processes and institutions (Paris 2010). The second approach is ‘bottom-up’ and holds that peace should be indigenous (Mac Ginty 2008) and fully authored and led ‘from below’, by the locals and for the locals (Pouligny 2006). The third approach strikes the ‘middle ground’, calling for balance between the imposition of international norms and institutions and the restraint in the face of local tradition, agency and leadership (Barnett and Zürcher 2009; Donais 2012).

Whatever the aspired degree of local commitment might be in any particular case, the consensus around the need for local ownership is so universal among the scholars and practitioners alike, that it has become a veritable orthodoxy in international peacebuilding thanks to the ‘local turn’. Virtually non-existent prior to 1997, the term ‘local ownership’ has experienced a meteoric rise in recent years. Between 1996 and 2015, there has been a steady rise in the number of scholarly publications containing the terms ‘local ownership’ and ‘peacebuilding’.<sup>3</sup>

To what extent have these assumptions of the local turn been implemented on the ground? Unfortunately, the track record is quite disappointing. The majority of studies have documented a wide gap between the liberal rhetoric of ownership on the one hand and peacebuilding practice on the other. The UN, which has championed the concept since the late 1990s, as Sarah Von Billerbeck notes, ‘has failed to realize local ownership in the broad way in which it is presented in discourse’ (Billerbeck 2016, p. 4). In my own research on crisis management operations of the Common Security and Defense Policy of the EU in the Balkans, Middle East and Horn of Africa, for instance, I have also identified a big



gap between how the EU narrates local ownership in its policy discourse on the one hand and how this principle is being implemented in practice on the other (Ejdus 2017). As I demonstrate, in the policy rhetoric the EU construes local ownership as a middle ground between imposition and restraint. In practice, however, the EU has operationalized ownership as an externally driven, top-down effort, frequently leading to low degrees of local participation on the ground.

In some cases, local ownership is used only as a fig leaf meant to conceal an outright imposition of priorities. A perfect example of this is the EUCAP Nestor, a maritime security mission launched by the EU in 2012. One of its flagship projects was the so-called Joint Action Plan with the Government of Somaliland. The Plan, agreed between the Republic of Somaliland and the EU in 2014, was allegedly a product of negotiation and was aligned with Somaliland's Vision on how they wanted to develop their maritime security sector. As a matter of fact, the EU was firmly in control of the entire process (Ejdus 2018). As one of my interviewees put it: 'The mission was based on how bureaucrats in Brussels saw the problems on the ground. Unfortunately, while designing the mandate, they were not looking into institutions in Somalia where resources are limited'.<sup>4</sup>

In other cases, the EU defines local ownership in such a narrow, technocratic and depoliticized way that it entirely excludes those who are supposed to be the end beneficiaries of the EU peacebuilding interventions. A case in point is the European Union Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS) (Tartir and Ejdus 2018). The mission was launched in 2006 with the aim of fostering effective policing in support of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state. EUPOL COPPS has been frequently praised for its contribution to the professionalization of the Palestinian security sector under full local ownership. In our work on EUPOL COPPS Alaa Tartir and I posited that the mission can be considered to be locally owned only if we adopt a very narrow technocratic standpoint and if we deny the political reality of the continued Israeli occupation and Palestinian Authority's authoritarian rule. When we broadened the analysis to also bring into the picture the voices of ordinary Palestinians, a different picture was revealed. It turned out that the Palestinian civilian police and justice reforms supported by EUPOL COPPS have only led to the professionalization of authoritarian policing. Hence, the EU-assisted security sector reforms have only

added a new layer of human insecurity without bringing about either an independent or a democratic, let alone a viable, Palestinian state.

Because of such a dire implementation record, the concept of local ownership has been reprimanded as a ‘legitimizing concept’ to use Nina Wilén’s words (Wilén 2009), or even worse, as a mere ‘rhetorical cover’ (Chandler 2011, p. 87) for ‘varying degrees of local control that are typically not realized’ (Chesterman 2007, p. 20).

