Conceptualising Local Ownership as 'Reflexive Cooperation': The Deferral of Self-government to Protect 'Unequal' Humans?

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**Conceptualising Local Ownership as 'Reflexive Cooperation':
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Abstract

This article analyses how the concept of 'local ownership' has been employed within policy frameworks in the context of peacebuilding since the late 1990s. It identifies the paradox that lies in the increasing willingness to transfer ownership to the local population and the also explicit assumption that self-determination and self-government have to be avoided in democratisation and post-conflict situations. It is argued that it is important to investigate the paradox, the fact that ownership and self-government have opposed connotations within contemporary frameworks of peacebuilding, because in the literature this position is not seen as being contradictory. Far from being seen as a strategy containing an irreconcilable paradox, local ownership is conceptualised so that it resolves at the same time two problems at the core of international governance settings: it limits the international administrators' intrusiveness in national affairs and avoids the risk of giving too much responsibility to local authorities. While it is presented as a progressive strategy on all fronts, the conclusion of this article is that the concept of ownership, as it has been interpreted by the discourses of peacebuilding analysed here, has been of little value to post-conflict societies and, furthermore, it has denied their moral and political autonomy. This denial, disguised as a discourse that promises to embrace difference, is particularly flawed because it seems to permanently defer equality between internationally supervised populations and the rest of sovereign nations.

Keywords

Author

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Conceptualising Local Ownership as 'Reflexive Cooperation': The Deferral of Self-government to Protect 'Unequal' Humans?[1]

Pol Bargués-Pedreny

Introduction

This article unpacks how the concept of 'local ownership' has been employed within policy frameworks in the context of peacebuilding since the late 1990s (OECD 1996; UNDP 2001; World Bank 2000). The term has widely been understood in the literature as 'the extent to which domestic actors control both the design and implementation of political processes', which is essential because, the wisdom goes, 'any peace process not embraced by those who have to live with it is likely to fail' (Donais 2009a: 3). The concept is portrayed positively first for its practical benefits, as it improves the results of the mission if local authorities are able to take the initiative; secondly, it is also endorsed because of its ethical connotation of transforming externally dominated and overly invasive practices and correcting 'a paternalistic attitude of donor countries towards local actors' (Reich 2006: 7; see also OECD 2011: 45). While the practical and ethical importance of ownership is seldom disputed, there is a wide consensus too that ownership is rarely realised in practice. Indeed, one of the biggest concerns in the literature is how to operationalize this concept more successfully in post-conflict scenarios. As Ganson and Wennmann (2012: 6) write: the challenge is that 'the international rhetoric of 'local ownership' must be made substantially more real'.

What is intriguing is that even if there are policy reports (and academic critiques of these reports) continuously highlighting the need to enable genuine local control of peace processes, these processes exclude de facto self-determination or self-government. This is intriguing because, as Chesterman (2007: 20) notes, in its broadest sense, ownership means 'self-determination', a basic principle of international law (e.g. UN Charter, ICCPR, ICESCR), which nowadays seems to have

lost its punch.[2] Rather than understanding ownership as akin to self-determination, studies increasingly define it as 'a shorthand way of describing the relationship between different local and international actors' (Martin and Moser 2012: 3). Within this narrower definition, in which self-determination is not contemplated, the big question is how to improve the nature of the exchange between partners. Reich (2006: 4), for example, who calls 'literal' or 'full' 'ownership' an 'unfulfillable goal', wishes to make the relationship between donors and recipients more emphatic by introducing the notion of 'learning sites'. For Donais (2009a: 21), similarly, 'local ownership' is 'a delicate, complex, and often shifting balancing act, in which the division of responsibilities between outsider and insider is constantly calibrated and adjusted as a means to advancing the peace process'. Krogstad (2014) rightly notes that the literature has mainly focused on the difficulties faced by donors, but, instead of giving support to self-government, he focuses on the cases in which local authorities ask for an international supervision of their country. For Krogstad (2014: 1), there is no longer a conflictive relation between international and local, 'coloniser' and 'colonised', because sometimes receivers are the ones 'inviting the coloniser back'. To this I wish to add: what if receivers do not invite her? Or what if they do not even have the prerogative to make the invitation?

This article thus explores the paradox that lies in the increasing willingness to transfer ownership to the local population and the also explicit assumption that self-determination and self-government have to be avoided in democratisation and post-conflict situations. [3] It is argued that it is important to investigate the paradoxical fact that ownership and self-government have opposed connotations within contemporary frameworks of peacebuilding, because in the literature this position is not seen as being contradictory. Far from being seen as a strategy containing an irreconcilable paradox, local ownership is conceptualised so that it resolves at the same time two problems at the core of international governance settings: it limits the international administrators' intrusiveness in national affairs and avoids the risk of giving too much responsibility to local authorities. In other words, local ownership—increasingly understood by most policy reports and the academic literature as a learning relation, cultural exchange or reflexive cooperation between donors and recipients, in which self-government is no longer an issue demanding a response — has sought to overcome the wrongs of both top-down and bottom-up processes of peacebuilding. However, the conclusion of this article is that the concept of ownership, as it has been interpreted by the discourses of peacebuilding analysed here, has been of little value to post-conflict societies and, furthermore, it has denied their moral and political autonomy. This denial, disguised as a discourse that promises to embrace difference, is particularly flawed because it seems to permanently defer the equality between internationally supervised populations and other sovereign nations.

