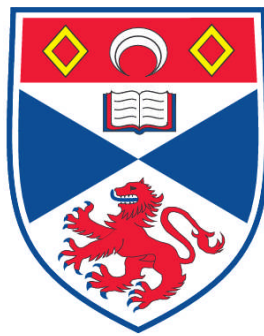# RETURNING CULTURE TO PEACEBUILDING: CONTESTING THE LIBERAL PEACE IN SIERRA LEONE

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Returning Culture to Peacebuilding:
Contesting the Liberal Peace in Sierra Leone

PhD Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the advantages and limitations of applying culture to the analysis of violent conflict and peacebuilding, with a particular focus on liberal peacebuilding in Sierra Leone. While fully aware of the critique of the concept of culture in terms of its uses for the production of difference and 'otherness,' it also seeks to respond to the critique of liberal peacebuilding on the account of its low sensitivity towards local culture, which allegedly undermines the peace effort. After a careful examination of the terms of discussion about culture enabled by theoretical approaches to conflict in Chapter 2, the thesis presents a theoretical framework for the analysis of cultural aspects of conflict and peace based on the processes and effects of meaning-generation (Chapter 3), developing the conceptual apparatus and vocabulary for the subsequent empirical study. Instead of bracketing out the recursive nature of cultural theorising, the developed approach embraces the recursive dynamics which arise as a result of cultural 'embeddedness' of the analyst and the processes which s/he seeks to elucidate, mirroring similar dynamics in the cultural production of meaning and knowledge. The framework of 'embedded cultural enquiry' is then used to analyse the practices of liberal peacebuilding as a particular culture, which shapes the interaction of the liberal peace with its 'subjects' and critics as well as framing its reception of the cultural problematic generally (Chapter 4). The application of the analytical framework to the case study investigates the interaction between the liberal peace and 'local culture,' offering an alternative reading of the conflict and peace process in Sierra Leone (Chapter 5). The study concludes that a greater attention to cultural meaning-making offers a largely untapped potential for peacebuilding, although any decisions with regard to its deployment will inevitably be made from within an inherently biased cultural perspective.

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Abbreviations

AFRC – Armed Forces Ruling Council
APC – All People's Congress
BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation
BHC SL – British High Commission in Sierra Leone
CDF – Civil Defence Force
CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CGG – Campaign for Good Governance
CPR – Conflict Prevention and Post-conflict Reconstruction Network
CR – Conciliation Resources
DDR – Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration
DfID – Department for International Development, UK
EC – European Commission
EC SL – European Commission's Delegation in Sierra Leone
ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States
ECOMOG – Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
EPLO – European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
EU – European Union
FAWE SL – Forum of African Women Educationalists, Sierra Leone
FoC – Forum of Conscience
GGEM – Grassroots Gender Empowerment Movement
GoSL – Government of Sierra Leone
ICG – International Crisis Group
ICTJ – International Centre for Transitional Justice
IMF – International Monetary Fund
IR – International Relations
NAG – National Accountability Group
NGO – Non-governmental Organisation
NP – Nonviolent Peaceforce
NPRC – National Provisional Ruling Council (of Sierra Leone)
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMC – Private military company
PRIDE (P.R.I.D.E. Salone) – Post-Conflict Reintegration Initiatives for Development and
        Empowerment
RUF – Revolutionary United Front (of Sierra Leone)
SCG SL – Search for Common Ground, Sierra Leone
SLA – Sierra Leone Army
SLPP – Sierra Leone People's Party
TRC (SL) – Truth and Reconciliation Commission (of Sierra Leone)
UN – United Nations
UNAMSIL – United Nations
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
UNMIK – United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
UNIOSIL – United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone
UNOMSIL – United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone
UN PBC – United Nations Peacebuilding Commission
UNSC – United Nations Security Council
UNSG – United Nations Secretary General

USAID – United States Agency for International Development
WB – The World Bank

1. Introduction

'I will bring peace, everlasting peace! And unity. And uniformity!'
'And imagination, what about that? One thing that led you here,
imagination? You are killing it dead!'

– Doctor Who, Series 2, 'The Age of Steel,' BBC

A case for 'returning culture to peacebuilding'

In the post-Cold War period, violent conflict in the Global South has acquired unprecedented prominence on the agendas of policy-makers and International Relations (IR) scholars alike. Yet, a lay person will usually have heard more about interventions by the United Nations peacekeeping forces or NGOs' humanitarian relief efforts than about the particulars of the conflicts in question. The rapid increase in the number and scope of UN peace operations following the end of the Cold War, the high visibility of national donor agencies involved in conflict management and prevention (such as DfID or USAID), as well as the growing number of non-governmental actors engaged in relief, development aid and post-conflict reconstruction activities in the recent decades all point to the formation of a large-scale industry of peace. Despite the absence of centralised coordination, this 'industry' is guided by a shared understanding of both the sources of violent conflict and the required remedies as grounded in liberal international theory and ideology (Duffield 2001). The prescriptive character of the liberal 'order,' designed to counter the 'chaos' of post-Cold War conflicts, highlights the ideological dimension of 'disciplinary liberalism' (Debrix 1999).

The domination of liberal approaches to addressing violent conflict has not remained uncontested, with the perceived lack of practical alternatives to liberal peace (founded as it is on the apparently self-explanatory norms of constitutional democracy, human rights, the rule of law and market economy) inviting particular controversy. The premise of universal applicability and benignity of liberal peace as the *raison d'être* of the vast array of policies aimed at the developing world has been exposed as the major source of misfit between the offered institutional solutions to violent conflict and the requirements stemming from diverse conditions on the ground (e.g. Richmond and Franks 2006). Despite sharing a number of features, such as post-colonial history, repercussions of the Cold War era superpower rivalry, or inclusion in transnational shadow economies, the dynamics of contemporary violent conflicts make each of them sufficiently different to question the standardised terms of involvement associated with liberal peacebuilding.[1]

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[1] 'Peacebuilding' is used here to refer to the entire spectrum of activities aimed at conflict prevention, resolution and post-settlement reconstruction – from military peacekeeping interventions to fostering civil society to reconciliation and state-building.

Already these preliminary notes offer a strong case for 'cultural critique' of liberal peacebuilding, exposing its inability to engage constructively with local cultural dynamics and implicit cultural biases of its own approach to conflict and peace (e.g. Duffey 2001; Fetherston 2000a, 2000b; Shaw 2005). These biases are exemplified by the imperative to end violent conflicts regardless of their underlying dynamics and the role that violence may play in the constitution of societies in question (Richards 2005a; Brigg 2005). They are also evident in the modernist view of social change, which underlies the elevation of development to an unquestioned end of interventions, as well as a means to safeguard peace and security through universal spread of principles of progressivist rationality (e.g. Duffield 2001; Echavarria 2007). The inability of liberal peacebuilding to engage with local culture is demonstrated by occasional failures to respect the elementary cultural sensitivities (Duffey 2001), frequent working at cross-purposes with the established local practices of reconciliation and locally-nurtured visions of peace (Kaldor 1999; Fetherston 2000a, 2000b; Lederach 1997; Shaw 2005), the lack of ability to understand the cultural impact of interventions (Fetherston and Nordstrom 1995) and vice versa (Chopra and Hohe 2004), as well as the general trend of substituting the existing patterns of social organisation by those consistent with the institutional frameworks of liberal peace (Duffield 2001). The tendency of blindness towards the cultural problematic in general is underpinned by viewing the problems besetting the application of liberal peace as merely 'technical' and not grounded in a particular (cultural) perspective which it represents. And although the problems to be solved (e.g. corruption or 'bad governance') are occasionally put down to culture (Kapoor 2008: 35-6), the necessity of engaging with it is 'superseded' by postulating the required improvements in equally technical, a-cultural terms. The political dimension of culture is all but eliminated by relegating culture to the recreational domain (ibid.: 23; *EuropeAid 2007*), so that possibilities of its broader, formative role in structuring the discursive production of the 'others' of liberal peace (*à la* Said (1978) or Dunn (2003)) are not even envisaged (Kapoor 2008: 6-7). And although the recognition of notable absence of culture from the discourse of liberal peacebuilding has reached the circles of its ideologues and practitioners (e.g. *WB 2007b*), a return of culture to liberal peace would involve more than a routine exercise in 'sensitisation,' as the following preliminary discussion of the complexity of the concept of culture illustrates.

Culture: Advantages and limitations of the concept

References to culture are infrequent in peacebuilding policy documents, and when they do appear, there is little reflection on the meaning or scope of the concept, as though references to 'culture of prevention' (Annan 2001) or 'cultures of violence' (UNDP 2004) were taken to be self-explanatory. Yet a closer look at 'culture' reveals it as one of the most complex and contentious concepts in social sciences. It is almost impossible to delineate what belongs within the realm of culture from that which does not: intuitively, 'culture' calls for a broad understanding that embraces 'the totality of human and/or social existence' (Bauman 1999: 124-5). However, the breadth of the concept presents immense analytical difficulties for its users, who are often forced to resort to other, less nebulous terms to define and delineate its scope, thus disengaging culture into a number of different, not always interchangeable

facets (such as, for instance, 'social structure,' 'identity,' 'ritual' etc.). The implicit understandings stirred up by invoking 'culture' are thus likely to differ widely; furthermore, the 'tactics of evasion' where culture is addressed through its disparate facets risks losing sight of the overarching concept itself.

While defining culture presents challenges (as illustrated by multiple attempts documented by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952)), successful delineations invoke problems of a different kind, if one considers the political and normative implications of exclusive definitions of culture (as opposed to 'non-culture') (cf. Jenks 1993: 9). Although such exclusive understandings of culture are largely a thing of the past (Avruch 1998: 6), the connotations of 'othering' and hierarchy still accompany the contemporary uses of the term aimed at demarcating boundaries between different cultures (Abu-Lughod 1991), even when these are put to the service of the 'politically correct' ideas of respect for cultural rights (e.g. Spivak 1988). Thinking about culture in terms of cultural difference is also problematic because it tends to obscure both variation and diachronic change within the delineated cultural 'wholes,' which bears the danger of reifying difference as well as cultural identity. And although the discourse of liberal peacebuilding presents cultural diversity as an asset in human development (e.g. UNESCO 2001: Article 1; UNDP 2004b; Bezanson and Sagasti 2005), the envisaged solutions to the problem of power asymmetry between cultural groups, such as multiculturalism, often rely on excessively static and homogeneous portrayals of cultures (cf. Huysmans 2006). Arresting cultures in time and space also has problematic power connotations because of the preconditions for governing to which this form of 'knowing' gives rise (cf. Foucault 1965, 1977).

'Defining' cultures is also challenging because the notion of culture invokes, simultaneously, 'universality and commonality' and 'particularity and diversity' (Blaney and Inayatullah 1998: 64). While this tension is present in any characterisation of a particular culture (cf. Connolly 1991), it is clearest in Avruch's (1998) juxtaposition of two aspects of culture, 'local' and 'generic,' where the latter refers to 'the general potential of human individuals to share certain not genetically inherited routines of thinking, feeling, and acting with other individuals with whom they are in social contact and/or to the products of that potential' (Brumann 1999: S6). In post-Arnoldian conceptualisations (Arnold 1882; cf. Avruch 1998: 6), 'generic' culture is viewed as a truly ubiquitous feature of humankind, denoting any imaginable design of human cohabitation and interaction with an environment. Both the generation of culture as an instrument for countering the instinctually under-determined character of human condition (Bauman 1999: xii-xiii), and the ensuing 'meaningful and constructed quality of human existence' (Blaney and Inayatullah 1998: 64), make 'culture' the most general feature of humanity (cf. White 1959: 17; Lowie 1936: 305). One could, of course, argue that such generic 'cultural universals' are not specifically cultural, but rather simply human phenomena (cf. Bauman 1999: 17; Kapoor 2008: 22-3). But as it is difficult to separate the 'human' from the 'cultural,' the concept of culture as such can be used to delineate 'the boundaries of … the human' (Bauman 1999: 30). (After all, 'human' is the professed focus of anthropology – a discipline we have come to associate closest with the study of culture (cf. Clifford 1986a: 4)). This understanding of culture as 'the common

domain of the human' (Jenks 1993: 9) also marked early anthropological fascination with culture – 'that realm of human being which marked its ontology off from the sphere of the merely natural' (ibid.: 8). However, to recognise the generic aspect of culture is not synonymous with endorsing universalism, since 'the most generic element in culture is precisely its dividing, differentiating function' (Bauman 1999: 34). In this light, 'generality in culture is a by-product … of mankind *not* being united into a whole; of it being, on the contrary, split into separate units' (ibid.). This consideration recasts the division into 'local' and 'generic' in very different terms, drawing attention to the potentially problematic, inevitably divisive effects at the very heart of the concept, thus lending evidence to the abovementioned propensity for its abuse.

One reaction to the alleged 'abuse' perpetuated by references to culture – such as politicisation, or naturalisation of certain interests and power asymmetries – is to discard culture altogether as a usable concept (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1991; Scott 1992, 2003). However, this suggestion faces immediate difficulties. Tempting though it may be to treat any evocation of culture as suspect, there is no way to enforce rhetorical abstinence short of universal censorship (which in itself would be even more problematic). Furthermore, avoidance of an informed discussion of culture on the grounds of its susceptibility to abuse would also be counterproductive, since only a profound understanding of dynamics set forth by evoking culture would guard against uncritical acceptance of political 'givens' produced in that way. Analytically, '[c]easing to speak of cultures … also entails a cost' of underplaying observable regularities, which would amount to claiming 'that features are distributed randomly' (Brumann 1999: S7) – a view that could easily be construed as politically problematic since it, too, offers limitless possibilities for misuse. Ignoring culture could also only be justified if it were possible to achieve a perspective utterly untainted by things 'cultural.' Although the quest for such 'culture-free, nonsemiotic world' (Becker and Mannheim 1995: 238) is unlikely to be abandoned – as manifest in the continuing seduction of positivism and bureaucratic politics with their self-positioning as an objective 'non-perspective' (Häkli 1996) – it also seems necessary to examine the implications of such inevitable cultural grounding for what we can say (or would prefer not to say) about, or with the help of, culture. Just as the need for 'othering' is exposed as discursively embedded in the very idea of culture (Abu-Lughod 1991; Scott 1992, 2003), so, it seems, is the critical questioning of the self (Vidich and Lyman 2000; Viktorova Milne, forthcoming). The notion of culture, in this respect, is a testimony to (self-) reflection on the human condition and factors which perpetuate it.