### 3 THE ‘LOCAL TURNS’ AND THEIR DISCONTENTS

This rhetoric/practice gap is to an extent also a reflection of the fact that the local turn in peacebuilding has been far from a coherent school of thought (Mac Ginty 2015, p. 846). Tania Paffenholz, for instance, discusses how the ‘local turn’ evolved through two generations of scholarship (Paffenholz 2015).<sup>5</sup> Drawing on Robert Cox, I will here distinguish problem-solving from critical approaches to the local turn in peacebuilding (Cox 1981; Ejodus and Juncos 2018, p. 8). Problem-solving approaches such as neoliberalism and liberal cosmopolitanism take the liberal peacebuilding project for granted, together with its attachment to universal norms and its top-down and linear logic of peacebuilding, and then attempt to make it more effective by ensuring the local buy-in (Paris 2010). In contrast, critical approaches construe the ‘local turn’ as a fundamental challenge to the liberal peacebuilding project (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, p. 764). In this section, I review both approaches to the ‘local turn’ as well as critiques leveled against them.

In the problem-solving camp, the most prominent approach has been that of *neoliberalism*. While critical peacebuilding scholars would certainly object to considering neoliberal appropriation of localism as part of the true ‘local turn’, the discursive transformation that has taken place within the liberal peacebuilding discourse is hard to dispute (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). Neoliberals construe peacebuilding as the globalization of liberal market democracy from the West to the rest (Paris 2010, p. 638). Its objective is not only to end violence but also to lay an institutional foundation of liberal democracy as the only durable guarantee against relapse into violence. From such a standpoint, international peacebuilders are expected to design and export institutions for sustainable peace, while local elites are supposed to gradually buy into this externally conceived project (Donais 2012, p. 32).

As this has often not worked in practice, neoliberals adapted their approach and endorsed localism as a corrective. From the point of view of neoliberalism, local ownership should be achieved through a gradual transfer of responsibility from the interveners to the local authorities. Once the seeds of liberal institutions are planted in conflict-affected societies, the responsibility to run them is gradually transferred to ‘maturing’ local authorities (Narten 2008, p. 375). This practice of international interveners to gradually hand over stewardship over the fledgling liberal endeavor—eventually making themselves superfluous—is what the former Special Representative of the UN Secretary General to Kosovo, Michael Steiner, termed the ‘art of letting go’ (Steiner 2003). ‘The local’ is here equated with liberally-minded local state elites from conflict-affected states or their western-funded metropolitan NGOs receptive to liberal ideas. Such a reductionist approach to ‘the local’, which has been a dominant view among practitioners, is often justified on pragmatic grounds (Brinkerhoff 2007, p. 118).

A similar, but distinct problem-solving approach that has also attempted to appropriate the ‘local turn’ is that of liberal cosmopolitanism, as put forth, for example, in the works of David Held and Mary Kaldor (Held 1995; Kaldor 2002). This radical liberal tradition shares with neoliberals the conviction that sustainable peace can only be built on universal principles derived from Western modernity. In contrast to neoliberalism, however, these principles are not to be practiced through the strengthening of the market economy and state institutions, but rather through the respect of human rights and the activism of global civil society. To that end, liberal cosmopolitans call for stronger engagement with civil societies. In their view, local civil society is constitutive of global civil society and therefore excludes local communities uncommitted to the western concept of human rights. Moreover, liberal cosmopolitans advocate for the creation of international structures, such as the standing UN force or EU Human Security Response Force as recommended by the Barcelona Report from 2004 (Barcelona Report 2004). These supranational forces, in their view, are meant to repair the failures of the Westphalian state-system and contribute to world security via the protection of human security (Woodhouse and Ramsbotham 2005). Preventing such a force from misuse by powerful states, in the words of Woodhouse and Ramsbotham, would require ‘democratizing peacekeeping so that it has principles, mechanisms and practices that promote local ownership

and empower civilians in conflict-affected communities' (Woodhouse and Ramsbotham 2005, p. 153).