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[2] To clarify, this paper is not a defence of self-determination. Indeed, it is not even about self-determination as such. It is about how 'local ownership' has been understood in peacebuilding settings so that it means something different to self-determination and self-government. For a defence of the principle of self-determination see, for example, Philpott (1995).

[3] See the research developed in the Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global Cooperation Research, in particular in Unit 4 'Paradoxes and Perspectives of Democratisation', http://www.gcr21.org.

This article is divided into three parts. The first section focuses on how ownership was introduced at the end of the 1990s as a way to rectify the problems of overly intrusive interventions and of democratisation processes, as illustrated in the case of Bosnia. Initially, the promotion of ownership thus implied a process in which the adequate social and political conditions of post-war societies had to be developed before actual self-government could be enacted. The second section analyses how, over the past few years, international policy-makers have shown a greater commitment to granting local ownership. However, more ownership has rarely implied that the local population can take full control of the state, as the example of Kosovo demonstrates. It is argued that, in the governance of post-war situations, ownership is increasingly conceptualised both as a means and an end of the peacebuilding process (rather than as a means to a final state of self-government). Finally, the third section deals with the critique of liberal peacebuilding operations. Critical scholars indicate the need to think of local ownership as a learning relation or 'cultural exchange' that resists simplistic dichotomies—such as, for example, the divide between international and local actors—in order to foster a more locally engrained peace. Yet critical frameworks do not argue for self-government either. Along similar lines to policy perspectives, therefore, they seek to resolve the dilemmas associated with the process of transferring local ownership by turning demands of sovereignty or self-government into unnecessary or 'unthinkable' questions. In so doing, it is argued that the concept of local ownership—as it is understood by policymakers and critics of peacebuilding—downgrades the capacity of post-conflict societies to think and choose for themselves and in consequence is of little relevance for the current concerns of the people in the name of which peacebuilding is being renovated.

Peacebuilding and the dilemmas of transferring local ownership

In 1996, reflecting on the experience of the last five decades of international development, the OECD (1996: 9) published a report to set a new strategy for the 21st century. 'Success will depend', it argued, 'upon an approach that recognises diversity among countries and societies and that respects local ownership of the development process'. The concept of 'local ownership' soon became a mantra for international organisations. From the UN to the World Bank, international institutions believed that there were no universally applicable strategies for development. For this reason, developing people—rather than international administrators importing successful institutions from elsewhere—ought to be in the driver's seat of economic and political reforms and the specific socio-cultural context of every society had to be taken into account (CIDA 2002; Stiglitz 1998a, 1998b; UNDP 2001: 20–30; World Bank 2000: 8–9; 2001: 191–2). [4] As one of the

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[4] Along the lines of the OECD, most of reports considered that 'ownership' was one of the 'principles of effective development'. The Canada International Development Agency, for example, wrote: 'development strategies, if they are to be sustainable, must be developed by recipient countries—their governments and people—and they must reflect their priorities, rather than the priorities of donors' (CIDA 2002: 4).

World Bank (2001: vi) reports stressed: 'action must also take place with local leadership and ownership reflecting local realities. There is no simple, universal blueprint'.

In post-war scenarios, the processes of transferring local ownership were considered more burdensome than in developing contexts because groups were generally divided by the conflict and there were periodic relapses of violence after the peace agreement. However, on the other hand, very hands-on and highly invasive international administrations in post-war situations, such as the missions in Kosovo and East Timor, were deemed much more problematic. These interventions were economically and politically costly because they lacked legitimacy and it proved to be almost impossible to implement institutions without the approval of local actors. As Chesterman (2002: 4–8) observes, it was after the dubious results of these exceedingly interventionist practices that the UN shifted the focus towards a 'light footprint approach' in Afghanistan, in 2001, where the need of ownership and the involvement of the Afghan Transitional Administration were central concerns. A UN official expressed his willingness to correct the overbearing outlook of previous intervention practices in these terms: 'we are protecting a peace process from the hubris of the international liberal agenda as promoted by donors' (quoted in Chesterman 2002: 4). Ownership thus was introduced as a politically correct concept, which also seemed to provide more efficient results with regards to humanitarian assistance because it widened the level of acceptance and legitimacy among the local population (Kumar 1999: 9). Local inhabitants were no longer conceived as passive receivers or victims, but as key actors that could actively interact with international partners to develop context-sensitive solutions (Pouligny 2009: 5).

However, the rise of ownership as a policy strategy in the broader context of post-conflict democratisation and peacebuilding projects at the end of the 1990s contained a potential inconsistency. This is because the commitment to reflect the priorities of the local population—rather than those of external agencies—and devolve responsibility to the nationals appeared at a moment when there was the suspicion that democratic processes could disturb the efficiency of peacebuilding missions. After the experiences of post-conflict peacebuilding of the early 1990s, one of the main assumptions was that rapid elections after the peace settlement would reproduce the divisive lines of the war, contributing to the further destabilisation of the country (e.g. Carothers 2002; Paris 2004: 151–78; Mansfield and Snyder 1995). As Jack Snyder (2000: 20) summarises: 'the transition to democratic politics is meanwhile creating fertile conditions for nationalism and ethnic conflict, which not only raises the costs of the transition but may also redirect popular political participation into a lengthy antidemocratic detour'. Snyder was optimistic that democratic governments were stable, but his point was that countries experiencing democratisation heighten the risk of war. It is against this assumption of the problems of democratisation that I seek to highlight the inherent paradox haunting the operationalization of the concept of local ownership within peacebuilding frameworks.