Culture thus emerges as a concept capturing, if not resolving, a series of seemingly irreconcilable tensions, such as those between generic and particular, sameness and difference, domination and resistance, self-assertion and -doubt, and so on (cf. Bauman 1999: xiii). The ambivalence coded into the concept of 'culture' makes it a unique tool for reflecting upon and connecting a wealth of diverse human experiences. And although the ambivalence is reflected in the uses to which the concept of culture itself can be put, uncovering the possibilities of abuse that the concept of culture offers is just as important as investigating how its careful and even-handed application can assist with the analysis of conflict and peacebuilding.

Methodological issues

Having established the need for a study of culture in relation to conflict and peacebuilding, the question of how to conduct such a study becomes paramount, given that culture has something of a 'reputation' as a difficult and unyielding subject. In conventional methodological terms, even conceptualising culture (as discussed above) presents a challenge; its operationalisation for the purposes of a particular study is even more difficult, considering that the breadth of the concept makes it almost impossible to differentiate between 'cultural' and 'non-cultural' influences, while the likelihood of co-variation in case of limited definitions of culture makes it difficult to determine, whether it is culture or something else that plays a defining role in conditioning particular aspects of conflict and peace. Disengaging culture into concepts and phenomena more amenable to the conventional tools of social research (as has been widely practiced in various disciplines) can assist with the study of those particular aspects of culture, but generalisations on their basis all too easily invite accusations of reductionism. Such an approach also perpetuates the perception of culture as an obscure and unaccountable influence, to be considered as 'an explanation of last resort' (Pye 1991: 504, quoted in Hudson 1997b: 2) when other options have been exhausted. The view of culture as the unfathomable residue that is left behind after the more specific aspects of human activity have been accounted for, not only risks essentialising culture through reifying these 'residual' differences (Rao and Walton 2004), but also actively constructs culture as something that is difficult to relate systematically to other fields of human activity and to subject to an informed academic study (Wuthnow et al. 1983: 3-7). On these grounds, some recent studies (e.g. Chabal and Daloz 2006) have argued that it is not only impossible, but also counterproductive to seek exhaustive and restrictive definitions of culture, if the concept is to preserve its analytical value.

A broad and inclusive approach to culture, however, challenges most of the received wisdoms of social science methodology, which operates on the principle of analysis (i.e. literally – taking apart, before a synthesis in the name of explanation can be attempted). Cultural situatedness of the research subject appears to direct the study of culture towards interpretive methodologies; yet the social and even public nature (cf. Swidler 1995) of not only most manifestations of culture, but also reflections on it, makes interpretation itself a focus of cultural enquiry. Engaging with the issue of culture seems to involve the researcher into a 'double hermeneutic' movement particularly compellingly. But, as noted above, observations of culture also warrant assumptions of its patterned character (Brumann 1999: S7), which point beyond the limited possibilities of generalisation traditionally associated with interpretivism. References to intersubjectivity, mutual constitution of culture and its subjects, whether in its social constructivist (e.g. Wendt 1992) or structurationist guises (e.g. Giddens 1984), although helpful in overcoming the rigidity of conventional methodological oppositions, offer little guidance for investigating the exact mechanism of intersubjective constitution of culture, or for identifying the exact domain of cultural enquiry. Taken seriously, however, 'intersubjectivity' reinforces the notion that an in-depth consideration of culture leads to an engagement with the very character of knowledge and the terms and ways of its generation. This means that methodology cannot be relied upon to provide uncontroversial answers to

questions about culture: far from an external, independent and 'disinterested' toolkit for analysis, it becomes yet another subject for 'cultural' investigation. This also means that such an investigation would have to proceed without the aid of many conventional safeguards of academic research, and establish (and interrogate) its own parameters as it actively explores the conditions of situated knowing – from within the 'messy' social reality undifferentiated into neat 'object' and 'subject' categories, first- and second-order discourses, products and producers of knowledge, and so on.

Implications for a cultural enquiry (of conflict and peacebuilding)

This places the present work at the heart of debates over non-foundational epistemologies and the implications of knowledge not anchored in a timeless and abstract departure point (cf. George 1994; Toulmin 1992, 2001). But while endorsing the conclusions of anti-foundationalists concerning the heightened sense of responsibility for both the theorist and decision-maker in the conditions where the ultimate rightness of knowledge cannot be verified, this work also engages with the question of why the need for external validation of knowledge and truth seems to be so constant across different cultural environments. Investigation of this and other identifiable patterns and controversies takes the offered consideration of culture beyond mere 'interpretation,' although there is no possibility to ensure – other than by 'triangulation' with the ideas and conclusions of other (differently situated) thinkers – that what this thesis offers is more than just one possible reading of the problematic of culture in conflict. In this sense, the present work is suspended between a post-structuralist suspicion of any truth claims, and the temptation to generalise upon the patterned character of cultural phenomena (cf. Price and Reus-Smit 1998: 275).

This should not, however, be considered a fatal flaw in the research design, since upon closer inspection, most established and well-rehearsed theories and methodologies (even Hume's empiricism, according to George (1994: 22-4)) are founded upon some irreconcilable paradox, a leap of logic incorporated into their very structure (cf. Lassman 2005; see also Debrix 1999; Dolan 1991). Curiously, any attempts to 'iron out' such paradoxes, instead of strengthening the theory's internal consistency, make it even more vulnerable to deconstruction (cf. Debrix 1999: 40-41). The impossibility of avoiding such 'founding paradoxes' in the first place is reflected in Lotman's remark that minimally two differently organised channels, code systems, or languages are required to enable the production of meaning, communication and cognition generally (1990: 36-37). Theories and methodologies, therefore, differ not in whether or not they contain such moments of founding inconsistency, but in how they treat their presence. An open endorsement of a paradoxical moment, in the case of the present work, not only imposes limits on its truth claims, but also enables the offered analytical approach to mirror similar inconsistencies and contradictions abundant in its subject-matter, culture (cf. Bauman 1999: xiii). While the approximation of the meta-language to its subject could be considered a highly unorthodox methodological move, it may yield knowledge inaccessible by more conventional means (cf. Feyerabend 1975). In particular, instead of offering a 'solution' to methodological problems associated with the study of culture, this thesis will look at these problems as not accidental

undesired effects of engaging with culture, but rather as aspects instrumental for understanding the ways in which culture is produced and employed by human agents. The situated and recursive character of culture as a research subject is captured in the labelling of the offered approach as 'embedded cultural enquiry.'

Epistemological issues also become relevant in considering how culture 'fits' (or otherwise) within the dominant modes of addressing the problems of conflict and peace, especially on the background of the distinction between 'policy' and 'politics' made by some post-structuralist scholars (e.g. Edkins 1999). While 'politics' is portrayed as the realm of exploring human possibilities, many issues we think of as political are presently dealt with by means of administration (i.e. 'policy') rather than politics (ibid.: 1-2; cf. McCormick 1997: 6). This tendency has not spared the fields of development and peacebuilding, where all the principled dilemmas have presumably been resolved *before* embarking on interventions (and *for* the subject populations) (Duffield 2001: 50), with problems which do arise in their course presented as requiring merely technical solutions. This suggests that the a-cultural stance of the liberal peace is not accidental, but tied in with the broader patterns of knowledge and action in which it originates. The possibility of critical reflection on the realities created through the application of liberal peacebuilding is all but removed, with the debates confined to issues of efficiency, which reinforces the 'technological' treatment of peace (cf. Levidow 1998). The narrow parameters of knowledge enabled by the 'policy' mode of engagement with conflict seem drastically inadequate even for discussing the genuinely 'political' questions about interventions (e.g. 'what kind of peace is being built?' (see e.g. Richmond 2005; Baker 2006)), let alone for determining a place for culture in approaches to peacebuilding. Yet it is through such a restrictive frame that the issues of conflict and peace are often considered not only in policy circles, but also in orthodox IR theory (Dillon 1996: 4). Questioning the practice of addressing conflict becomes inseparable from interrogating the habitual theoretical approaches to (international) politics, and the awareness of the role of culture in cementing certain patterns of thought and action offers a favourable perspective from which to attempt this.

Theoretical leanings and methodological choices

The offered methodological and epistemological considerations largely predetermine the theoretical orientation of this thesis towards the approaches capable of keeping in sight the broader social grounding of the phenomena investigated in connection with conflict and peace. For IR, this limits the usable approaches to critical theory, constructivism and post-structuralism, broadly defined – although, as will be shown in the next chapter, none of these can offer a readily available analytical toolkit, despite significant inroads made into considering the problematic of culture since early 1990s (e.g. Lapid and Kratochwil 1996; Hudson 1997a; Jacquin-Berdal et al. 1998). In conflict studies, approached subsumed under the 'fourth generation,' or 'transformative peacebuilding' (Richmond 2005; Fetherston 2002b), as well as anthropologies of conflict and war (see e.g. Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Schmidt and Schröder 2001; Richards 2005b) and studies of culturally-specific conflict resolution mechanisms (e.g. Avruch et al. 1991; Brigg and Bleiker, forthcoming), offer important insights into the cultural dynamics of violence and peace-making, although not quite amount to establishing the parameters for a broader discussion of

culture in the context of conflict and peace. This points the direction of research towards cultural anthropology, which has been very receptive to the paradoxes and controversies associated with the study of culture (e.g. Clifford and Marcus 1986) and which has provided, over the years, a constant source of 'contraband' of culture-related insights for IR and conflict studies (Greenhouse 1987; Avruch 1998). Upon a closer look, however, the origin of the most analytically 'fertile' ideas about culture has to be sought elsewhere, since anthropologists, in turn, borrowed heavily from semiotics (as illustrated by Clifford Geertz's focus on culture as structures of meaning (1973; Chabal and Daloz 2006)). Semiotic enquiries into the organisation and generation of meaning also underlie many a post-structuralist take on culture, whether based on the linguistic or social functioning of meanings (e.g. Kristeva 1977, 1986; Barthes 1982; Laclau 2000; cf. Bauman 1999).

It is through linking the insights of cultural semiotics regarding the production and contestation of meaning (Lotman 1990; Bauman 1999) to critical theorists' and post-structuralists' concerns with the power dimension of social and cultural realities that I approach the task of analysing the role of culture in conflict and its resolution. The importance of the power dimension of culture is underscored by those advocating greater attention to culture as a way of countering the power imbalances between, and among, the interveners and local populations in conflict zones (e.g. Duffey 2001), as well as those warning against the power effects of the discourse on culture itself (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1991). A semiotic view of culture as grounded in meaning-generation seems ultimately compatible with both Foucauldian explorations of the links between knowledge and power (e.g. Foucault 1965, 1977) and the critical theorists' uncovering of alternative realities and conceptualisations eclipsed by the hegemony of dominant discourses (e.g. Cox 1981). Furthermore, exploring the cultural production and functioning of meaning allows for re-negotiating many of the practical dilemmas of studying the social dynamics of power at a more general level. For instance, if culture (and not language) is seen as the principal medium of communication and ordering of social reality (Bauman 1999), the need to choose between discourses vs. practices as the main motors of (re-)production of social reality can be superseded by viewing both as particular avenues of cultural production of meaning (e.g. Neumann 2002).

This latter point is particularly important, given that the virtual absence of identifiable 'discourse on culture' in liberal peacebuilding significantly cripples the analytical value of discourse analysis for the purposes of this study. Although culture is now likelier to get mentioned in guideline policy documents of peacebuilding agents than in the 1990s (e.g. USAID 2005; UNDP 2003, 2004a; CPR 2005; EC 2007), its inclusion is often nominal, and connections between culture and conflict are not explored in any depth. Even such a focal point of 'cultural awareness' of liberal peacebuilding as gender (cf. *Large 2007*) is more frequently discussed in connection with other matters – for example, economics (*WB 2007a*), or the desire to uphold human rights through supporting upward social mobility of women (USAID 2007a). Of course, discursive 'silences' also present valuable material for discourse analysis (e.g. Hansen 2006), but it is difficult to construct meaningful interpretations almost exclusively on their basis. Similar limitations apply to the analysis of practices of engagement with the issue of culture, since

peacebuilding activities are seldom conceptualised as pertaining to culture at all (EU 2007b). Although other peacebuilding actors seem to recognise the public nature of culture in references to, for instance, the 'culture of corruption' or 'violence,' reflection on what accounts for the perpetuation of such practices (or, indeed, on the role that interventions themselves may play in it (cf. Fetherston and Nordstrom 1995)) remain extremely scarce (e.g. UNDP 2003, 2004a). Therefore, uncovering what, on the basis of preliminary explorations, is likely to be a drastically inadequate treatment of culture by peacebuilding agents, cannot form the centrepiece of this study.

Approach, aims and ambitions of this research

In view of the above, the main purpose of this thesis consists in sketching alternatives to the dominant mode of engagement with culture – primarily in theoretical terms, but also with respect to the parameters of political action. Its prime objective is to de-automatise the terms of debate about culture and point out pathways for alternative conceptualisations of cultural realities of conflict and peace. This would necessitate adopting an inductive approach to identifying cultural 'material' in the context of conflicts and interventions, given that the conceptual breadth of 'culture' is coupled with widely varying 'local' realisations of generic cultural functions (cf. Bauman 1999; Chabal and Daloz 2006). An inductive approach would also allow for re-contextualising as cultural that material which on the surface of it appears to speak to other domains of human activity, such as economics or politics. This is important, given that the exclusion of culture from the discourse of liberal peace can be attributed to 'disciplinary monopolies' which frame the engagement of peacebuilding agents with the issues of conflict and peace (Rao and Woolcock 2007), leading to situations where even the studies corroborating the need to correlate the development priorities with local 'value systems' (IMF 2005b) are not utilised in policy as 'cultural' knowledge (*WB 2007a*).

Analysis of the 'non-discourse' on culture in liberal peacebuilding is thus coupled with an investigation of what could be presented as the cultural traits of liberal peacebuilding itself, exemplified by the avoidance of an in-depth engagement with culture and preference for the more easily identifiable and quantifiable parameters of research and action. These traits are more readily subjected to analytical devices of discourse and practice analysis, as applied to policy statements and documents, peace mission objectives and reports, practices of information gathering, funding and subcontracting of local partner organisations, standard operating procedures, reports of actual conduct of interventions, and so on. Textual material of this kind, produced by or relating to a variety of peacebuilding agents – international (principally, the UN and its various bodies), regional (EU, ECOWAS), national (DfID, USAID), non-governmental and private – has served as an important, if largely uninspiring, source of insight into the 'culture of liberal peacebuilding.' Because of its vast volume (and, as a rule, progressively lower returns from studying every subsequent piece of 'evidence'), this material has been complemented with interviews conducted with officials and researchers associated with peacebuilding actors, to elicit the implicit understandings of culture underpinning peacebuilding policies and practices. Secondary literature also constituted a valuable source of information on peace operations and key documents establishing their principles, as

well as on alternatives to the dominant mode of (dis-)engagement with culture in peacebuilding.