In contrast to these problem-solving approaches, critical approaches have construed the 'local turn' as an alternative to the liberal peacebuilding project. Under the 'local turn' critical scholars are investigating the merits of non-linear (Chandler 2013) and non-liberal forms of peace (Richmond 2009, 2012) such as indigenous (Mac Ginty 2008), emancipatory (Richmond 2007; Visoka and Richmond 2017), everyday (Mac Ginty 2011) and hybrid peace (Jarstad and Belloni 2012; Mac Ginty 2010, 2011). They criticize the liberal problem-solvers for having accepted the letter but not the spirit of the 'local turn' (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, p. 779). The liberal peacebuilders, it is argued, have adopted the language of local ownership as a technical problem of implementation rather than design problem hardwired into the system (Cooper et al. 2011, p. 2001). Liberal peacebuilding, from their perspective, is nothing but a problem-solving exercise aimed at repairing, to use the words of Michael C. Pugh, 'the dysfunctions of the global political economy within a framework of liberal imperialism' (Pugh 2004, p. 39).

Critical approaches have drawn extensively on post-structuralism and in particular on the work of Michel Foucault and his concept of governmentality as a liberal government of population at a distance (Ejdus 2018; Foucault 2007; Richmond 2010, 2011, 2012). Drawing on Foucault's idea of counter-conduct as a 'struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others' (Foucault 2007, p. 201) but also on James Scott's concept of infra-politics or hidden and everyday resistance (Scott 1990) the critical peacebuilding scholars have shed light on how the local actors contest, resist, co-opt and adapt internationally conceived interventions to serve their local needs, norms and interests (Ejdus 2018; Kappler and Richmond 2011; Mac Ginty 2011; Richmond 2010).

Of particular importance for critical peace research has also been the concept of emancipation developed within the Frankfurt School (Patomäki 2001). For Oliver Richmond, emancipatory peace is 'an everyday form of peace, offering care, respecting but also mediating culture and identity, institutions and custom, providing for the needs and assisting the most marginalised in their local, state, regional and international contexts' (Richmond 2011, p. 4).

Critical peacebuilding scholars have also relied on insights from post-colonialism on orientalist discourses that pervade peacebuilding (Kappler 2015; Said 1978) and its underlying colonial rationality (Jabri 2013).

The concept of hybridity proved to be particularly fashionable for the analytical capture of the interplay between the local and the international (Bhabha 1994; Mac Ginty 2011). In the words of Mac Ginty, a hybrid approach to peacebuilding does not ‘seek to advocate a particular form of peacemaking, peacebuilding, reconstruction or development’. Instead, as he put it, ‘it seeks to describe a real-world condition and the process whereby that condition is constructed, maintained and replicated’ (Mac Ginty 2010, p. 392). Following this dictum, empirical studies have corroborated that in the course of international interventions interveners often become an integral part of domestic politics (Jarstad and Belloni 2012; McLeod 2015; Wallis 2012). Tim Donais uses hybridity to make a prescriptive argument about peacebuilding and criticizes both liberal and communitarian approaches to local ownership as ‘incomplete strategies for building stable sustainable peace’ (Donais 2012, p. 13). In his view, durable settlements require resources of both outsiders and insiders, as well as a process of consensus-building between the locals and internationals, but also among the locals, that leads to ‘negotiated hybridity’ (Donais 2012, p. 37).

Drawing upon similar traditions, in my own work on EU crisis management missions, I have shown how the principle of local ownership in the contemporary peacebuilding practice, echoing the late colonial principle of indirect rule, is actually underpinned by the rationality of advanced democracies on how best to govern global insecurities at a distance, less but better and through a chain of actors ranging from the EU through local governments all the way down to local civil society organizations (Ejdus 2018). Consequently, the EU has operationalized ownership as responsabilization for externally designed objectives. No matter how skillfully it is performed, this ‘art of letting go’ is based on the rationality of the intervener and therefore frequently gives rise to local resistance that ultimately ends up undermining international efforts.