For instance, had 'ownership' been taken literally, for example, as a synonym for self-government, international administrators would have found themselves in a contradiction. That is, by proposing ownership as self-government, they would

have infringed the widespread assumption shared by academics and policymakers at the end of the 1990s that democracy was a destabilizing factor in post-war societies. Nevertheless, as I shall demonstrate, far from it being recognised as a paradox, international administrators were to understand local ownership as being detached from its meaning of self-determination precisely to resolve this governance dilemma: being able to avert the dangers of democratisation, which could lead to conflict, and of top-down interventions, which could be reminiscent of colonialism.

Let me illustrate with a brief example from Bosnia how international agencies introduced local ownership as a progressive strategy on two fronts: it provided an escape route both from the risks related to democratising conflict-affected environments and from a neo-colonial approach led by international administrators. In 1999 the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, stated that the UN was undertaking a new approach, which he referred to as 'ownership'. For him, this new approach meant that the responsibility for the peace process and implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement lay with the Bosnian electorate and its elected leaders. However, while Petritsch was defending ownership, at the same time, he was discriminating in favour of the leaders he preferred and was convinced that Bosnians were not yet ready to make the 'appropriate' (read here non-nationalistic) democratic choices (Chandler 2000: 201–202; Hughes and Pupavac 2005: 882). In an apparent incongruity, the UN affirmed its commitment to local ownership *after* its ruling administration had been prolonged indefinitely and the High Representative had adopted further substantial powers in a meeting in Bonn only two years earlier. The point here is not that Petritsch was hypocritical or fallacious, but to understand that for the High Representative the approach of 'ownership' did not imply 'self-government' and it was certainly not contradictory with further international assistance. With the benefit of hindsight, it seems obvious to say that, even if international policymakers have increasingly transferred responsibilities to the local population, the process of ownership initiated by Petritsch has continuously limited self-government, supposing that the Bosnians are not capable of taking autonomous actions.[5]

The more policy-oriented literature in the first decade of the 21st century also conceived local ownership in similar ways: as a strategy which, on the one hand, represents a step forward in avoiding the overly intrusive practices of early intervention; on the other, full self-government has to be limited until certain requirements have been met (Chesterman 2007; Nathan 2007; Pouligny 2009; Reich 2006; Scheye and Peake 2005; Tschirgi 2004). For these scholars there is thus a need to support and respect local interests and practices in order to allegedly

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[5] For critiques along these lines, see Chandler (2000: 194); Pupavac (2004: 391–4). Both authors argue that the apparent contradiction between denying self-government and promoting ownership is not a contradiction according to the lens of international policy-makers. This is because there has been a redefinition of the traditional meaning of democracy and citizens' political rights: now these come to be understood as processes that can be enhanced or empowered to meet international standards (Chandler 2000: 162–3; 2010; Pupavac 2004: 393).

renovate internationally driven statebuilding projects.[6] Nonetheless, much like the perspective taken by international administrations, they also think that the delicate realities of post-conflict situations place some constraints on the transfer of ownership. Scheye and Peake (2005: 259), for example, argue that local ownership is devoted to untangling the following 'Gordian knot': there is 'the need to ensure that reform is 'locally owned,' coupled with the awareness that the actions of often the same 'local owners' necessitated the intervention of the international community in the first place'. In this fashion, Chesterman (2007: 7) notes that it should not be forgotten that 'operations have tended to be undertaken precisely because of the malevolence or incapacity of existing governance structures'. Furthermore, Narten (2009: 252) takes it as given that 'international assistance' is a requirement in order to avoid the risk of 'falling back into violence and chaos'.

These authors contend that the autonomy of post-conflict societies is unquestionably problematic and thus some degree of external interference is mandatory. The hypothesis is that without an international presence, 'they' will fail again or, at least, 'they' will be much worse.[7] On this assumption, local ownership is understood to be a delicate process leading to self-government, which consists in a careful negotiation and cooperation between international and national agents to resolve the dilemma of giving too much power to either local or international agents. As Scheye and Peake (2005: 259) put it: 'the dilemma is how to chaperone a process that incorporates 'local ownership,' but that does not permit either international actors or the compromised 'local owners' to dictate programming choices'. Comparably, Narten (2009: 278) proposes 'a field-based emphasis on gradual (co-)ownership between external and local actors' in order to, for example, reduce more effectively the power of 'local spoilers.'[8] The underlying conclusion is that ownership needs to be carefully enhanced to avoid giving authority back to those that could jeopardise the peace process.

Throughout most of the decade 2000-2009, along the very same lines of these academic commentators, international organisations have accepted that the process of successfully transferring authority depends on international administrators developing the structural conditions that make national ownership 'efficient' (UNDP 2010: 23).[9] In 2005, in a manual for conflict resolution and

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[6] For example, Nathan (2007: 4) writes: 'What is required is not local support for donor programmes and projects but rather donor support for programmes and projects initiated by local actors. The question for donor governments is not "how can we undertake Security Sector Reforms in partner countries?" but "how can we support local actors who want to undertake SSR in partner countries?"' See also Pouligny (2009: 22); Tschirgi (2004: 16).

