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Introduction: Peace-Building or World-Building? Peace Interventions, Conflict and Violence

Peace-building can be an act of violence. Conflict, on the other hand, may not be a cause of violence, but rather a crucial means for resisting, constraining and preventing it. Violence occurs when the plural worlds occupied and created by conflicting groups are damaged or even destroyed, and when it is impossible to resist or counteract this destruction. However unintentionally, transformative peace interventions, which aim at radically altering conflict to produce a particular model of peace, may enact violence against the plural worlds they transform. This, in turn, can produce subtle cycles of violence that may evade the attention of intervening actors until they manifest themselves in acts of physical or material violence that endanger the peace process. If peace interventions are to be non-violent, I argue, they should be premised not on particular models of peace-building, but rather on supporting plural world-building, or creating the conditions in which plural worlds can exist non-violently.

Lost in Transformation explores these seemingly counter-intuitive statements, re-thinking the relationships between peace, conflict and violence. To do so, it examines a transformative peace intervention that has been lauded worldwide as a success and exported as a model for peace-building: the Northern Ireland ‘peace process’. I place the words ‘peace process’ in quotation marks for two reasons: first, the range of negotiations, initiatives, policies and dynamics that resulted in the current state of affairs were not a single process but rather, as I shall illustrate, a set of interlocking, transformative processes of democratization, governance, development and securitization. More importantly, perhaps, I question to what extent this peace process was ‘peaceful’, if peace is defined as non-violence. Indeed, I shall argue that interventions in Northern Ireland since the mid-twentieth century (and quite likely before) have involved significant violence, which in turn has helped to generate the
cycles of physical and material violence between paramilitary actors that have furnished the most common images of the Troubles. In examining this case in detail, I demonstrate the ways in which these dynamics of violence have unfolded, rethinking the sources of the Troubles and the nature of the fragile ‘peace’ that exists today. I also examine in detail how the logic of securitization creates particular violence within and among the ‘target category’ of ex-combatants, and how this has helped to generate the cycles of ‘dissident’ violence, as well as many forms of conflict, including rioting and ‘sectarianism’, that characterize the Northern Irish polity. The final chapter of the book argues that the latter must be reconsidered, not as mere obstructions to the ‘peace process’, but rather as responses to the patterns of violence it has helped to generate, and as attempts to resist and constrain these.

Although *Lost in Transformation* focuses on Northern Ireland, it suggests a new direction in theories of (political) violence and conflict, and in critical peace and conflict studies more generally. It challenges the basic assumption that conflict causes violence, and argues instead that conflict is more closely aligned with plural forms of peace. Moreover, it moves beyond debates about the ‘(post)liberal peace’ to suggest that the sources of violence in peace interventions are much deeper than the tenets of liberalism and that even the goal of ‘building peace’ requires reflexivity. In promoting an orientation to intervention that prioritizes plural world-building over peace-building per se, it not only criticizes existing practice but also provides an alternative lens through which to view the phenomena of violence, conflict and peace, one which significantly changes the way in which they are interpreted and addressed. In so doing, it moves towards a new ethos of intervention in which less will be lost in transformation and, hopefully, much can be gained.

**War of the worlds? Peace-building and (plural) world-building**

In their everyday lives, people engage with challenges of occupying, preserving, altering and sustaining the plural worlds that they occupy. Here, the term ‘world’ refers to spaces and experiences in which human groups create and sustain their collective lives, interacting with their material environment. I use the term ‘world-building’ to refer to the practices through which they create, alter and move among worlds. In their everyday lives, human beings inhabit not one ‘world’, but rather a series of overlapping worlds which sometimes collide, conflict or threaten one another. Worlds, I shall argue, are inseparable from the