Critical approaches to the ‘local turn’ have also been subjected to strong analytical and normative critiques. Hence, it has been argued not only that the key concepts such as ‘the local’ and ‘the international’ are unclear (Narten 2008), but that the entire dichotomy between the two upon which the ‘local turn’ has been premised is misleading (Paffenholz 2015, p. 862; Schierenbeck 2015, p. 1028). Such a binary reading, as Paffenholz put it, portrays the local and the international as monolithic entities, and by default essentializes them as either good or bad despite calls from the scholars of the ‘local turn’ to beware of romanticizing the

local (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, p. 770). Moreover, the binary is said to lead to the portrayal of the international as the source of power, and the local as the source of resistance, hence obscuring the power of local elites (Paffenholz 2015, p. 864).

To address these analytical problems stemming from this binary opposition between the local and the international, scholars of the ‘local turn’ have borrowed the concept of hybridity from post-colonial studies. This, in Paffenholz’s view, not only perpetuates the essentializing binary logic it attempts to overcome, but also ends up romanticizing hybridity (Paffenholz 2015, p. 863).<sup>6</sup> Some authors, such as Hameiri and Jones, have pointed out that the binary logic preserved in the concept of hybridity obscures the politics of scale involved in peacebuilding (Hameiri and Jones 2017). Peacebuilding actors, they argue, strategically deploy different scales such as local, national or international, in order to serve their interests. Sometimes the same actors use different scales simultaneously and therefore, instead of treating the local or the international as separate groups of actors, we should in fact study them as strategies as Stephanie Kappler suggests (Kappler 2015).<sup>7</sup>

Normatively, critics have also raised a number of issues concerning the practical consequences of the ‘local turn’. To begin with, many pointed out that the fact that solutions are local does not mean that they are necessarily good (Donais 2012; Paris 2010). Donais, for instance, warns that enthusiasm for substantive and broad-based ownership stems from a naïve understanding of society as inherently progressive (Donais 2012, p. 66). Similarly, Elisa Randazzo argues that normative questions regarding who is to be emancipated have largely been ignored by the ‘local turn’ (Randazzo 2016). She particularly exposes the ‘nebulous’ concept of everyday peace—which is presented as an alternative to the linear top-down liberal peacebuilding—without offering any guidance on which everyday agency is to be privileged and why. Others go even further and warn that placing the locals in the driver’s seat may actually undermine peace. Edward Joseph, for example, contends that the assumption that locals know what’s best for them is essentially flawed. If they did, he argues, there would be no need for international intervention in the first place (Joseph 2007).

Some have argued that the ‘local turn’, at least in the policy rhetoric, only pays lip service to the liberal peacebuilding. Paradoxically, this argument has been made both by liberal scholars and by those on the more radical end of the critique. Roland Paris, for instance, argues that the

critics of the liberal peace are closet liberals, as they haven't proposed any alternative to liberal peacebuilding (Cooper et al. 2011; Paris 2010). Mira Sabaratnam agrees that the 'local turn' ends up reinforcing liberal peacebuilding, albeit not because there is no alternative to it, but because such thinking stems from their Eurocentric ontology that underlines their key concepts (Sabaratnam 2013). In her view, despite its 'anti imperial ethics', the analytical apparatus of the 'local turn' only perpetuates colonial ethics (Sabaratnam 2013, p. 260). The dichotomy local/international is hence argued to carry deep-seated colonial era Eurocentric assumptions about the world as split into the rational, modern West and the traditional, indigenous local.

It has also been pointed out that liberal peacebuilders adopted the language of the local turn only to salvage a failing project. This rhetorical turn, critical scholars argue, reflects only an attempt to make top-down externally driven liberal interventions more effective without unlocking the expected emancipatory potentials of what should be a veritable 'local turn' (Bräuchler and Naucke 2017). Mac Ginty and Richmond agree that most peacebuilders rely on the letter instead of the spirit of the 'local turn' (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, p. 779). However, there is no consensus among critical scholars whether the 'local turn' is salvageable or not. Chandler argues that post-liberal appropriation of all things local is nothing but an 'exhaustion of the emancipatory potential of liberalism' (Chandler and Richmond 2015, p. 4). Mac Ginty and Richmond are more optimistic and hold that the 'local turn' nevertheless contains emancipatory seeds that blossom quietly, through resistance (Chandler and Richmond 2015, p. 7; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, p. 773).