[7] Arguing against those scholars who oppose that there is the need for external interference, Paris argues, first, that 'let them fail' is not option and, second, that less intrusive operations have not yielded better results. His conclusion is that 'most host countries would probably be much worse off if not for the assistance they received' (Paris 2009: 98–108).

[8] Analysing the case in Kosovo, for example, Narten (2009: 275, 279) considers Vetëvendosje a potential spoiler group. For him, the solution to the problem of spoilers would be to 'invest more in educational projects for the general public'.

[9] For example, the *Utstein* group advises that a 'simple commitment to local ownership' without preconditions can be 'fatal to hopes of successful peacebuilding'. Instead, 'there needs to be very careful research about the identity and background of project partners, and recognition

peacebuilding, the OECD (2005: 4, 7) wrote: 'in all peace-building interventions particular emphasis should be given to national ownership of the process. Work may need to be done to ensure that it is truly representative and not perpetuating existing divisions in society'. This statement needs a careful attention. While the OECD does not specify why the 'existing divisions in society' are 'not representative', it nevertheless assumes that there is the need to work on building favourable 'country conditions' and 'institutional capacity' to achieve that ownership is 'truly representative'. For the OECD, therefore, ownership does not imply the right to autonomously own or choose, but it is subordinated to prerequisites or amendments that internationals allocate and that indicate how ownership ought to be.

Within this framework, questions about the right to self-determination or direct voting mechanisms such as referenda are left aside until the adequate conditions are settled. Chesterman (2007: 7) argues conclusively that 'ownership is certainly the intended end of such operations, but almost by definition it is not the means'. How much time will be needed for the end of the operation, he does not say. But his conclusion serves to reaffirm that the literature has reached a consensus on the fact that the transfer of ownership does not mean transferring self-government, at least, *not yet* (e.g. see contributors in Ebnöther and Fluri 2005). The assumptions that post-war societies are not yet ready and, therefore, in need of international interference, is indicative of the dominant conceptualization of ownership since its initial formulations: rather than framing it as a democratic right to self-determination that populations have or do not have (Philpott 1995), it is formulated as a process that can be enhanced or built from a co-ownership perspective. In the next section, I focus on contemporary policy approaches, which have pushed this conceptualisation of ownership further in order to resolve its inherent dilemmas 'forever' (avoiding the possibility that either international or local actors could dictate how the end state of peace would be). It will be argued that today ownership is no longer seen as a process the goal of which is transferring authority to the locals, but is considered as a goal in itself. That is, local ownership is understood as a process without a clear end, in which there is constant hope that ownership can be ever more genuine. In this process, therefore, granting full sovereignty to the people is a step that has become unthinkable.

Making ownership more 'real' and self-government 'unthinkable'

By the end of the decade after the year 2000, international organisations progressively placed greater emphasis on the requirement that the locals take

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that it will be best to attempt to increase the degree of local ownership slowly and carefully as experience offers a growing basis of trust. Otherwise, local ownership risks being a code for working with the most powerful and most opportunistic sectors of society' (Smith 2004: 26–7).

command of post-war situations.[10] 'Time and again, it has been noted that if there is one overriding lesson for the achievement of development results—and for the sustainability of such—it is the importance of national ownership', stated the UNDP (2010: 45).[11] A quick glance at contemporary reports is enough to identify systematic efforts to transfer responsibilities to the locals, while respecting the specificity of every context. As the UN (2010: 6) argues, 'peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to the specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership'. The OECD has a similar position: 'it is absolutely necessary to give the state space to establish itself and to ensure that local ownership leads to locally grown institutions' (OECD 2008: 101; see also OECD 2011: 23–5).

One of the crucial differences regarding earlier peacebuilding operations is that international organisations seek to make ownership more 'real' (Ganson and Wennman 2012: 6). That is, in contrast to the previous approach in which ownership was the end that justified other means; now ownership is understood to be both the means and the end of the peacebuilding process.[12] In this vein, international agencies have limited their role to mere assistance, support or facilitation of the locally owned process of cultivating resilience to violence and other crises (e.g. OECD 2010; UNDP 2012).

In being both the means and the end of the project of peace, peacebuilders have sought to solve more proficiently the dilemmas associated with local ownership present in governance processes (having either overly intrusive international partners or excessively powerful local spoilers). Now, achieving local ownership requires international partners to become more self-reflexive throughout the process, aware of their limits and culturally biased assumptions, and more open to the socio-cultural backgrounds of other societies. At the same time, however, their role as facilitators is still considered to be important to ensure that ownership actually results in a plural and all-encompassing execution of domestic politics. It always appears that further work needs to be carried out to 'walk the talk' and guarantee 'genuine national ownership' (e.g. OECD 2011: 45; UNDP 2012: 101). Predicated on the belief that there can be ever-greater culturally sensitive policies and more inclusive measures, international administrators legitimise the prolongation of the process of transferring local ownership under international auspices.

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[10] Nowhere has this tendency been more apparent than in recent policy reports that have focused on strengthening the 'resilience' of post-war societies as a strategy to build peace (e.g. OECD 2008; 2011; Ganson and Wennman 2012).