Teasing out the possibilities for alternative conceptualisations of the role of culture in violent conflict and peace also forms the main rationale for the case study, since it is only through demonstrating the wealth of cultural data that conflict analysis can yield that the consequences of poor receptivity of liberal peacebuilding towards culture can be brought into focus. Sierra Leone has been chosen as the case study because of the notoriety of the violence perpetrated by different parties during the 12-year civil war – violence which was often presented as culturally unintelligible and shocking for its victims and witnesses alike (e.g. Richards 1996; HRW 2003). It is also a conflict which in many respects goes against expectations formed by post-Cold War trends, given that mobilisation of ethnic or religious identity was virtually absent – despite, seemingly, every precondition for this in a country with about sixteen identifiable ethnic groups and three main religions (e.g. HRW 2003: 9). This means that investigation of cultural dynamics underlying the articulation of identity in the Sierra Leone conflict can proceed with fewer constraints imposed by fixed terms of interpretation – which may also be useful for analysing those conflicts where the prominence of ethnic or religious dimension is in danger of obscuring other cultural issues. In terms of peacebuilding, Sierra Leone is a 'typical' case in that the success of external actors in peace-making has been intermittent, and the attempted transformation of the country's governance and economy in the traditional liberal mould has reportedly left in place many of the factors cited to be responsible for the conflict (e.g. ICG 2004). While cultural dynamics of the Sierra Leone war may be sufficiently unique to preclude generalisation beyond the immediate geographical neighbourhood, the dynamics of interaction between peacebuilding actors and the 'local' culture is likely to be illustrative of wider regularities concerning the interveners' reaction to and reception of local culture.

Not intended to provide an exhaustive overview of cultural issues relevant for conflict and peace, the choice of a single case study rather emphasises the need for an in-depth and open-ended engagement with the issue of culture in every particular context, regardless of the 'comparative value' it can yield to illuminate the dynamics of other conflicts. Although the spirit of such an enterprise seems to indicate extensive field research, time and financial constraints reduced the actual time I could spend in the field in Sierra Leone to fourteen days, which does not withstand any usual ethnographic criteria (the oxymoron of 'blitzkrieg ethnography' notwithstanding (e.g. Massey 1998)). On the other hand, having to rely extensively on other available material, such as research reports and academic publications on Sierra Leone's conflict, as well as recent ethnographies of different peoples of Sierra Leone, has approximated my position to that of many external peacebuilding actors who possess limited resources and time to acquaint themselves with the particulars of the conflict in question. (In this respect, the presented case study analysis is not beyond the reach of a conscientious peacebuilding practitioner intent on acquiring a cultural perspective on conflict.) An open approach to what could qualify as 'cultural data' enabled me to take into consideration a wide variety of material, including the implications of the dominant patterns of interpreting the conflict as practiced in the academic studies (e.g. Richards 1996; Abdullah 2004a; Gberie

2005; Keen 2005) on the envisaged policy solutions to the conflict in Sierra Leone. Available ethnographic studies, although not directly engaging with the issue of conflict, offered important insights into the patterns of meaning-generation and dynamics of identification characteristic of Sierra Leone's culture(s).

Thesis structure and research questions

Presented initial considerations offer grounding for the more specific research questions which are explored in this thesis. These questions follow three main avenues of enquiry:

(i) **Culture as a concept in relation to conflict and peacebuilding**. What is it that makes culture an analytically awkward but also immensely 'fertile' and multi-faceted concept? How does the propensity of culture to 'spill over' analytical boundaries (e.g. between culture as an analytical category and as an object of analysis) affect its ability to yield knowledge? What are the cultural dynamics which can illuminate the mechanisms of conflictual or peaceful interaction; how is the problematic of conflict and peace anchored and framed in culture? How could (or should) culture be approached in enquiries into conflict, its causes and dynamics, and to what extent and how should it enter the discussion and practice of peacebuilding? What can be gained and what could be jeopardised by framing an enquiry into conflict and peace in cultural terms?

(ii) **Liberal peacebuilding as a culture**. What characterises liberal peacebuilding as a culture; what cultural traits transcend the 'atomism' of particular peacebuilding agents and their practices? How do these cultural traits condition liberal peacebuilding's perception of conflict and its own role in addressing it? How does that predispose liberal peacebuilding towards particular treatment of culture in its own activities and discourses; what accounts for the virtual absence of culture from the peacebuilding discourse, and what are the consequences of 'silencing' culture? What preconditions does the 'culture of liberal peacebuilding' create for its interaction with other cultures? And finally, whether and how culture and attention to local 'sensitivities' can be meaningfully included in the policies and practices of liberal peacebuilding?

(iii) **(Liberal) peacebuilding and 'local culture.'** How have these preconditions translated into the actual interaction of liberal peacebuilding and local culture in the case of Sierra Leone? Was the role of culture in Sierra Leone's conflict discussed, conceptualised, and how? What impact do these conceptualisations have on the prospects for peace, reconciliation and recovery? What could be achieved by more in-depth conceptualisations of the cultural dimension of Sierra Leone's armed conflict, its dynamics and resolution? Which alternative pathways for peace (as well as understandings of the underlying conflictive issues and their framing) could be gleaned from such an analysis? Does culture enter local considerations of conflict and visions of peace, and if so, is the a-cultural stance of the liberal peace perceived as problematic? What are the implications of this for the 'default' approach of liberal peacebuilding?

These questions inform the core issues addressed, respectively, in chapters 3 (Theoretical Framework: Embedded cultural enquiry), 4 (The Culture of Liberal Peacebuilding) and 5 (Peacebuilding and 'Local Culture:' Cultural dynamics of war and peace in Sierra Leone). In addition, to situate the present enquiry, Chapter 2 (Culture in Conflict and Peacebuilding: Spaces of theoretical investigation) will look at the existing terms of debate on culture in conflict and peace literatures, acknowledging debts and outlining divergences and disagreements on the way to developing my own approach to culture. Chapter 6 (Conclusion) will draw up the key issues that arose from the conducted research, discussing, among other things, pathways of transformation of the existing peacebuilding frameworks and practices in the light of knowledge gained through an 'embedded cultural enquiry' of peacebuilding in Sierra Leone.

2. Culture in Conflict and Peacebuilding: Spaces of theoretical investigation

> '… The experts don't know everything. Still, where would the world be if we were all the same?'
>
> – Terry Pratchett, *Small Gods*

As Kevin Avruch (1998) has remarked, whether or not culture is viewed as part of conflict resolution very much depends on how conflict itself is conceptualised. This also applies to (international) political theory and practice at large, where the space allocated to culture has shifted together with the changing understandings of the political and international. In this limited overview of existing treatments of culture in the academic study of (international) politics, my objective is to investigate possible departure points for thinking about culture in the context of conflict and peace, and to identify lacunae which my own treatment of culture will need to address. In this chapter I also hope to acknowledge the influences which guided my enquiries and to outline crucial disagreements with the existing accounts of culture within IR and around. Admittedly, the scope of such an overview could be almost unlimited according to the breadth of the notion of culture one is willing to entertain: As this study leans towards a broad and inclusive treatment of culture, even those literatures which employ culture implicitly, or in an auxiliary role, could not be excluded on that basis. However, to keep the overview manageable, I restrict it to works in the fields of International Relations and conflict studies, also outlining their interdisciplinary connections and important contributions of other literatures, especially where these link to my own treatment of culture. This chapter is subdivided into two parts, the first addressing the overall possibilities of approaching culture as abstracted from trends in literature, and the second discussing cultural issues that have been raised in relation to conflict and violence.

I. Possible approaches to culture

Culture overshadowed

Despite the general recognition that humans are, to paraphrase a well-known expression, cultural animals, there are plenty of approaches across the social sciences horizon which do not engage with culture. Although few exclude culture on principle, they either turn it epiphenomenal or restrict the analytical usefulness of the concept to the point where engaging with it becomes unnecessary. Yet, the banishment of culture from the centre-stage of political analysis is never entirely successful, as it opens endless opportunities for cultural critique to which these approaches (owing to the lack of corresponding vocabulary) cannot adequately respond. For instance, the issues of concern in realist-liberal mainstream IR are construed either as cultural universals or as problems of existential importance, whose urgency effectively overshadows the possible interference of cultural

variables – such as security, power, or sovereignty (Black and Avruch 1998; Avruch 1998: 27-31). Realism, arguably, 'offers little appreciation of the role of cultural forces in international politics' (Ross 1998: 164, referring to Donnelly 1995) for a variety of reasons:

> First, the assumption of undifferentiated states suppresses any possible differences among them, or at least renders differences among states essentially mono-dimensional: states only need be distinguished from one another by their relative (i.e. susceptible to an ordinal ranking) possession of power. Second, the assumption of rationality in the behaviour of states suppresses any considerations of other modes of reasoning and/or decision-making imperatives. Third, the assumption (linked inextricably to rationality) of utilities-maximizing (e.g. 'security') imposes, a priori, a single, universalizing metric. (Black and Avruch 1998: 36)

Realism's inattention to culture, and the ideational realm generally, can be traced to its reliance on 'materialist ontology and empiricist epistemology' which drives realism to objectify the social world, obscuring its human-made dimensions (Williams 1998: 208; cf. George 1994). Although liberalism, by stressing the role of 'beliefs, values, ideologies and ideas as motors of international affairs,' potentially opens more space for 'subjectivist' concerns, it also betrays the promise of greater attention to culture by focusing on universalised 'presumptions about natural law and human nature' (Black and Avruch 1998: 36). It is unsurprising, therefore, that approaches to conflict informed by such 'uniformitarian' theoretical thinking display very limited sensitivity towards the issue of culture. Even treatments engaging with identity expression – an issue which elsewhere is viewed as a cultural phenomenon – evade culture by elevating identity into a biologically-derived universal 'human need' (e.g. Burton 1984, 1987; Azar 1986; Väyrynen 2001; Avruch 1998: 89-90).

It could, however, be argued that culture was sidelined not out of neglect but because of an understanding of the links between culture and conflict that formed at a crucial junction in European history. The exclusion of culture from the realm of politics, alongside everything to do with subjective opinion – from theological belief to 'innatist justifications of social identity' (Williams 1998: 213) – can be considered a deliberate move, which, coupled with the adoption of atomistic and egalitarian empiricist epistemology, formed a conflict-avoidance strategy spurred by the devastating experience of religious wars in the early 16th-century (Toulmin 1992). However, whether the pacifying promise of 'transforming social and political and ethical practices' through establishing more 'objective' foundations for knowledge (Williams 1998: 213) still holds is debatable, given the changes and challenges faced by both sides of this equation. At one side, the liberal ideas about acceptable and desirable political practice have undergone a considerable transformation since the World War I – away from the atomistic 'liberal sensibility' and individual freedom and towards prescriptive visions of global collective harmony and corresponding interventionist practices. At the other, the very positivist foundations for knowledge, entitled to banish unchecked subjectivity from the realm of politics so as to turn it into a deliberately limited field of probable knowledge (see Williams 1998: 210-212), have been shown, instead, to dispense with the awareness of their own limits and to inflate their inherently partial claims to the status of universal and timeless truths (Toulmin 1992; cf. Cox 1981; George 1994; Smith 1997). Despite its core ambition, the realist-positivist endeavour also, as illustrated

by the Cold War ideological contest, failed to dissociate political practice from the issue of identity (e.g. Brown 2005: 50; Williams 1998) – a link emphasised, for example, by the now discredited post-WWII studies of 'national character' (see Avruch, 1998: 12-16). Moreover, the reluctance to engage responsibly with the issue of culture may have contributed to the proliferation of essentialist interpretations of identity blamed for aggravating many contemporary conflicts (such as Bosnia) (Kaldor 1999; see below). Conscious exclusion of culture from 'rational' political practice does not, it seems, guarantee a liberation from the quagmire of subjectivity and related potential for conflict.

A further reason cited for excluding culture from the study of (international) politics is that it unfolds within the bounds of a shared culture – of diplomacy, international negotiations and so on (cf. Zartmann 1993: 17; Avruch 1998: 42). Whatever cultural differences may exist between participants, the international engenders its own culture, as captured in the English School's concept of international society and the practices, norms, and expectations of behaviour it embodies (see e.g. Linklater and Suganami 2006). However, to claim that culture is not a relevant variable because it influences participants equally is tantamount to neglecting the very foundations of the dominant political practice, as well as any instances of dissidence or change. As William Connolly convincingly argued, studying the language of politics is not a preliminary stage of political analysis, but its very essence (1983). Similarly, the study of the 'common' culture of norm-formation and dissemination, of the ideas of anarchy, or the principal distinctions governing the separation of the realms of domestic and international political practice (e.g. Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Schmidt 1998; Walker 1993) has a role both in extending our understanding of the political and in influencing the very conduct of (international) politics. In addition, concerns with culture and cultural difference acquired greater relevance as the expansion in the substance of 'the international' in the wake of pluralist and the so-called 'reflectivist' IR (Keohane and Nye 1971, 1977; Keohane 1989) brought the types of relationships previously not thought of as 'international' into the orbit of the discipline (cf. Steans and Pettiford 2005: 8).

Another relevant issue which emerges from engaging with the terms of supposedly universal (international) political practice concerns its particular cultural origins, grounded largely in Western European (and, more recently, Euro-Atlantic) political history. The understandings of 'politics' and 'the international,' defining this practice, continue to mould global politics, naturalising world-wide these essentially partial and historically-specific experiences (cf. Morgenthau 1946). That such fundamentals of the Westphalian international system as territorial compartmentalisation and exclusive sovereignty are treated by many as unquestioned givens is a testimony to the power invested in this process of cultural 'reproduction' (of the outwardly a-cultural terms of international political practice). As noted by its critics, international theory which upholds the worldview informing such practice also becomes part and parcel of this regime of cultural hegemony (e.g. Smith 1997). Unsurprisingly, the return of the cultural problematic *per se* often appears at odds with the accepted terms of (international) political practice, whether in the form of ideas of religious unity defying the principles of secular statecraft, or the rise of ethnicity and nationalism in counterweight to 'globalisation' of the

relations 'of production and consumption' (Blaney and Inayatullah 1998: 62; cf. Bull and Watson 1984; Smith 1995). The violent potential of 'new' or ' malignant' nationalisms (Kaldor 2004; Luoma-Aho 2002), grounded in the resurgence of 'politics of identity' (Kaldor 1999), has been cited as an impetus for the chaos which, in the form of unintelligible violence of the 'new wars' (ibid.), is threatening to engulf the realm of habitual international politics (Kaplan 2000). Culture is thus re-entering the scene of political analysis, whether in the form of critique of the hegemony of the liberal international order, or as its radical 'other.'