#### 4 CONCLUSION

Where do we go from here? There are several avenues of further development which the future research of the 'local turn' could use to overcome what seems to be a current impasse. On the theoretical level, three directions seem to be particularly promising.

The first one is to devote more effort to the issue of power in peacebuilding. The binary logic, which places the power in the hands of internationals and ascribes resistance to the local actors, has to be replaced with a more nuanced and diffused understanding of power. The second direction involves grappling with the issue of scale and space more generally and some very interesting steps have already been made in that

direction (Vogel 2018). Insights from the human geography (Herod 2010) on the construction and production of scale, ‘scale jumping’, ‘scale bending’ and ‘the politics of scale’, that have slowly but convincingly traveled to IR (Agnew 1994; Hameiri and Jones 2017; Sjoberg 2008) could also help the ‘local turn’ to overcome the charge of essentialization. Finally, the ‘local turn’ should heed to the longstanding calls to take the notion of culture seriously by engaging more closely with anthropology in general and ethnographic methodologies in particular (Millar 2018; Richmond 2010). This will require much longer and deeper immersion of researchers in the field than usually is the case in peace and conflict studies (Bräuchler and Naucke 2017). Given the problems of access and security in conflict-affected states, this also requires a stronger engagement with methodological and ethical dilemmas (Peter and Strazzari 2017).

On the prescriptive level, the ‘local turn’ needs to cope more directly with some of the fundamental questions that all too often remain overlooked. For problem-solvers, this translates into a question of how to move policy practices from the letter to the spirit of the local turn without compromising on fundamental values that could cost them domestic legitimacy to take part in international peacebuilding in the first place. Critical scholars of peacebuilding should face the same dilemma but in reverse and square another circle by constructively engaging with peacebuilding practitioners without losing the critical edge and being co-opted into the pre-existing grid of post-colonial and neoliberal institutions and practices (see Omer 2020, this volume). Lastly, the ‘local turn’ has emerged as a critique of neoliberal hubris of the 1990s and early 2000s. One is left to wonder what we can make out of the ‘local turn’ in the context of the rapid democratic backsliding, a surge in populism, a revival of nationalism, a return of geopolitics and a rise in authoritarian powers. Does the ‘local turn’ still provide a progressive avenue for the future of peacebuilding? (see Richmond 2020, this volume). Was it only a swan song of the declining liberal order or do its lessons still hold the promise of emancipation?

## NOTES

1. For another overview of the literature on local turn, see Leonardsson and Rudd (2015).
2. The term peacebuilding was first coined by Johan Galtung in the 1970s to denote the creation of structures that address the ‘root causes’ of violent conflict by supporting local capacities for conflict resolution (Galtung 1976).



3. In 1996, it was mentioned on the internet only once, in 1997—8, 1998—11, 1999—18, 2000—25, 2001—45, 2002—59, 2003—63, 2004—131, 2005—201, 2006—212, 2007—278, 2008—367, 2009—408, 2010—480, 2011—523, 2012—551, 2013—572, 2014—601, 2015—537, 2016—515 times. The search was done through Google Scholar on 16 January 2017.
4. Interview with author, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Somaliland, Hargeisa 26 November 2016.
5. In her account, challenging peace and statebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo in the 1990s gave rise to the first generation of scholarship spearheaded by the work of John Paul Lederach (Paffenholz 2015, p. 858). The failures in Afghanistan and Iraq provided a new momentum for critiques of the liberal peace, leading to the second generation of scholarship on the ‘local turn’, led by the work of Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond (Paffenholz 2015, p. 859).
6. It should be noted, however, that some scholars of the ‘local turn’, aware of the criticisms that had been raised already within the post-colonial studies, conceived hybridization as a process that involves ‘prior hybridities’ rather than essentialized pre-existing liberal international and non-liberal local (Mac Ginty 2011, p. 8).
7. Some recent arguments in defense of keeping the dichotomy can be found in Millar (2017).

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