[11] For another example see the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, integrated by developing states and partners. Its members have agreed to 'change the policy and practice of engagement': 'As part of the "New Deal" we commit to focus on new ways of engaging, to support inclusive country-led and country-owned transitions out of fragility based on a country-led fragility' (IDPS 2011).

[12] See Chesterman's quote above. Recently, the OECD (2011: 20) specifies that 'statebuilding is primarily a domestic process that involves local actors, which means that the role of international actors is necessarily limited'.

The result is that efforts to enhance more substantial local ownership within contemporary governance frameworks are rarely translated into de facto self-government. Rather than providing full autonomy or ownership to the local, local ownership has turned into a long-term emancipatory process in which autonomy is, at the same time, enhanced and supervised—without these positions being seen as contradictory. Schmidt (2013: 14) goes a step further to argue that, within current internationally administered democratisation practices, populations come to 'acknowledge' and 'fulfil' their 'lack of autonomy'. However counter-intuitive this claim may sound, the EU Mission (2008-present) in the statebuilding project in Kosovo seems to be translating this idea into practice.

From its inaugural report, EULEX (2009: 9) has stressed that 'there would be total ownership of the reform process by the relevant Kosovo institutions'. Its commitment towards effectively operationalizing local ownership seems clear in this statement:

> The EULEX Programmatic Approach is based on a rigorous adherence to the principle of 'local ownership'. In practice this has meant that the final responsibility for translating each recommendation into a[n] MMA Action has rested with the relevant institutions of Kosovo's rule of law. In this way, the EULEX programmatic approach is designed to help Kosovo's rule of law bodies to make the changes themselves, rather than rely upon an international presence to do it for them (2010: 6).

The willingness to transfer responsibility and leadership to the Kosovars is purposely different from the intrusive strategy led by the UN administration during the immediate post-war period. However, EULEX's predisposition to promote ownership is belied by the important fact that it entered into force just before the Kosovo Assembly declared the independence of the country in February 2008.[13] This implies that EULEX, which operates under UN Resolution 1244 and does not recognise Kosovo's independence,[14] is enhancing ownership to a population that is not sovereign. But under EULEX approach this is not inconsistent: it understands ownership as if there were no longer a conflictive binary or opposition between international supervision and local leadership. That is, ownership has turned into a process that has removed any tension between international (potentially neo-colonial) and local sovereignty (potentially problematic). Within this framing, in which full sovereignty is *a priori* eclipsed as an immediate possibility, ever more genuine local ownership can indeed become the means of a cooperative process of

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[13] As discussed above, in the case of Bosnia, talks about 'ownership' were also introduced after the UN mission acquired further regulatory powers.

[14] It is important to add here that most scholars emphasise that there are many international pressures—e.g. divided Security Council and divided EU—and domestic constraints—e.g. Serbia's opposition to Kosovo's independence and the territorial disputes in the north of the country—that make it difficult for EULEX to recognise Kosovo as an independent state (see, for example, Greiçevci 2012; Papadimitriou and Petrov 2012; Weller 2008). However, the point here is to highlight that EULEX intends to promote ownership without transferring self-government to the Kosovars.

peacebuilding that has an unclear end.[15] Although the dilemmas of transferring ownership may be 'solved', the discourse of promoting ownership seems to constrain the political agency of the Kosovars who, to paraphrase Schmidt, acknowledge and fulfil their lack of autonomy.

At least in the case of Kosovo, the process of granting ownership to some degree and discarding self-determination and full self-government from the equation is problematic because this process goes against the preferences of the immense majority of the Kosovars. The cause of self-determination has been a priority for the Kosovars at least since the summer of 1990, when the majority of members of the Assembly voted to declare Kosovo a Republic within the Yugoslav Federation (IICK 2000: 43–4). It is very likely therefore that, since the possibility of self-government is left out of EULEX's schema, international policymakers are doing little to resolve the concerns of the majority of the Kosovars. The efforts to respect and support the preferences and priorities of the local, which are explicit in contemporary policy texts, become vacuous if these do not include or respond to their principal plea. [16] To be clear, the conclusion drawn here is not that Kosovo (and other post-conflict societies) ought to be independent or freed from international interference. What I seek to understand is the meaning and implications of a strategy that promotes ownership and seeks to offer a deep respect of local sensitivities but still places firm restrictions regarding self-government. It is important to interrogate the understanding of ownership as a process of 'reflexive cooperation' because, at least in the cases of Bosnia and Kosovo, this approach seems to be frustrating one of the citizens' central agenda.

Let me finish this section with a brief remark that introduces the conclusion of this paper. In a discussion about 'tolerance', Slavoj Zizek (2002: 542) argues that there are limits on tolerance in liberal democracies: 'We can go on making our small choices, 'reinventing ourselves', on condition that these choices do not disturb the social and ideological balance' (see also Furedi 2011: 12). This description could be applied to Kosovo, and to debates about ownership more broadly, since certain preferences of the local population have been tolerated, while others have been denied. However, when Zizek (2002: 548) is developing the lines of his argument, he refers to the impossibility in contemporary democracies of introducing radical changes in the political and economic system. Against this constraint, his text is a 'plea for Leninist intolerance'. He wants to 'repeat, in present worldwide conditions, the Leninist gesture of reinventing the revolutionary project'. And he adds: 'This simply means that we obtain the right to think again.' In the context of post-war societies, the freedom of choice of their citizens has been constrained to higher levels. Post-conflict societies have not been restricted from carrying out any revolutionary project, as the one Zizek is proposing. What has been foreclosed throughout the statebuilding process is the possibility that these populations could govern themselves, like any other sovereign state. Believing that they are fragile, ready to kill each other again and in need of a deep therapeutic intervention to

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[15]   See Krogstad (2014) for an interpretation that undoes this binary.