Implications for a cultural enquiry into liberal peacebuilding

Despite the encroachment of culture onto the agendas of international politics, the liberal take on the problematic of identity in conflict remains distinctly a-cultural, since offered solutions revolve around *political* accommodation − without deeper reflection on the nature of the 'political,' or (cultural) conventions which bind it together. Yet, in many recent conflicts, it is precisely the dissolution of the 'political' as a system of conventions which necessitates the recourse to culture as a source of both new forms of conventionality and as a repository of power (cf. Crawford and Lipschutz 1997; Nordstrom 1994; Viktorova 2005a). As such, culture itself − in the form of widely held conventions, ideas of the permissible and appropriate, etc. − often becomes a target of violence in contemporary conflicts (ibid.). This phenomenon is largely disregarded in liberal recipes for peace, which focus on the establishment of political institutions capable of absorbing the conflictive dynamics and directing them along the avenues of democratic expression of disagreement (Rummel 1996: 21; Miall et al. 1999: 22). Curiously, 'democracy' also emerges as a universal solution to the problem of human aggression, whether one sees it in cultural terms or as something which supersedes culture. While for evolutionists, who adopt the latter view, democracy offers a solution owing to the constraints it places on the profitability of violence, those who see aggression and violence as a culturally-constructed 'invention' emphasise the usefulness of democracy for 'manipulating structural and psychological aspects of culture in order to produce non-violent societies' (Ramsbotham et al. 2005: 303-307; see also Pinker 2002; Ross 1993; Fry and Bjorkqvist 1997). Although this seems to corroborate the rationale of the liberal peace, the reasons for limited success of substituting the existing patterns of social commonality with the introduced structures of liberal democratic governance (cf. Duffield 2001) are not often investigated (although see Paris 2004); nor are the consequences of liberalism's lack of receptiveness towards the 'illiberal' avenues of expression of identity (Duffield 2001), which leaves the new democratic governance structures vulnerable in their face (cf. McCormick 1997: 126-7).

The issue of culture thus offers a vantage point from which to interrogate both the dominant political practice and the intellectual traditions which inform it: the banishment of culture from their agendas does not make them impervious to being analysed in cultural terms, and itself offers an insight into the kind of culture they represent and perpetuate. For instance, the blindness of both political and academic paradigms borne of 'liberal sensibility' (Williams 1998) towards the problematic of collective identity can be traced to 'methodological individualism,' widely adopted across the rational choice mainstream IR, which renders any determinants beyond

the individual level largely epiphenomenal. The endorsement of individualism as a methodological position appears to be more than a transient phase in the cumulative quest for rational knowledge, having become 'a moral principle underpinning a liberal profession' (Douglas 2004: 87). This effectively obscures other forms of knowledge and sociality which do not fit in the prescribed limits of this dominant paradigm, so that instead of engaging with empirical manifestations of different forms and grounds of commonality, the implications relevant for the study of, for example, the international system are theorised on the basis of abstractions such as 'the state of nature' (see Jahn 2003; see also Chapter 3). The tendency of deriving solutions to the plight of underdevelopment and conflict from the latest vogues of (abstract) thinking among academics and practitioners, rather than empirically determined local needs, follows the same pattern (Duffield 2001; cf. Helander 2005; Kapoor 2008: 23-4). Even the practices of 'local needs assessment,' when the latest vogue happens to emphasise their importance, are derived from universalised criteria of 'needs' and follow predetermined formulae of 'local' information-gathering (see Kent 2005; Richards et al. 2004; see also Chapter 5).

This theme of critique of the types and standards of knowledge prioritised by the dominant theoretical approaches and the underlying methodologies, epistemologies (and, ultimately, ontologies) will form something of a leitmotif throughout this work, since, as argued in the Introduction (and as will be further discussed in the Theoretical Framework), engagement with the issue of culture is inseparable from explicating the process and consequences of production of knowledge. At this point, it seems necessary to emphasise that the tendencies outlined above – of excluding culture (among other issues) as a relevant concern for the mainstream IR, coupled with insufficient attention to its own cultural biases – have not passed unnoticed by its critics. In this sense, 'reflectivist' IR, inasmuch as it invites critical reflection on the limitations and implications of 'totalist theorising' (Väyrynen 2001) exemplified by the mainstream, accords more space to culture. The same is true of approaches to conflict inspired by the critical and post-structuralist paradigms (e.g. Richmond 2002).

Culture in an auxiliary role: Openings for the reflection on culture

Although rarely explicitly concerned with the issue of culture, the 'reflective' IR (Keohane 1989) of various strands (constructivist, critical, post-structuralist) has helped to problematise the received understanding of culture in various ways. An important impetus for this was provided by the questioning of positivist methodologies and standards of knowledge, which led to a greater attention to the subjective, ideational, and axiological aspects of International Relations. Constructivist concerns with identity and norms; the strong institutionalists' insights regarding the constructed, rather than given, nature of interests; critical theorists' efforts to unmask the pretence of 'neutrality' of the dominant political order – to name just a few examples – all variously acknowledge the role of culture in shaping the political and international.

Awareness of human-made nature of social and political reality (cf. Searle 1995) that characterises the 'reflective' approaches alerts theorists to culturally specific, 'situated' character of theories and their own theorising (with a further possibility of

imagining alternative points of departure, depending on the theorist's emancipatory ambitions) (e.g. Cox 1981: 128; Wendt 1995; Dillon 1996: 2-3; Avruch 1998: 27-39; Bleiker 1998: 89, 95). More crucially still, the observation that 'violence' committed by uncritical IR theorising is reflected in the increased levels of actual violence (e.g. Smith 1997) opens a way for contemplating the cultural mechanisms of transposition between the realms of theory and practice. In this sense, critical reflection has been instrumental in picturing various strands of IR theory as particular cultures – with their own patterns of representation, abstraction, meaning-making, and corresponding types of political practice (Debrix 1999; Sylvester 2001). Unsurprisingly, therefore, most contributions that heralded the 'return of culture' to the agendas of security studies (e.g. Wæver et al. 1993), foreign policy analysis (Hudson 1997a), conflict studies (Avruch et al. 1991; Avruch 1998; Black and Avruch 1998; Cohen 1998; Rubinstein 1998), or IR at large (e.g. Lapid and Kratochwil 1996; Jacquin-Berdal et al. 1998) have their origins in 'reflectivist' theorising. Not all of these literatures are preoccupied with culture directly; mostly culture is invoked through challenging what Tarja Väyrynen terms 'totalist theorising' (2001: 4) by emphasising the constructed, constituted character of both difference and sameness, and by drawing attention to the processes and mechanisms of their articulation (cf. Jahn 2003: 32-4).

'Reflectivist' approaches also turned the disciplinary boundaries of IR increasingly fuzzy, as both its methods and concerns underlined the connections and overlaps with other branches of social science, which also made borrowing and 'contraband' between them more legitimate (as exemplified by the application of sociological or anthropological insights about culture and identity to IR (see e.g. Jacquin-Berdal et al. 1998)). Another boundary to become blurred was the one between social sciences and the meta-level methodological concerns, which were seen to be linked through certain disciplinary and epistemological biases inherent in, and reproduced through the dominant academic practice (e.g. Appadurai 2001: 9-12). Feminist scholars became particularly vocal in exposing the non-neutrality and particularity of IR theorising as grounded in specific historical, cultural, and gendered experiences and interests (e.g. Tickner 2005). A sustained effort to re-contextualise 'modern sciences' as 'just one collection of local knowledge systems among many others' (Harding 1998: 89, quoted in Sylvester 2001: 541) has attracted attention to other 'voices in the conversation of mankind' (Oakeshott 1962b) – such as art, poetry, and aesthetics generally – drawing them into the ambit of IR as not only subjects but also avenues of knowledge (Bleiker 2001). The recognition of futility of trying to overcome the trappings of individual experiences that shape one's approach to academic investigation (cf. Toulmin 1992), and of removing the 'personal' from the 'scientific,' has led to calls to explicate personal motivation and biases and to adopt a writing style attuned to the particular subjects of research rather than the traditions of impersonal academic discourse (Tickner 2005; Sylvester 2001: 541; Denzin and Lincoln 1998; cf. Lyotard 1984). The view of IR as just another avenue of re-mediation (rather than 'objective' representation – see Debrix and Weber (2003)) was also reflected in a humbler stand of reflective IR on 'resolving' the political issues of the day (as exemplified by Cox's very distinction between 'problem-solving' and 'critical' theory (1981)).

Reflection on culture in conflict theory

The 'reflectivist' intellectual posture created fruitful preconditions for re-examining the links between culture and conflict, starting with the rethinking of the social role and functions of conflict itself. Rather than viewing it as an inevitable effect of power rivalries (as in IR realism) or a deviation from the enlightened norm of social harmony (as in liberalism), conflict became reconsidered as an avenue of social development, occurring through the clash and competition between different visions (and agents) of social and political advancement (e.g. Fetherston and Nordstrom 1995; Miall et al. 1999). Although this view of conflict challenges some key premises of liberalism regarding undesirability of conflict (see e.g. Brown 2005: 21-2), it is consistent with the competitive nature of both democratic electoral politics and liberal economics (Paris 2004). True, most understandings of conflict as a means of social betterment focus on its non-violent forms (Fetherston and Nordstrom 1995), although some Marxist and structuralist visions of change also foresee a role for violent conflict in altering the distribution of power towards more equitable relationships (e.g. Galtung 1971; Frank 1969: 402). The very de-legitimation of violence in the international political practice can be construed as evidence of a normative hegemony of a Western value system with its aspiration for peace – in contrast to the centrality of other values, such as justice, in competing perspectives (Martín 2005; Salem 1993, 1997; cf. Bull 1977).

The ease of transition between non-violent and violent forms of conflict in Galtung's structuralist paradigm is grounded in the recognition of 'indirect' forms of violence, such as structural, symbolic, or cultural violence, which significantly affect the life chances of large proportions of the world's population and are comparable in their effects with direct physical violence (Galtung 1964, 1990; cf. Duffield 2007). Although many have criticised the concept of 'structural violence' for obscuring the distinction between violence and non-violence, which makes the former almost indefinable (e.g. Riches 1986a), it is consistent with the critical and Foucauldian understandings of 'naturalised' power asymmetries as capturing the patterns of institutionalised violence, thereby removing the need for its actual exercise (Foucault 1994; Viktorova 2005a). 'Cultural violence' is manifested in the widespread acceptance of these real-life patterns of inequality as a matter of 'common sense' (Galtung 1990; Geertz 1983: 73-93). Galtung's broad view of violence is also reflected in his understanding of peace; indeed, references to 'positive peace,' which removes not only occurrences of direct violence (as does 'negative peace' of realism-inspired settlements) but also addresses the underlying structures of injustice and inequality, have firmly entered the discourse of liberal peace and associated theoretical literature (e.g. UN 2005). (Whether this rhetorical commitment does indeed translate into a removal of all aspects of indirect violence in the polities subjected to liberal peace transitions will be a matter for discussion in subsequent chapters).

The mechanisms of the reverse transition – from violent to non-violent means of expression of conflict – form the core concern of the so-called 'conflict transformation' paradigm, which developed as a response to the flawed premises of 'conflict resolution,' shown, on many occasions, simply to recreate the impetus and preconditions for conflict, by failing to address local hegemonic discourses and

power asymmetries (Fetherston 2000a, b). Conflict 'transformation' seeks both to direct the conflict towards non-violent means of expression and to pursue an emancipatory agenda in harnessing the transformative potential of conflict in the service of positive social change (ibid.; Lederach 1997). The space for consideration of culture in 'transformative peacebuilding' is created by the recognition of the necessarily small-scale, 'local' grounding of the visions of transformation, even if their scope extends nation-wide (Lederach 1997). This sets transformative peacebuilding apart from the liberal peace version of channelling the conflict into more 'manageable' avenues, which relies on national-level democratic state and civil society institutions attuned to, and orchestrated in the image of, the international liberal order (cf. Richmond 2009a: 559-60). Although not always viewed as part of 'culture,' the ways in which people organise their societies, economies or polities not only bear distinct cultural imprints, but also actively participate in the reproduction of culture to the extent that people's 'social environment' imparts to them 'powerful ideas of how to classify and understand their world' (Hohe 2002a). Understanding this recasts culture as an intrinsic part of any peacebuilding intervention.

The 'conflict transformation' paradigm represents one of the strands of thinking subsumed under the tentative heading of 'fourth-generation' of approaches to conflict, which variously interrogate many of the axiomatic premises of the liberal peace (which has come to epitomise the 'third generation' approaches) (Richmond 2002). Among such assumptions is the representation of the liberal peace as an a-cultural 'technology' for the achievement of peace and development. Some of the themes explored by the fourth-generation critique have featured above – for example, exposure of the cultural 'bias' contained in attempts to emulate, in post-conflict environments, the Western models of development and governance ('market democracy,' in Paris' terms (2004)). A related point of critique concerns the ontologically uneasy coupling within the liberal peace of the realism-inspired and force-orientated 'conflict management' and the track-two-centred 'conflict resolution' (e.g. Burton 1990) approaches to conflict (Richmond 2002; see also Ramsbotham et al. 2005). This unease is also replicated in combining the methods and objectives of these two generations of approaches – the 'negative' (to use Galtung's terminology (1990)) pacification through a return to *status quo ante* vs. 'positive,' but potentially destabilising, effects of the reformist human security and group identity agendas (Burton 1990; Miall et al. 1999: 194; cf. Mansfield and Snyder 1995). Far more than cumulatively combining 'the best of both worlds,' the marrying of the hard aspect of peace (or 'victor's peace,' in Richmond's framework (2005)) to the 'soft' facets of institutional, constitutional and civil peace, which appear to legitimise its unwavering application (ibid.; Richmond 2009a), the liberal peace has succeeded in eliminating the spaces for doubt or dissent. Indeed, to question some of its principles, such as the universal validity of human rights, may invite accusations of complicity with the immoral practices of illiberal regimes blamed for conflict (cf. Duffield 2001). The ease with which the instances of questioning the dominant paradigm of addressing conflict acquire negative connotations accentuates the hegemonic status of liberal peace, raising concerns with the violence of cultural 'common sense.'