[16]   For instance, it is unsurprising that citizen satisfaction with the work of EULEX has been very low (below 30% most of the periods) and with EULEX police even lower, regardless of ethnicity (IPOL 2012: 15–17).

build their resilience,[17] international administrators have undermined their moral and political autonomy.[18]

In conclusion, international peacebuilders have aimed to solve the dilemmas present in post-conflict governance settings by promoting peacebuilding processes that are owned and led by local actors and facilitated by international administrators. Here, therefore, international regulation and local ownership are no longer categories in tension, let alone contradiction. This solution entails that international administrators still supervise the process, albeit less directly. This is justified given that post-war populations cannot yet make the right choices for themselves and ownership could still be more inclusive. For instance, Martin and Moser, while considering the difficulties in Kosovo's statebuilding project, advocate that self-government is never fully permitted: 'base the international presence around a perpetually renewable contract, in which international actors recognise, reassess and continuously reconfigure their responsibility in Kosovo in conjunction with local actors' (2012: 24). The consequence is that these processes suspend the autonomy of post-conflict societies and seem to be questioning the *equality* between these people and the rest of states, who can address their problems autonomously in the political sphere. The last section seeks to expand on this conclusion by engaging with academic critical frameworks of peacebuilding, which presumably take the lead in caring for and tolerating the views of the local population.

Hybrid peacebuilding: Embracing difference at the cost of equality?

The critics of liberal peacebuilding highlight two main problems regarding how ownership is operationalized to explain the unsatisfactory outcomes of peacebuilding missions. [19] Firstly, these authors point out that recent policy concerns about local ownership represent only a rhetorical shift that is not realised in practice, where international and national agents still maintain asymmetrical power relations. For Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013: 775), for example, 'local ownership'—like 'partnership' or 'participation'—are merely 'buzz phrases' used by practitioners to gain local legitimacy and support. [20] Even if contemporary

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[17] It is likely that the fragility of post-war states has been exaggerated in a paternalistic fashion. See Pupavac (2001: 358–64) for an analysis of how humanitarian responses have overemphasised the level of 'trauma' and 'psychological suffering' leading to the 'pathologisation' of war-affected societies.

[18] As Furedi (2011: 126) argues, 'widespread scepticism about people's capacity to respond to dangerous ideas with maturity indicates that society finds it difficult to take seriously the value of moral autonomy'.

[19] By critics of liberal peace, I refer here to scholars who emphasise that practitioners have universalised understandings of peacebuilding practices and therefore have undermined the social and cultural dynamics of post-war societies. Here I will focus specifically on their critique of the way local ownership is practiced (e.g. Brigg 2010; Donais 2009a; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Pouligny 2005; Richmond 2011).

[20] Note that international administrators and policy-oriented academics also share the belief that ownership has not been translated into practice when they assess some negative results

policymakers specify that they are willing to place local actors on the driver's seat, the critics nevertheless identify and censure the (liberal) elephant in the room. It is worth quoting Timothy Donais (2009a: 4), who has extensively reviewed issues of local ownership, at length:

> While the basic premise of peacebuilding, as Necla Tschirgi has suggested, is that peace cannot be imposed by external forces, military or otherwise, but must rather be nurtured through patient, flexible strategies carefully calibrated to the domestic political context, the empirical record suggests that peacebuilding in practice more closely resembles an externally driven exercise in both state building and social engineering. Local ownership of governance, in other words, is accepted in theory but rarely practiced.

Donais straightforwardly criticises the practice of international peacebuilding because this is mainly top-down and externally driven, despite a firm intention of responding to local priorities. He suggests that the challenge today is to build bridges between theory and practice, to develop strategies more sensitive to the context of every situation (2008; 2009a; 2009b). Along these lines, Pouligny (2005: 608) asserts that missions will fail unless internationals take a more 'modest, flexible, patient and unobtrusive' role that facilitates the process being led by local actors.

Secondly, critical scholars are wary of how ownership is being promoted. They suggest that international administrators that seek to transfer authority to the local population rely on a narrow and 'self-referential vision of civil society'—one that is based, for example, on liberal NGOs—and thus underestimate the plurality of views and possibilities that can be found in the everyday life of conflict-affected zones (Belloni 2001: 175–8). A direct consequence is that war-prone entrepreneurs, nationalist groups or other local 'spoilers', which do not represent the majority of the population, have co-opted ownership and dominated post-war political transitions. Donais (2009a: 16) argues that, besides capacity building, work should be done to promote 'capacity disabling' of some groups or some practices. This means that there ought to be 'efforts to disable, marginalize, or co-opt those domestic political power structures that stand in the way of the effective establishment of new institutions'. For the critics, liberal peacebuilding operations should pursue a deeper engagement with diverse civil society groups in order to develop a bottom-up version of peace and overturn the risks that unrepresentative groups could co-opt the conflict resolution process (Pouligny 2005; Orjuela 2003).