Limitations and closures in the reflection on culture

Still – as is perhaps consistent with the 'anti-totalist' stance of most reflective IR – the resurgence of the interest towards culture has not produced any concerted effort to unpack the concept or systematically employ it in IR or conflict analysis; or, in most cases, even to relate the more specific and 'tangible' concepts on which the reflectivist debates tend to centre (such as identity, discourse, or norms) to the underlying totality of 'culture.' Frequently, the issue of culture is omitted from such debates altogether as these more specific concepts (e.g. language) are taken to provide sufficient insight into the 'ideational' realm, rendering references to culture superfluous; and where culture does feature, its relationship with language or discourse appears to be taken as self-evident and not meriting explanation (see Väyrynen 2001: 5). Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999) perhaps comes closest to elaborating an understanding of culture among the constructivist works in IR, but in doing so also demonstrates why culture is not a central concern for a constructivist enquiry. Wendt places his interest in culture into the context of a quest for 'social structures that are systemic but cultural rather than materialist,' linking the micro and macro-level 'through both constitutive and causal effects' observable 'in actual interactions' (which, in turn, serve to (re-) produce those structures) (Kratochwil 2006: 28). 'Wendt argues that the relationship between the collective structures of meaning and individual beliefs is one of "supervenience and multiple realizability"' (Kratochwil 2006: 29; quoting Wendt 1999: 162), which is to say that

> "culture", as the shorthand for collective representations, cannot exist or have effects apart from the beliefs of individual actors, but is not reducible to them. As in the case of language, it exists only insofar as it is used by individual speakers but cannot be conceptualised as the "private" possession of each speaker. (Kratochwil 2006: 29)

Although it is difficult to dispute Wendt's reasoning, his 'capturing' of the place of culture within the social world serves merely as a stepping stone for determining the functions and characteristics of 'collective representations,' which form his core concern. But while it is possible to approach the issue of genesis and maintenance of culture through 'collective representations,' such an approach raises – and largely leaves unanswered – the question of who makes up the 'collectives' that share the representations, or what degree of commonality is required for them to be genuinely 'shared.' (This is also true of any approach to culture that defines it through 'shared meanings,' as will be discussed in Chapter 3.) So, *pace* Wendt, there is a need for a consideration of culture which allows for capturing not merely the 'collective representations,' but also the mechanisms of their constitution, and of their 'boundedness' in particular collectives, which invites greater attention to identity-formation and boundary-drawing as *cultural* phenomena – a focus which is missing from most enquiries into identity yielded by reflectivist scholars (although see Neumann 1999).

In other instances, such half-hearted engagement with culture is explained by its purportedly subordinate role among other factors ordering the social reality. Thus, some reflective IR indirectly underwrites the realist conviction about the primacy of power over culture by acknowledging that power (or discourse, as its medium and

motor) plays a defining role in the wider social acceptance of one or another understanding of culture. The same can be said about the critical theorists' discussions of the hegemonic status of partial representations of reality as reflecting naturalised power asymmetries (Gramsci 1971; Cox 1982: 38; cf. Foucault 1986, 1994; Smith 1997: 3; cf. Wuthnow et al. 1983: 4). In Neumann's (2002) otherwise insightful study, culture has little independent conceptual existence aside from being conceptualised as a framework for a dynamic interplay between 'governmentality' and 'conceptual power' – two kinds of power realised, respectively, through the avenues of discourses and practices. Although equating culture with power, as practiced 'by a range of contemporary theorists' (Swidler 1995), helps to direct attention to the links that may obtain between these two concepts, it also obscures culture by narrowing the terms of debate to the functioning of power.

The primacy of power also defines encounters in the international sphere, where 'the tendency is for the more powerful group simply to impose its norms and procedures on the weaker' (Cohen 1998: 118), establishing 'the dominance relations of some cultures or subcultures over others' (Nader and Todd 1978: 11, 20-1, 37, quoted in Cohen 1998: 118). In situations where culture becomes accentuated, it is easily politicised and manipulated, so that the outside interveners become caught up in an eternal dilemma as to whose vision and interpretation of a particular culture to accept (Sriram 2004; cf. Bauman 1999: xiv), especially in the light of the widespread practice of different agents to co-opt 'symbols and myths for their own purposes' (Katzenstein 1997: 50). From this perspective, if culture is to be an object of study, the appropriate focus should be on its discursive uses as an instrument of 'othering' and colonial domination (see Abu-Lughod 1991; Scott 1992, 2003; Brigg 2005), so that optimism regarding the benign effects of greater cultural sensitivity on the part of peacebuilding practitioners appears misplaced.

Moreover, problematic power effects accompany the very framing of issues in a 'cultural' vocabulary. References to culture may lead to unfounded valorisation of certain practices and understandings owing simply to their labelling as 'cultural,' which readily invokes the connotations of their superior authenticity and organic affinity with the communities in question (cf. MacGinty 2008). In contrast, other practices, not thought of as 'cultural,' as well as the instances of social and political change may become perceived as artificial, irrelevant, or as a threat to that 'culture,' so that both communities and their culture(s) easily become essentialised. This effect has been observed with respect to other related concepts, such as 'traditional' or 'indigenous' (ibid.: 150), and the binary dynamics it unleashes is manifest in the propensity of the internationals to overcompensate for the alleged disregard of local cultures by 'romanticising' the local in those instances where local practices of peace-making are taken into account (Richmond 2007a, 2009b). The power dimension of 'cultural' vocabularies is also evident in cases where the postulation of an 'organic' association of practices with a community has adverse effect on its fortunes, as demonstrated in Arendt's writings on the Holocaust (1967). The continued relevance of this problem is illustrated by the debate surrounding the interpretations of the Indonesian conflict, where, for example, the invoking of the 'local traditions involving "men of violence"' to explain the 'repeated materialization of paramilitary militias during moments of extreme political stress'

may be seen as 'playing into the hands of those elites who, in fact, sponsor and benefit from' the supposed Indonesian 'culture of violence' (Zinoman and Peluso 2002: 547; see also Cribb 2002; Collins 2002).

The hijacking of 'cultural' explanations to forego the responsibility for political choices is a very troubling consequence of essentialising culture. Equally damaging conceptual violence is committed through the excessive homogenisation of cultural entities, or their discrete categorisation, especially where separation between one culture and another is axiologically charged (cf. MacGinty 2008: 157). Yet, in some perspectives, such violence accompanies any instance of purposive engagement with the other, which draws that other into the orbit of the 'self's' cultural domination, 'digesting' its alterity (cf. Critchley 1992: 6) while purporting to emancipate (e.g. Spivak 1988, 2004: 567-8). MacGinty's examples of the use of indigenous and traditional peace-making as part of liberal peace interventions portray exactly this type of relationship (2008). Yet, two observations allow for countering the pessimism with regard to cultural analysis of conflict and peace. Firstly, given its ubiquity and persistence, the human propensity to generalise and homogenise as well as to think in terms of discrete categories should be made into a subject of cultural analysis (cf. Viktorova 2003), for without understanding its mechanisms, the 'abuse' of culture would be difficult to counter. Secondly, it could be argued that the relations of domination are never strictly one-sided (cf. Bhabha 1994; Kapoor 2008: 7-9); indeed, instances of subversion of the hegemony of liberal peace by local actors have been widespread, if insufficient to overthrow its dictate (see Chapter 5). Cultural contexts of interactions between local and international actors are usually too varied and complex to translate into clear-cut power hierarchies, even when structured by a general power asymmetry.

In view of the noted susceptibility of culture to be utilised or participate in power dynamics, it seems that the relationship between culture and power merits a more informed enquiry before culture is sidelined as a subordinate concept. A focus on culture can, in fact, reverse the culture-power 'hierarchy' through recasting power as not a universal (as in realist conceptions) but as a contextualised, localised set of relationships and understandings. The symbolism involved in the 'mechanics' of power (Foucault 1994) and even violence (which, as well as signalling a breach of conventions of institutionalised violence, gives rise to a different set of conventions its own (see Viktorova 2005a)) indicates that power is a cultural phenomenon. Therefore, a serious engagement with culture should investigate the relationship between culture and power both ways, since the articulation, possession and exercise of power cannot be considered without taking into account their cultural context, just as the functioning of culture cannot be considered without reference to power, order, or hierarchy.

An explicit focus on culture

Apart from the treatments which invoke culture only to point it to its rightfully 'subordinate' place, there are a number of approaches across the horizon of IR and political science which openly speak of the need to include 'culture' among their analytical toolkit. These approaches can be subdivided into those which seek to narrow the scope of applicability of the concept of culture so as to increase its

explanatory value in particular enquiries, and those which insist on the broad understanding of culture and an open-ended application of the concept across a range of contexts. Hijacking Barry Buzan's designation of similar trends in security studies (e.g. Buzan et al. 1998), I term them 'narrowers' and 'wideners' for convenience.

The narrowers' approach to culture

The 'narrowers,' as the name suggests, attempt to deal with the analytical messiness of culture by narrowing it down to a selection of variables and characteristics, which, arguably, helps to establish a clear and even grounding for the study of culture, particularly in a comparative perspective. The narrowness of the definition of culture is directly correlated with the explanatory power and operational value of culture as a concept: in this view, 'the more inclusive view of culture is the least useful' (Hudson 1997b: 7).

Examples of this approach are abundant, and are perhaps iconic of many people's understandings of what a study of culture in the context of IR and conflict studies should involve (see Ward 1998). One of the most prominent trends – constructing typologies of cultures based on variables which capture their key characteristics – is consistent with the 'scientific' ambition of predicting how members of a particular culture will respond to a range of vital issues (e.g. Douglas and Wildavsky 1982; Wildavsky 1987; Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky 1990). The appeal of such typologies lies in enabling both a 'parsimonious' social science and a range of practical advice which can be given to decision-makers, since classifications yield graspable cultural 'types' reflecting the patterns of behaviour and mentality, and as such can serve as a guide to the inter-cultural interaction and communication. The variables underlying classifications are selected on the basis of 'permitting and constraining effects' they exercise 'upon the individual's choices' (Douglas 1982: 190, quoted in Ward 1998: 212). Douglas and Wildavsky's grid-group theory uses social cohesion (group) and social hierarchy (grid) as variables, yielding four types of cultures: fatalist, hierarchist, egalitarian, and individualist (1982). Although not developed with a view to conflict, this classification of cultures (notably, its 'fatalist' type) was used to explain the dynamics of RUF insurgency in Sierra Leone (Fithen and Richards 2005). Hofstede (1980) offers another classification, based on four dimensions: 'individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance,' whose application demonstrates 'a non-random geographic pattern of cultures with respect to such values' (Hudson, 1997b: 8). Triandis (1994: 156-79) rates cultures according to three dimensions – cultural complexity, cultural 'tightness' and individualism – which in combination form 'unique cultural proclivities' (Hudson 1997b: 8). Hall (1957, 1976) uses a single scale – from low- to high-context cultures – depending on how much of the intended message is spelled out and how much is expected to be understood implicitly (see Avruch 1998: 64). The latter typology has gained some prominence in the analyses of international negotiations (ibid.)

Another example of a narrowers' approach is to construct a hierarchy of variables where culture is the widest and deepest, and becomes invoked when other, more immediate and graspable variables (such as 'rational' foreign policy preferences, or

economic interests) fail to provide a satisfactory explanation of, for instance, differences in Belgian and Dutch patterns of allocation of development aid (Breuning 1997). This approach is particularly symptomatic of what Lucian Pye had referred to as the use of culture as an 'explanation of last resort' (Pye 1991: 504; quoted in Hudson 1997b: 2). Although the possibility of invoking culture without getting bogged down in the considerations of its complexity has a certain appeal, this approach only yields atomistic insights into culture, which offer little help in understanding the wider patterns of cultural influence on politics, and allow neither for elucidating the functioning of culture as such, nor for determining its role in the constitution of the narrower spheres of activity invoked in the more 'immediate' variables. This narrowers' approach succeeds in relegating culture, once again, to the role of an auxiliary concept.

On the face of it, the limited ambition for cultural insight underlying the narrowers' approach stems from the recognition of enormous cultural complexity: one can only hope to approach the field of culture 'piecemeal,' and describe those cultural characteristics which happen to manifest themselves to the observer, and can thereafter be typified and recorded with a view to their use for particular analytical purposes. However, this approach reveals manifold problems. Firstly, the limited character of the ambition in research is replicated in similarly limited possibilities of analysis offered by the resulting 'data,' since limitations that cultural typologies (regardless of their chosen criteria) impose on the possibilities of approaching new cultural material may be greater than advantages. Secondly, in characterising cultures, the narrowers' approach relies on 'etic' rather than 'emic' cultural categories – meaning that the categories used to describe cultures (such as 'individualist' vs. 'collectivist') belong to the researchers', rather than their cultural subjects', conceptual universe (Avruch 1998: 60-1). Situatedness within a particular culture, as opposed to its external perception, may yield a different set of insights to those advanced by, say, the grid-group theory. This renders the narrowers' typologies much less definitive as tools of cultural understanding and even description, since 'emic' categories, borne of cultural self-analysis, would interfere with the neat structure of external classifications. This is not to deny that the production of cultural typologies is founded on serious anthropological research – if anything, Mary Douglas' work clearly reaffirms its importance – but rather to say that its formative input is all but hollowed out in the resulting 'usable' analytic categories.

This argument leads to the third – and perhaps most pernicious – issue with the 'narrowers' approach, namely, that the 'etic' categories developed by the researcher are somehow presumed to be external to culture. This represents a wider tendency to consider academic and scientific discourses as emanating from a 'non-perspective' (Häkli 1996), a 'panopticon' of knowledge unbiased by interests, background, history, and such like (Foucault 1977). The culturally and historically contingent nature of science (cf. Morgenthau 1946; Toulmin 1992, 2001) is concealed behind the assumption of universal applicability of categories and corollaries of analysis, which is in turn founded on the presumption of neutrality and non-involvement of the observer – a position capable of producing unbiased, 'objective' knowledge. Curiously, the argument used to discredit the analytical value of 'emic' knowledge –

the situatedness of the research subjects within their culture – does not usually extend to 'etic' categories of analysis, which are nonetheless indisputably 'emic' to the culture of science and academia. The use of ready typologies, with their inherent prioritisation of categories presented as 'crucial' and 'important' to an academic analyst, automatically postulates a hegemonic relationship between the researcher and the research subject.

Of course, this argument could be pursued *ad infinitum*, by pointing out the culturally specific nature of the very division into 'emic' and 'etic' categories, and noting the hegemonic potential of any single analytical category, let alone language, given their proneness to suppress alternative modes of expression. Yet, as noted by Mouffe (1993: 14-5), despite their inherent hegemonic tendencies, languages are not identical in terms of their treatment of the subject – just as different political regimes, albeit founded on the exercise of power, make a perceptible difference to the fortunes of people concerned. On a more fundamental level, however, the very ubiquity of the noted tendency of all languages – whether those used for cultural analysis, or the 'subject' languages of cultures under scrutiny – to produce, as well as mask, power disparities, suggests its importance as a kind of cultural mechanism, which could provide an entry point into the study of a diverse range of cultures. A comprehensive approach to culture, I argue, should be able to account for both the inherent power dimension of culture and the cultural situatedness of the researcher and subject, rather than bracketing them out.

The wideners' view of culture

By contrast to the trend of narrowing the study of culture to a set of usable criteria, outlined above, the approaches considered here advance a view that limiting the terms of engagement with culture is counterproductive for the purposes of understanding what culture is all about and how the concept can be employed in academic study. 'Culture' refers to a set of relationships, functions, and realities so complex that even seeking to define it comprehensively is futile (Chabal and Daloz 2006). The sentiment is well captured in Jenks' summary: 'The concept is at least complex and at most so divergent in its various applications as to defy the possibility, or indeed necessity, of any singular designation' (1993: 1).

Such singular designation is, furthermore, unnecessary: since not only the ideas as to what culture is, but also what belongs (or does not belong) to it, will differ from one culture to another, the best approach to the study of culture is inductive (Chabal and Daloz 2006). Although this is not to say that the study of culture should be reduced to unrelated case-specific insights (a spectre that has haunted many a qualitative discipline, from anthropology to human geography), an inductive approach to culture does involve a degree of suspicion of the habitual analytical categories. Writing from the perspective of comparative politics, Chabal and Daloz emphasise how the staples of its disciplinary vocabulary, such as 'regime' or even 'state,' are misleading as categories of comparative analysis because of the local variation in meanings and practices masked by their homogenising façade (2006). Even 'politics,' as the overall subject of enquiry, does not guarantee identity of the relevant institutions, practices, functions, behaviours or ideas: thus, the role of the 'invisible' realm in structuring the political relations in Africa would seem

inconsistent with the secular and rational idea of politics in contemporary Europe (ibid.; Chabal and Daloz 1999; Ellis 1999).

The primacy of culture for the 'wideners' is underlined by the cultural constitution of both the instruments of political analysis and politics itself, as a distinct realm of practice (Chabal and Daloz 2006): According to Hudson, 'things "political" can be deconstructed and shown to have their roots in broad systems of shared meaning' – i.e. culture, according to one of her own definitions (1997b: 10). Crawford and Lipschutz (1997) also underwrite this view when demonstrating how, in the absence of functioning political institutions, cultural conventions take over their role in that they become viewed as the repositories of power, and frequently serve as targets of violence in contemporary conflicts (cf. Nordstrom 1994). The overarching position of culture also accounts for the interdisciplinarity of the wideners' works. Chabal and Daloz (2006) build on Geertz's cultural anthropology, who, in turn, develops a semiotic approach to culture (1973) utilising Weber's very interdisciplinary insights regarding the human-made nature of the social environment. Zygmunt Bauman's *Culture as Praxis* (1999) is equally non-discriminating in its disciplinary leanings, offering an account of cultural constitution of any human activity on the basis of insights drawn from sociology, anthropology, structural and post-structural linguistics, and philosophy. 'Unencumbered' by the specific interests of IR and politics, such broad treatments of culture draw on a wide range of sources of thinking on culture, and it would be impossible to review them here (those which have been relied upon are further discussed in the Theoretical Framework). There are, however, some themes which seem to focus the broad interest in culture, often reconnecting it with the problematic of politics and power.

The foci of the wideners' approach

One such common theme in the wideners' approach is their focus on meanings, and culture as a wider framework in which they are established, organised, articulated, negotiated, and contested (Bauman 1999; Chabal and Daloz 2006; Demerath 2002). This is the path I follow in the present work (see Chapter 3). However, despite numerous inroads made into investigating 'culture as shared meanings' within and outside IR (e.g., Verweij et al. 1998: 2; Cohen 1998: 117; Rubinstein 1998: 190; Hudson 1997b; Kluckhohn 1957; Geertz 1973; 1983; d'Andrade 1984), few studies offer easily usable clues for theorising culture from this perspective, the most common limitation being the treatment of both meanings and their commonality as overly static. The view of culture as enabling communication and mutual understanding has a rich academic pedigree, as attested by, for instance, Wittgenstein's concept of language games (Wittgenstein 1993: section 65; Buckley-Zistel 2006: 8; Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 108). Yet the formative role of culture in establishing (the commonality of) meanings is often absent from such conceptions. A more comprehensive perspective would also need to engage with questions such as how to reconcile the idea of commonality of culture with the reality of uneven 'cultural distribution' (Hannerz 1992), or the perception of cultural 'discontinuity' and separateness of cultures (e.g. Schlee 2009: 577; Barth 1969) with the empirical 'fuzziness' of boundaries between them (Avruch 1998). Equally important, particularly for cultural analysis of conflict, is the issue of mechanisms and consequences of cultural mis-understanding, as well as possibilities of cross-cultural

communication and learning – an issue by which an approach to culture as 'shared meanings' is easily stomped. A careful consideration of these issues leads to a view of meanings not as a passive medium of cultural communication, but as an expression of discursive – and recursive – reality-making by its agents, who are instrumental in 'imagining' both cultural communities (cf. Anderson 1991) and boundaries between them. Far from being a matter of 'technical' linguistic interest, the issue of meanings as a distinct concern of 'cultural' enquiry acquires profound political connotations.

Approaching meanings through their role in the production of culture allows the 'wideners' to bridge the conventional divide between discourse and practice theory, since the genesis of meanings can be cast not only as a linguistic activity, but also as an outcome of communal practice which valorises certain qualities, things and patterns of action over others (cf. Bauman 1999). Practice theorists have been particularly receptive to the idea of exploring the links between practices and discourses: for example, Turner argues that linguistic practices are insufficiently different from other types of practice to merit radically separate treatment (2001: 121). Neumann develops a conception of culture relying on both discourses and practices as motors of cultural innovation (2002). Prominent scholars of discourse, such as Foucault, also acknowledge the need to expand the study of discourse towards the conditions of its production and use, which would involve not only the sphere of social action (see Neumann 2002: 627; cf. Bourdieu 1990: 32; Rouse 2001: 191-4; Lynch 2001: 131) but also the inclusion of 'meaningful actions … and things' into the totality of discourse (Schatzki 2001b: 44; Laclau and Mouffe 1985). To an extent, the very possibility of distinguishing between discourses and practices is called into question through various instances of equating them with culture, particularly in its ordering and reality-making functions (see e.g. Väyrynen 2001: 4-5; Bauman 1999). Certainly, the 'rich' concepts of discourse and practice both incorporate an ideational and social dimension.

This brings the diverse literatures on discourses (e.g. Foucault 2002a; Laclau 2000) as well as practices (Bourdieu 1977, 1990; de Certeau 1984) into the orbit of cultural enquiry. At the same time as enriching the spectrum of approaches to culture, however, these literatures contribute their own debates which feed into the many problematic issues already outlined. One of the most puzzling issues with the broad, undiscriminating approach to 'culture as everything' is the logical equivalence which is established between concepts, processes and phenomena by virtue of being equated with culture. The example of blurring distinctions between discourses and practices, and between each of these concepts and culture as a whole, offers a good illustration. A similar play of equivalences is unleashed between 'meanings' and 'languages.' This can be traced to the property of culture not only to manifest itself on a variety of levels and scales (from international to individual), but also to provide a 'dynamic link between levels of analysis' (Katzenstein 1997: 47). While intuitively indisputable (otherwise there would not be much cause to speak of culture as an all-encompassing totality), this view posits the conceptual space of culture as organised very differently from the linear logic familiar from the Euclidean geometry and associated ideas of rationality. And although wideners' analyses of culture implicitly underscore such an 'impossible' conceptual construct,

they offer little guidance for accounting of the paradox of nominal equivalences of the general and the particular with(in) the totality of culture. This will be another formidable challenge for the theoretical framework chapter.

Another problematic issue, which overlaps with the non-linear nature of culture, has to do with the ambivalence of culture with regard to the freedom of shaping human realities and the constraints that are placed on this freedom by the already established structures of meaning and action (Bauman 1999). This problem has given rise to a number of different attempts to reconcile what Thévenot terms 'macrosocial structures and microsocial behaviours' (2001: 58), among them Giddens' structuration theory (1984) and Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1977, 1990). Given the futility of resolving the debate regarding the primacy of either agency or structure, the solution is to regard structures as dual, i.e. 'both the medium and the outcome of the practices which constitute social systems' (Giddens 1981: 27, quoted in Swidler 2001: 78). While this perspective conjures a dynamic picture of structures, it still does not accord much role to human agents aside from the initial choices which become naturalised in the structures (Bourdieu 1990: 55), and the subsequent mediation of the structures' reproduction. One of the possible solutions to this problem is to isolate different levels at which practices are located; for instance, Swidler's concept of 'anchoring practices' (2001) is underpinned by a tiered view of the relations between different templates of social action. In this sense, a hierarchical relationship could be envisaged between Giddens' structures and Bourdieu's habitus, for Bourdieu's concept is better attuned to smaller-scale and less formal systems 'of structured, structuring dispositions' (Bourdieu 1990: 52) which represent 'chunks' of social praxis (Swidler 1998) rather than the entirety of culture (which could be associated with Giddens' structures). The freedom of choice (or variation within the wide albeit not limitless repertoire of practices (cf. de Certeau 1984; Neumann 2001)) for human agents would thus be inversely proportionate to the 'seniority' of the structure. Yet, such a view risks eliminating the dynamism introduced by recognising the duality of structures in the first place. Much more promising, in this regard, is de Certeau's (1984) differentiation between practices based on their relation to the loci of power – 'strategies,' which embody and project power, and 'tactics,' which consist in inventive ways to circumvent and subvert the strategies while displaying overt compliance. The relation to power also determines whether the instances of innovation will be temporary or more durable in character (see Viktorova (2005b) for a more detailed discussion of Bourdieu's and de Certeau's practice theories).

To summarise the implications of the wideners' view of culture for the present work, the complexity of the concept of culture for which it allows also offers unusual opportunities for theorising the multi-faceted and -pronged nature of culture. Although the introduction of yet other sets of terms (practices, discourses, languages, meanings and so on) may complicate the issue of culture even further, it also helps unpack the workings of culture at particular junctions. Because of the noted play of substitutions and equivalences with and within the concept of culture, these terminological distinctions have a less binding character and are less likely to become naturalised in the fixed terminologies which dissect 'culture' into often incompatible conceptualisations. The heuristic nature of the terminology applied in

the offered conceptualisation of culture is also emphasised by its mirroring of the processes of substitution and establishment of equivalences which epitomise the process of cultural meaning-production. Coming back to the purposes of the second part of this chapter, the broad perspective on culture also underpins the most fruitful of the reviewed applications of culture in conflict and peacebuilding.

II. Culture in the context of conflict and violence

Having established the parameters of engagement with culture generally, in this section I turn to the question of how culture has been related to the problematic of conflict and violence, as well as peace. This concerns, first and foremost, the debates on the origins of conflict and violence, the effects which violent conflict has on culture, and cultural mechanisms of conflict resolution. In addition, this section discusses issues and dilemmas related to the conflictive potential of some of the most studied aspects of culture, such as ethnic/national identity and religion. As with the above, the following discussion aims to identify departure points for my own approach to culture as well as relevant issues which it will have to address.

Culture: A source or a medium of violence?

Among questions asked about the role of culture in (violent) conflict, that concerning the origins of aggression is perhaps the most fundamental. Does violence originate in culture, and, in that case, what is to be made of this 'dubious' connection; or is it among the more 'basic' propensities of humankind, grounded in biological or genetic predispositions (and in that case, how should one conceptualise the role of culture in addressing it)?

Responses to these questions vary widely. While evolutionists (e.g. Pinker 2002) pinpoint a 'natural' human propensity for aggression, claiming that it has been instrumental in ensuring the evolutionary advantage of our species, their opponents tend to question 'biological' generalisations regarding human nature. In anti-evolutionists' view, the noted propensity for violence is a product of cultural nurturing in some societies in the same way that the collective preference for peaceful resolution of disputes is in others (e.g. Ross 1993; see also Ramsbotham et al. 2005: 305-7). In this reading, the overall level of violence in society is a variable, whose value depends on patterns of socialisation, established cultural practices and so on. This does not necessarily imply that culture is to blame as some sort of 'external' generator of violence: if anything, culture, in the form of behavioural and attitudinal patterns reproduced in communal praxis, is very much an intrinsic part of society. However, its influence in not entirely deterministic for the occurrences of actual violence: this relationship, as noted by Riches (1986b: 25; cf. Geertz 1973: 18), is one of opportunity whose realisation hinges on individual choices. But once the attention shifts back to the individual, it becomes almost impossible to determine whether it is the 'natural' proclivities, or the endorsement of cultural conditioning, that plays a defining part in choosing violence over non-violence; and so the question regarding the 'origins' of violence is re-opened.

Still, there may be more fruitful ways of unpacking the cultural problematic in relation to violence. However persuasive the 'nature' argument for the pervasiveness of aggression in human societies (although see e.g. Kelly 2000), there is no denying a huge variation not only in the overall levels of (acceptance of) violence across cultures, but also in the forms that the expression of aggression takes (see Ross 1993). Clearly, ideas as to what circumstances justify violent responses, what forms of violence are acceptable, as well as what measures and actions can de-escalate the conflict, directing it along the avenues of non-violent resolution, all belong to the domain of cultural 'conditioning.' Given culture's impact on the forms and dynamics of conflict, the issue of whether conflict originates in culture or is simply mediated by it becomes largely void, for even the presumably 'natural' aggression in animals often takes symbolic, rather than direct, forms (i.e. when the outcome of a confrontation is decided by symbolic demonstrations of force rather than actual combat) (e.g. Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1983: 45).