Critical scholars see the state-building project in Kosovo as a paradigmatic case in which international administrators have become complicit in reinforcing a divided society where nationalist views persist. It is argued that the policies of the UN Mission (UNMIK) in the immediate post-war period (before the EU Mission took charge of the country in 2008) such as the decentralisation of power to minorities have institutionalised 'ethnicity' and legitimised a polarised civil society dominated by 'ethnic' thinking in which reconciliation among groups is far from tangible (Hehir

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of earlier international interventions (Chesterman 2007: 17; Nathan 2007: 1; Reich 2006: 14–15).

2006: 205–7; Franks and Richmond 2008: 94). Almost consensually, these authors appeal for a reduction of the salience of ethnicity in order to foster an all-encompassing peace process that could be owned by the nationals. The aim is to be respectful of diversity without reifying nationalist positions (Devic 2006: 270; Simonsen 2005: 298; Franks and Richmond 2008: 98–9).

Against these two flaws identified above, critical frameworks seek to renovate the actual promotion of local ownership. The way forward depends on involving a great variety of actors, with a specific attention for the powerless, in a truly inclusive peace endeavour. Richmond (2011: 10) writes:

> Reforming the liberal peace model … requires an engagement with not just the currently fashionable and controversial issues of local ownership or local participation, but the far deeper 'local-local' (i.e. what lies beneath the veneer of internationally sponsored local actors and NGOs constituting a 'civil' as opposed to 'uncivil' society), which allows for genuine self-government, self-determination, democracy and human rights.

While Richmond states that his aim is to allow for 'genuine self-government', this is not automatically conceived, but subordinated to an external engagement with the local-local. The notion of the 'local-local' thus deserves special attention.[21] For Richmond (2011: 13–14), building peace in the plural—a peace attuned to the culture and needs of every society, which is distinct from the universally valid democratic peace idealised by the liberal gaze—ought to be practised by considering and enabling the 'local-local' and its critical agency. However, he argues, the challenge is that this deeper level is 'hermeneutic, diverse, fluid, transnational and transversal' and cannot be represented, analysed or governed from an external perspective. On this assumption, peacebuilding requires a plural, flexible and open understanding of difference, which does not essentialize or reduce difference to existing (Western-informed) forms of representation (see also Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013: 764). In other words, peacebuilding needs to be owned and led by the local-local actors, rather than driven by an elitist or narrow version of civil society

This emancipatory form of peacebuilding—'hybrid peace'—is committed to transferring responsibilities to 'the local' beyond 'ethnocentric ways of knowing culture', as Brigg (2010: 336–41) puts it. As a critical reappraisal of the liberal peace, proposals for hybrid peace demand the need to foster a context-sensitive peacebuilding process, which avoids the process being either controlled by domineering policy-advisors or co-opted by unrepresentative local leaders. Hybridity in this context is seen as a framework that corrects international peace practitioners and nationalist entrepreneurs, who both tend to conceptualise identity as static, homogenous and essentialist and thus undermine multiple forms of being and doing (Mac Ginty 2010: 397). There is confidence that a reflexive and agonistic conversation between multiple actors opens up new possibilities for cultivating a peace project that embraces difference and enables the local-local. As

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[21] Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013: 774–5) define it as 'the local that cannot be described as subscribing to liberal and neoliberal rationalities'.

Richmond (2012: 125) argues: 'peace-building would be reframed as a process that reconstructs the everyday according to how its subjects need and want to live, where rights and needs are both contextually and internationally negotiated and enabled'. It is through this reflexive process and 'cultural exchange' between diverse international and local actors that hybrid proposals for peacebuilding seek to overcome the traps regarding the transfer of local ownership: 'merging top-down with bottom-up approaches in creative and culturally sensitive ways is also likely to enhance a sense among local populations of the legitimacy of the broader peacebuilding process' (Donais 2009a: 19–20). In short, proposals for hybrid peace seek to rectify the problems related to post-conflict governance by means of cultivating a constructive and agonistic process that corrects invasive international attitudes and potentially pernicious local values or ideas.

These critical perspectives are thus very similar to contemporary policy approaches of peacebuilding, which have already sought to abandon the top-down and intrusive projects of the late 1990s in order to facilitate and enhance a real process of ownership that is inclusive of diverse views. To be sure, although proposals for hybrid peace promise an even greater appreciation of the dynamics and resources of everyday life and a more sensitive engagement with the local (or the 'local-local'), the process of transferring local ownership has not been translated into local self-government either. Although comparing policy and critical approaches goes beyond the scope of this article, I want to suggest here that critical views that defend a hybrid peace do not represent a step forward compared with current governance approaches: they are still being 'intolerant' to post-conflict societies if 'tolerance' is, as Furedi (2011: 22) argues, 'a positive orientation towards creating the conditions where people can develop their autonomy through the freedom to make choices'. Furedi starts from the assumption that people are autonomous subjects engaging in the world. Instead, very similar to policy frameworks, scholars who defend hybrid peace consider the 'autonomy' and 'freedom to make choices' of post-war societies the problem to be corrected through a process of hybridisation that transcends the dichotomy of international 'colonisers' and local 'spoilers'.

The negative implication is that these critical perspectives, in wanting to hybridise the process of peacebuilding in an effort to respect and appreciate the pluralism of post-war societies, eschew or belittle the autonomous demands openly voiced by different local actors. The willingness to build peace *beyond* current forms of political representation and identification gives little meaning to the *present* struggles faced by these societies. For example, Richmond (2011: 130) argues that the promise of a 'post-liberal peace' goes 'beyond mere rationalism and sovereignty', beyond 'state institutions' or 'territorial' constraints in order to aspire to true 'democracy and self-determination'. But this promise is of little value for current concerns of most of the people in post-conflict societies who want sovereignty, territory and state institutions (e.g. Bosnia and Kosovo). Wishing to build peace beyond the dominant constellations of identity and difference, as William Connolly (1995: xiv) would say, these frameworks disregard the preferences and political positions that make sense for the local population.

My suspicion is that, for contemporary frameworks of peacebuilding, the Other is not taken as the sovereign *equal*, but as the *different* whose peace ought to be

approached through a careful conversational and reflexive process of cooperation among multiple actors. It is not hard to see that questions of self-government and sovereignty, which cannot be thought of without a more or less stable notion of identity and difference (i.e. the local and the international), are increasingly seen as non-possibilities: they even become conceptually and politically 'nonexistent', no longer disputed.[22] In lieu of a conclusion, it is argued that the cost of a discursive shift, which has sought to move away from universal approaches (considered intrusive and disrespectful of diversity) to emphasise difference, may be the difficulty to consider post-conflict populations as equals. On the assumption that these people are momentarily 'inferior', [23] incapable of being autonomous, the approaches analysed here (international peacebuilders from the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century until the present and academic critics of the liberal peace) have promoted ownership while adjourning self-government. This has been problematic, for instance, in the former Yugoslavia, where self-government has clearly been one of the central concerns of the local population. Yet different frameworks of peacebuilding have considered that international assistance is necessary to cultivate an emancipatory peace that is dynamic and plural, in which conflictive positions would disappear. Wanting to protect difference infinitely, the discourse of peacebuilding hides a paternalistic view of post-conflict societies that denies their equality and condemns them to appreciate and enjoy their differences in a process in which self-government is continuously deferred.

Conclusion

   This article has explored the apparent paradox in contemporary democratisation and post-conflict settings of a growing commitment to promote local ownership and the reluctance to grant self-government to war-affected populations. I have argued that far from being understood as a strategy containing a paradox, the concept of local ownership is increasingly seen as a learning relation or a process of reflexive cooperation between international and national actors to resolve a fundamental dilemma affecting governance missions: either having overly invasive international actors or devolving power to unrepresentative or potentially violent local agents. In the first section, I explained how liberal peacebuilding frameworks introduced ownership at the end of the 1990s both as a mechanism for bettering the results of previous missions and a politically correct concept to improve the practices and relations between interveners and intervened upon. However, the notion of ownership appeared at a time in which there was a great scepticism with democratic processes and thus it had to be postponed until certain social and political conditions were met. In its inception, therefore, ownership could be considered little more than window dressing that allowed post-war societies to implement policies that had been engineered by donors.

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[22] I would like to thank Jessica Schmidt for discussing this point with me.

[23] See Friedman for a critique of the hierarchical assumptions underpinning hybrid approaches (2002).

In the second section, I argued that contemporary policy frameworks have intended to correct the gap between the theory and the practice of the peace missions and deconstruct the conflictive relation between international and local actors. In the last few years, local ownership has become both the means and the apparent end of the mission (even if this outcome is constantly adjourned) and the role of peacebuilders has become secondary in order to facilitate a mutual learning and cooperative process of peace. However, it has been argued that their role as mere 'facilitators' is still considered crucial in war-affected situations. Even if ownership has become a *sine qua non* principle for any peacebuilding process, this has not been translated into *de facto* self-determination or self-government. The problem is that the citizens in states like Bosnia or Kosovo, who have demanded self-government, have been constrained on the assumption that they are not prepared to take sovereign decisions. In this sense, I have argued that the promotion of ownership has undermined the moral and political autonomy of post-war societies. At the very least, processes of local ownership are in constant tension with the pleas and interests of the (majority of the) people.

In the third section, this article analysed critical views of liberal peacebuilding. Hybrid peace frameworks seek to rectify international domineering attitudes without transferring ownership to unrepresentative local agents by cultivating a process of agonistic relation between multiple self-reflexive actors. Yet it has been argued that the attempt to transfer ownership to the local-local—this is to consider diverse and unrepresented communities and individuals often excluded with the broad term of 'local' or 'civil society'—seems to offer solutions of little value to conflict-affected people. In plain English, while critical frameworks project an inclusive peace process in which statehood, territory or security are no longer relevant and hence are not exclusive of non-majority groups,[24] meanwhile, before this promise of peace is fulfilled, sovereignty, territory and security are the desires of the majority of post-war populations. Along similar lines to policy approaches, therefore, hybrid peace perspectives have belittled the priorities of local agents that are not considered plural, emancipatory, hybrid or open to difference, and have legitimised further international assistance. The question remains whether, within frameworks of peacebuilding that have increasingly sought to embrace difference and promoted a more inclusive local ownership process, the *equality* of post-war societies has been degraded.

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[24] See, for instance, Richmond's promise of peace: 'A deterritorialised, non-sovereign polity would be the outcome of incorporating the everyday as a key priority of peacebuilding in desecuritised form, maximising critical agency rather than the national interest of the state or interests of donors (2011: 138–9).

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