Violence and non-violence in communal identity and praxis

The near-ubiquity of violence in human societies could also be explained by the advantages that violence offers for the survival of not just the human species, but particular communities. Accounts of functional utility of violence in human communities are particularly prominent in anthropology, covering a wide range of applications from the attainment of day-to-day practical aims to the establishment of communities and maintenance of boundaries between them (e.g. Riches 1986b; Schröder and Schmidt 2001; Richards 2005b; Girard 1988; Clastres 1994; Malkki 1995). These themes reverberate in Volkan's concept of 'chosen trauma' (1991) used to analyse the political effects of mobilising memories of past violence in the service of ethno-nationalist ideologies (1997), and in Kaldor's remark that violence is the most potent tool for a forcible demarcation of the dividing line between ethnic communities (2004).

Although, as noted above, the acceptance of functional usefulness of conflict is usually limited to its non-violent forms (e.g. Fetherston and Nordstrom 1995), a closer study of different cultures reveals both violent and non-violent conflict as cultural 'options' coexisting in a variety of different settings. In many contemporary conflicts, violence is the province of the same social agency and networks which also practice non-violent methods of attaining their goals (Richards 2005a). Co-existence of violence and non-violence is also notable in the liberal peace, which combines the dominant 'enlightened' Western preference for non-violence with the recognition of necessity of force to ensure the success of peace interventions (see Richmond 2005). The same applies to a number of other broadly Western paradigms, from St Augustine's deliberations on earthly vs. heavenly peace in *De civitate Dei* (1945) to Marxist and structuralist visions of political change (e.g. Galtung 1971; Fanon 1967; Apter 1997: 7). A close study of culture can not only reveal which violent and non-violent options are present as latent cultural possibilities, but also illuminate the cultural pathways of legitimation which determine whether violent or non-violent responses are triggered in one or another set of circumstances (cf. Jabri 1996). Thus, relatively high levels of violence in the aboriginal communities of Australia have to be gauged against the local understandings of the harmfulness of verbal compared to physical abuse and ways of

restoring honour and social balance (Brigg 2005). The cultural context of the production of violence is also relevant for understanding the origins as well as wider social viability of non-violence, as evident in the comparison of the wide appeal of the Ghandian paradigm of non-violence (cf. *NP 2007a*) with highly specific forms of non-violent resistance, such as practiced by the Nasa of Colombia (see MacGinty 2008: 141, referring to Peacework 2004; Spindler 2005). In this sense, stripping violence of its privileged analytical status as an 'exceptional' form of conflict (Richards 2005a) becomes a pre-condition of a culturally informed study of conflict and its resolution.

Recognition of the cultural grounding of both violence and non-violence has attracted attention to the possibility of multiple ways of ethical framing of the issue of violence and the varying standards of legitimacy surrounding conflictive behaviour. In literature, these themes are reflected in the preoccupation with culture-specific notions of conflict and methods of conflict resolution, sometimes referred to as 'enthoconflict theories' and 'ethnopraxes' (Arvuch et al. 1991), manifest in, for example, the traditional Belau notions of conflict and pathways of resolution (Black 1991) and novel sources of conflict triggered by social change among the Dou Donggo (Just 1991). Among recent studies, Brigg and Bleiker's edited volume (forthcoming) offers accounts of a variety of Asian and Oceanic approaches to conflict resolution. Other works have focused on the patterns of reproduction of certain forms of conflictive behaviour, or 'cultures of conflict' (see Ross 1993, 1998), as well as cultural nurturing of peaceful forms of dispute resolution and personal fulfilment, or 'cultures of peace' (see Boulding 2004). Culturally-specific methods of conflict resolution have found wider practical resonance in the so-called 'alternative dispute resolution,' or ADR (e.g. Nader and Todd 1978), which in some cases became institutionalised as part of formal legal systems, for example in the US and New Zealand (MacGinty 2008: 141-2). One of the upshots of enquiries into culturally-specific understandings of conflict was the realisation that in many parts of the world, the dominant ideas of dispassionate, rational discussion of conflictive issues with a view to achieving a decisive resolution simply do not hold. In fact, the extensive use of emotional displays, ritual, and story-telling in different cultural settings starkly expose the specific cultural origins of the 'rational' Western-style conflict resolution (e.g. Lederach 1991). In contrast, many of the 'traditional' or 'indigenous' techniques emphasise the importance of ongoing relationships as opposed to one-off victories; and see a role for the third parties 'as facilitators rather that unilateral interveners' (MacGinty 2008: 141-2).

These studies form an important precondition for cross-cultural understanding of issues related to conflict and peace (e.g. Brigg and Bleiker, forthcoming), as well as possibilities of cross-fertilisation between culture-specific conflict resolution techniques, including mergers between the liberal peace and traditional or indigenous peace-making (MacGinty 2008) and broader cultural orientations which they represent. For instance, Schirch (2005) explores the uses of ritual in contexts not usually considered susceptible to 'cultural' reconciliation, and Väyrynen (2001) usefully reconceptualises what is happening in the setting of problem-solving workshops (usually associated with demonstrably a-cultural 'second-generation' thinking about conflict (e.g. Azar and Burton 1986)) in terms of common frames of

reference through which participants define their vision of conflictive issues and other life experiences. This shows that ideas about conflict do not form an isolated sphere of cultural knowledge, but are entwined with a wide spectrum of social experiences – a consideration which becomes particularly important in the context of external peace interventions. For example, Duffey (2000) demonstrates how the lack of elementary cultural awareness among the interveners undermines the peace effort where intervention practices are at odds with the cultural norms of recipient societies. The scale of this problem ranges from the chosen means of communication with local audiences (e.g. radio vs. print media) to the methods of reconciliation (e.g. court procedures vs. healing rituals) to the institutional formats promoted as part of post-conflict state-building (ibid.; Shaw 2005; Ferme 1998). In contrast, familiarity with local ways of life and perceptions of 'common sense' can offer as yet untapped potential for peaceful transformation: for instance, 'indigenous' authority figures in conflict zones (obscured by the more visible dynamics of 'warlordism') can provide a rallying point for peace activism (Kaldor 1999), while incorporating local visions of a functioning polity when designing governance structures for the post-settlement phase can be crucial for the sustainability of the end product (e.g. Lederach 1997). Lederach's work (1991, 1997) also emphasises that ideas about conflict resolution and its desired ends do not always exist as readily available cultural wisdom (cf. Just 1991), so that the role of the third parties in conflict resolution could be reconceptualised along the lines of 'eliciting' the latent understandings and visions of peace (cf. Buckley-Zistel 2006; Viktorova Milne, forthcoming).

Violence and cultural change

Another pertinent issue concerns the nature of the relationship between culture and violent conflict. The question of whether culture can impose restraint on the exercise of violence is topical regardless of whether one considers violence to be grounded in culture or not. Those espousing the evolutionist view of 'natural' human proclivity towards aggression tend to answer this question negatively – although this is because their excessively narrow view of culture does not include the realm of politics, which evolutionsists do credit with providing some restraint on violence (see Ramsbotham et al. 2005: 305-6). Those favouring 'nurture' explanations presume culture to exercise both enabling and constraining influence on violence (and other types of conflictive behaviour) (cf. Bauman 1999: xii; Douglas 1982: 190). The reverse consideration – of whether violence has an effect on culture (that is, beyond its reproduction through violent practices which form its part) – has been at the heart of a divisive debate of immense relevance for peacebuilding. Most often this debate has revolved around the issues of 'social fabric' and 'culture(s) of violence.'

The 'social fabric'

Although violence can – as discussed above – be viewed as an intrinsic part of culture, the notion of its 'normalcy' is sometimes difficult to accept, particularly when violence reaches culturally unprecedented scales, as in many armed conflicts of the post-Cold War era. Questions such as what happens to the established cultural practices and conventions (the 'social fabric') under the influence of war violence, and what new conventions regulating the use of violence (or 'cultures of violence')

emerge as a result, have elicited a great deal of controversy, in view of contradictory interpretations of their effects on the prospects for peace. A widespread assumption on the interveners' part is that the 'social fabric' becomes, often irreparably, damaged by violent conflict (e.g. WB 2003; EC SL s.a.). Moreover, it is also often seen as being 'implicated' in conflict – both on account of having manifested its inability to contain, or 'dampen,' the conflict (e.g. Paris 2004; see Duffield 2001: 127-32), and owing to its role in creating conditions which facilitated the recourse to violence in the first place. The imbalances of power, affluence, and opportunity coded into the social structure are often cited among the causes of conflict (although not usually viewed as pertaining to culture and sometimes explicitly dissociated from it (e.g. Kapoor 2008: 35-6)), as is the 'culture of violence' which is taken to imply widespread societal acceptance of violent means of dispute resolution (UNDP 2004: 5). Similar charges of facilitating violence are laid on what is sometimes labelled 'harmful' cultural practices and understandings underpinning them – for instance, discriminative 'customary law' or objectification of women in 'exchanges' to settle grievances – which result in perpetuation of various forms of social inequality (e.g. HRW 2003; USAID 2007a; Merry 2003: 58; Richards et al. 2004: 10).

Critics expose this assumption of 'damaged' social fabric as legitimising the inattention to local culture(s) which is coded into the dominant peacebuilding practice of using violent conflict as 'an axis of social reordering' (Duffield 2001: 13) to effect a wholesale reorganisation of societies in accord with the principles of liberal democratic governance (Richmond 2006). These principles appear to remove the need to address the cultural dimension of conflict and peace, by virtue of accommodating any 'cultural' needs of populations through the provisions of civil society, participatory democracy and individual freedoms of expression (cf. Duffield 2001). However, this view is problematic not only because of its disregard for the subject populations' own views and desires, but also because frequently, instead of 'destroying' pre-existing cultural practices, violent conflict reinforces them (Duffield 2001: 122-5). In the conditions of violent conflict, everyday practices and routines, such as journeys to obtain food and water, or any communal activities, often become valorised as instances of resistance and peace activism (e.g. Nordstrom 1994; *Accord* 9). Despite its often undeniably damaging effects, war violence can also lead to a (re-)discovery of coping and survival strategies which reconnect people's current experiences to their cultural past, or trigger cultural creativity and renewal (e.g. Nordstrom 1994). These cultural developments often evade the attention of interveners or get condemned together with other manifestations of the conflict, despite sometimes coinciding with the objectives of liberal transitions – for instance, towards a greater autonomy of women (*Large 2007*).

Ironically, it is precisely the reinforcement of local cultures that is often conductive to attempts at their destruction, as they become more prominent as sources of power not only for the communities in question but also their adversaries in conflict (cf. OECD 2001: 25). In the violence of the 'new wars,' the targeting of civilians becomes a deliberate destabilisation technique (Kaldor 1999; cf. Hoffman 2004), which is further 'refined' by forcible recruitment of civilians into militias and pitting

them against their own communities (Nordstrom 1994; HRW 2003). Crawford and Lipschutz (1997: 169) suggest that such violent tactics as systematic rape or separation of men from women, as witnessed in Bosnia and Croatia, represent an attack on the institution of family as the sole remaining repository of cultural cohesion and power (cf. Väyrynen 1991; Stiglmayer 1994). Other examples include deliberate infliction of grievous bodily harm, which deprives people of the possibility to perform their customary social roles; or using the sites associated with well-being, safety and peace (such as beauty salons in Yugoslavia, or kitchens in Mozambique) for committing heinous acts of violence (Nordstrom 1994). In addition to bringing about physical suffering, violence also leaves a long-term imprint on the social memories of individuals and communities, resulting in lingering trauma (Fetherston 2000b; Nordstrom 2004).

Whether, and in what sense, the effects of violence qualify as 'destructive' for the social fabric is thus an extremely contested issue, which hinges on the adopted distinctions between cultural change and destruction, as well as what we consider to be instances of cultural adaptation, resilience and capacity for 'regeneration.' Furthermore, this issue also resists generalisation, since whether the conflict triggers a recourse to the latent repertoire of cultural practices of survival (e.g. Rackley 2000), or overwhelms the community with violence of a 'novel' type that is outside the competence of the existing 'ethnopraxes' (e.g. Uvin and Mironko 2003), can only be determined empirically. Despite the often similar-sounding conclusions regarding the debilitating effects of violence on the social fabric, the recipes offered for its remedy differ tremendously between liberal peacebuilding interventions and the scholars advocating a more culturally-sensitive approach (e.g. Nordstrom 2004; Fetherston and Nordstrom 1995). For instance, critics justly expose the hidden agendas of social healing formats traditionally used in liberal peacebuilding, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, whose methods and rhetoric betray their orientation towards the production of docile liberal subjects as they advance ideas of state-building and national unity and cohesion, and superimpose the external interpretations of the causes of conflict onto their 'local' understandings (e.g. Shaw 2005; Hoffman 2007). In contrast, culturally-sensitive transformative peacebuilding is directed at the immediate personal and community environment, emphasising the restoration of long-term relationships and coping strategies attuned to local cultural traditions (Shaw 2005; Kelsall 2005; cf. MacGinty 2008). The differences between the approaches are evident even in their treatment of trauma: while from the perspective of liberal peacebuilding, cultural practices such as communal healing ceremonies (e.g. Honwana 2005) are easily dismissed as eschewing proper justice procedures (cf. Llamazeres 2005), the medicinal (or psychiatric) approach to trauma associated with the liberal peace can be shown effectively to obliterate individual and communal agency in post-violence environments (Pupavac 2005, 2007).

'Cultures of violence'

An issue closely related to 'social fabric' is that of the 'cultures of violence.' Usually, references to 'cultures of violence' emphasise the need to go beyond the customary approach to conflict, which proceeds by resolving the underlying issues that had triggered its outbreak, and leaves unaddressed the 'runaway' dynamics of violence which will have altered and complicated the initial grievances and

perceptions of the parties (e.g. Nordstrom 1994, 1995; Feldman 1991; see also Chapter 5). Violent conflict – especially on an unprecedented scale, as in the case of many post-Cold War conflicts in the Global South – sets in motion dynamics that ultimately alter the perceptions of permissible and justified violence, creating 'cultures of violence' (Nordstrom 1994). This process involves a variety of factors and manifestations, from reawakening of the latent 'culture of militarism' as the flip side of many peaceful societies (cf. Jabri 1996) or militarisation of existing social networks (Hoffman 2007), to the influence of shadow transnational economies which create alternative structures of dependency and opportunity, for instance through easy availability of arms (e.g. Kaldor 1999; Fetherston 2000). In many cases, the changes which violent conflict has introduced to societies are perceived as irreversible:

> What you must realize about a boy like Atek, … is that he has lost forever the grounding of his culture, … cows. Cattle in the Sudan provide the basis of families. Cattle connect parents to children. Cattle are pledged in marriage arrangements. Now a boy like Atek thinks that the center of culture is guns. It is all turned upside down. (Rosenblatt 1993: 88, quoted in Rackley 2000)

Although the references to 'cultures of violence' allude to their man-made character, the challenge of 'undoing' them faces all the difficulties involved in altering the patterns of established practice (cf. Brown 2005: 49): this task requires a profound understanding of the cultures in question in order to help orchestrate locally nurtured transitions to non-violent cultural repertoire(s) of practices. This is why merely substituting the existing 'cultures of violence' with institutional provisions for peaceful, democratic expression of dissent and difference, as attempted in liberal peace transitions, leaves its critics deeply sceptical: Without 'undoing' the cultures of violence, lasting peace remains an unlikely prospect (e.g. Nordstrom 1994, 2004), and in view of locally established traditions of reconciliation, the promoted fora such as TRCs may prove inadequate for this task (cf. Shaw 2005). Although the established reconciliation practices are rarely equipped to deal with the particular cultures of violence that have emerged as a result of recent conflicts, their application often demonstrates genuine cultural creativity, whereby elements of the existing cultural repertoire are recombined and complemented with the new ones to match the current needs and requirements (e.g. Honwana 2005). The awareness of cultural creativity can also be projected into the past, thus recasting what appears to be the established and time-venerated practices as responding, initially, to equally 'unprecedented' conditions. Furthermore, just as the emergent 'cultures of violence' are grounded in a broad array of cultural practices and conventions, so the attempts at 'rescuing' the peaceful alternatives invite a broad-based knowledge of the culture(s) in question, especially given that the scope of 'relevant' practices is not limited to conflict resolution proper, but includes a wider spectrum of ideas about the appropriate forms of governance and authority, communication and exchange, and procedures of restoring a balance between the people and their environment (MacGinty 2008: 147-8).

Cultural avenues of conflictive mobilisation

One of the most visible roles for culture in relation to conflict in the recent decades has been in conflictive mobilisation of religious and ethnic identities. Ethnic

conflict, in particular, has been in the spotlight of academic and political attention since the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, and 'ethnicity' featured widely in re-interpretations of many conflicts across the former Third World, as ideological motivations for violence receded with the lifting of the Cold War superpower rivalry. No longer overlaid by the constraining power of ideology, erstwhile patterns of identity and difference appeared to have regained all their divisive strength (e.g. Kaldor 1999). This section discusses the place and understandings of culture in relation to two main avenues of identity mobilisation – ethnicity (and nationalism) and religion.

Ethnicity and nationalism

The resurfacing concerns with national identity, in particular, seemed to question the long-held view of nationalism as associated with a particular stage in the development of modern industrial societies (Hobsbawm 1990; Tilly 1975) and reinvigorated the essentialist understandings of culture and identity (e.g. Kaplan 2000). The 'essentialist' view pictures national or ethnic identities as innate (i.e. grounded in some 'natural,' biological, or 'primordial' genetic characteristic), often in conjunction with a vision of neatly compartmentalised and mutually exclusive territorial ethnic 'homelands.' The presentation of identities as natural and given seemingly acknowledges the defining impact of culture on world affairs (e.g. Huntington 1993), but the static view of culture as an ineradicable 'thing-in-itself' (Kaplan 2000; see Richards 2005a: 8-9 for critique) in fact brackets it out, with the analysis concentrating on its product – the 'irreducible' differences which necessarily perpetuate ethnic conflict and rivalries. The mistrust of culture as an analytical category is often related to such essentialist understandings – as exemplified by Bayart's suspicion of 'culturalism' in his *Illusion of Cultural Identity* (2005). Yet, such a view of culture is largely acknowledged to be anachronistic and grossly inaccurate, for the 'ideal-type' ethnic compartmentalisation has very little justification in terms of actual realities, which testify to ethnic intermixing and 'cross-contamination' as being essential for both short- and long-term 'survival' of nations (see e.g. Richards 1996; Shaw 2002; Richards et al. 2004), given the crucial role that inter-marrying played in cementing peace agreements (Biggs 1960: 25; MacGinty 2008: 152). Thus, for all its 'biological' pretensions, the conception of innate ethnicity and its privileged links to a 'natural' homeland are founded on a large dose of myth (see e.g. Mertus (1999) for explorations of the mythological aspects of Serbian claims to Kosovo). Furthermore, some studies emphasise the inherent heterogeneity of any culture and its dependence on dialogical exchanges with other cultures for innovation and development (see e.g. Lotman 1990). Self-definitions (or -descriptions) in monolithic, clearly delimited terms are always secondary, and also second-order, constructions – rather than reflections of primary, pristine and 'unspoilt' ethnic realities (Lotman 1990; Viktorova 2003; cf. de Certeau 1997).

Contradicting the essentialist premises are a number of views advocating the relativity of identity and its (broadly) constructed character. The wide resonance of Fredrik Barth's research on the constitutive role of boundaries between communities in identity formation (1969; cf. Cohen 1969) emphasises not only its situational character and multiple facets (e.g. Bleiker 2000: 200-1), but also its belonging in the

realm of the 'other' (Bakhtin 1984: 287-88; Viktorova 2003). Accordingly, it is not culture *per se*, but the specific terms in which self-other relations are articulated, that determine the conflictive or conciliatory potential of identity (e.g. Hansen 2006; Diez et al. 2006). Because culture is not viewed as innate, but as a product of social and political practices of identification, its place in the constructivist conceptions of identity appears more modest than in the essentialist ones, but it is also two-fold: 'culture' can be placed among other products of social construction, such as identity and difference, *and* considered in connection with the very processes and mechanisms of the production of such collective constructs (e.g. Wendt 1999). In the studies of discursive articulation and production of identities, it is possible to envisage a similarly two-fold role for culture: although culture certainly features as the end-product of discourse, there is also scope for culture when considering the 'totalising' effects of discursive constitution of reality. In this respect, culture approximates 'language' in post-structural conceptualisations, and in some interpretations, it is culture, rather than language, that is given the ultimate communicative and reality-making functions (see Bauman 1999). This consideration is of immense importance in view of the task of elaborating a comprehensive approach to culture in the following theoretical chapter.

The idea that ethnic difference does not directly translate into violence has also gained acceptance in the 'mainstream' studies of conflict: thus, Collier (2000) finds 'that ethnic diversity correlates only weakly with war,' being more explosive in countries with two or three main ethnic groups rather than with multiple ethnicities (Richards 2005a: 10). This draws attention to the fact that ethnic mobilisation is not particularly different from other types of political mobilisation (Loisel 2004), and that for conflict entrepreneurs, its choice is often determined by its comparative cost-benefit advantages (Burnham 1996; see also Richards 2005a: 8). What makes politicisation of ethnicity potentially explosive is that it 'tends to collapse the distinction between ethnic identity, on the one hand, and political choices, affiliations and loyalties, on the other' (Kandeh 1992: 81-2). Another useful observation in this regard is that the 'centrifugal' effects of ethnic polarisation are counterbalanced by (much less marked) processes of creolisation, cultural adaptation and assimilation (e.g. Richards 1996) – although in itself, cultural approximation does not guard against violent conflict, or necessarily make its resolution easier (Bangura 2004; cf. Neumann 1999).

Arguably, 'ethnicity' is a category ill-suited for describing human commonalities in some parts of the world: Chabal and Daloz (2006) argue that in Africa, 'ethnicity' used to form but one of many overlapping principles of identification. The emphasis on 'ethnicity' was introduced by the colonial powers and drawn from the European experiences of identification rather than from the African terrain (ibid.). One of the prime examples of this was the cementing, under the Belgian colonial rule, of the difference in affluence between the Hutus and Tutsis of Rwanda into an 'ethnic' divide (e.g. Longman 2001: 356). Ellis demonstrates the extent to which 'ethnicity' is a misnomer for characterising the weak political and cultural ties between Liberian 'tribes' – a division which also, in the Liberian case, emerged comparatively recently and tentatively, in the 'process of interaction between national and local politics' rather than on the basis of such unifying characteristics

as a common language (1999: 31-3; cf. Moran 2006). Instead, in the bulk of Africa, kinship (variously defined depending on the purpose) serves as a flexible basis of identification and mobilisation (be it political or economic) which cross-cuts the 'ethnic' and even 'blood' divisions because of the practices of marriage and adoption, especially in the context of domestic slavery and its legacy (see Ferme 2001).

Despite its 'constructed' nature, ethnicity, undeniably, features as a powerful motor in conflict, partly because ethnic belonging seems to offer a security of identification on par with few other forms of commonality (save, perhaps, religion) (e.g. Smith 1995), and partly because it offers plentiful opportunities for manipulation. Both these aspects show how much can be gained by placing the issue of identity in a broader context of cultural analysis, because an enquiry into the mechanisms of cultural meaning-making can illuminate both the specificity of the production of identity as the internal space of meaningfulness, and the ways in which boundary-drawing can be manipulated in accord with certain interests.

Religion

The importance of cultural grounding of a particular basis for identification also concerns religion, which has lately become more prominent on the agenda of IR scholars (e.g. Laustsen and Wæver 2000; Juergensmeyer 2001), although this engagement with religion carries a measure of awkwardness, given the explicit grounding of the discipline of IR in the secular traditions of statehood. Yet, secular character of polities is not a universal norm, and furthermore, some political ideas borne of religious traditions, such as *umma* in Islam, challenge the very concept of compartmentalised sovereign statehood. In many societies, religion is part and parcel of the social structure, and it can play a defining role in the formation of ideas of power and legitimacy, emphasising the constitutive role of culture in the sphere of politics (e.g. Hohe 2002a; Chopra and Hohe 2004). Apart from its more visible application with regard to, for example, 'political Islam,' the religious dimension of the 'political' has been cited as an important factor in conflicts across Sub-Saharan Africa, and West Africa in particular (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Ellis 1999; Ellis and Haar 2004).

Religion's further relevance for cultural conflict analysis can be related to its role in structuring the deep-seated cultural patterns belonging to a 'collective subconscious' which, often in covert and 'undetected' ways, direct the more tangible patterns of political behaviour (Osiander 2000, referring to Galtung 1996). For instance, Martín (2005) traces some controversies in the perception of the role of peacekeeping in Western Sahara to Islam's preference for justice in contrast to Christianity's prioritisation of peace. However, religion is not the only factor structuring such deeply ingrained and, therefore, unarticulated convictions which govern the perceptions of appropriateness and common sense characterising cultural communities (cf. Just 1991). Therefore, multiple sources of such deep-seated cultural patterns could perhaps be discussed more fruitfully in the broader context of cultural analysis rather than religion. This need not entail exclusion of religion, for, as many scholars of culture emphasise, inductive cultural analysis should consider those aspects of culture which the participants in conflict themselves deem

important (Chabal and Daloz 2006). Thus, religion would feature prominently in a cultural study of both African politics and wars (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Ellis 1999; Ellis and Ter Haar 2004), and in the discussion of Cambodian ideas of social opportunity and justice (Ovensen 2005). Other contexts or levels of analysis might, in a similar vein, direct attention towards other categories of identification, be it class, gender, or race (e.g. Doty 1998).

Consideration of the processes of meaning-generation and reality-making at the core of cultural analysis can illuminate the mechanisms of both ethnic and religious politicisation – or, conversely, uncover the factors which drive identification away from the avenue of ethnicity in particular contexts. The issue of ethnic identity, in particular, highlights the importance of cultural mechanisms of identity consolidation and fragmentation, crucial in cementing our perception of ethnic and cultural 'wholes' and 'legitimate' divisions between them. The dynamic of identity-formation can also affect the acceptance and effectiveness of both locally-nurtured and 'imported' peace-making techniques, given that these often carry an implicit identity agenda (see e.g. MacGinty (2008: 145) and Chandler (2000) on the internationals' 'containment' of nationalist tendencies in the Bosnian peace process). Attention to 'micro-effects' of cultural identity-formation can offer particular insights into peace-making: for instance, Schirch's work on ritual in peacebuilding highlights its role in re-forging the bases of commonality on different levels, from rival leaders to the members of conflicting communities (2005). The use of symbols, whose inherent polysemy opens them to a variety of interpretations, as rallying points in the expression and (re-)formulation of identity also exposes the broader, cultural underpinnings of the identity problematic. The public nature of symbols makes them a ready 'access point' for the analysis of culture (Swidler 1995). These considerations corroborate the need for an in-depth exploration of the significational dimension underlying both the formation of culture and its functioning, which will be offered in the following chapter.

Conclusions

As illustrated by the above review of the thinking on culture, it has been sufficiently diverse to preclude comfortable 'streamlining' into a consistent account. Furthermore, it would be difficult to piece together a comprehensive approach to the study of culture on its basis, given the number of dilemmas and contradictions uncovered in relation to almost every intellectual take on culture. Of the reviewed approaches, the wideners' position comes closest to offering a basis for a treatment of culture which could both avoid making early commitments that limit its applicability to empirical material, and help address the problematic issues raised in the above discussion. The approach developed in the next chapter continues the pathway indicated by the works of Bauman (1999) and Chabal and Daloz (2006) towards a semiotic perspective on the problematic of culture, with a focus on meanings, their generation and their social functioning manifest in the cultural 'ordering' of human affairs. The encroachment onto the territory of semiotics will necessitate a recourse to a number of other sources to unpack the processes of meaning-generation, notably Yuriy Lotman's semiotic theory of culture (e.g. 1990) which was not considered above because of the wide coverage it is about to receive

in the following chapter. As noted in the Introduction, it is precisely this focus on meaning-making and world-ordering that offers grounds for drawing the connections between the 'cultural sides' of diverse spheres of human praxis (see Bauman 1999; Demerath 2002; Chabal and Daloz 2006; Hudson 1997b), allowing for an open-ended engagement with a wide range of empirical phenomena. It is also a focus which enables me to address a variety of pinpointed 'problems' with existing treatments of culture – such as the formation of identity and processes of boundary-drawing, the power effects of cultural vocabulary or naturalised power asymmetries, and the non-linearity of a broad concept of culture – integrating their consideration with the approach developed below.

A cultural enquiry has to proceed in full awareness of what Geertz termed the twin dangers of reification ('to imagine that culture is a self-contained "super-organic" reality with forces and purposes of its own') and reductionism ('to claim that it consists in the brute pattern of behavioural events we observe in fact to occur in some identifiable community or other') (Geertz 1973: 11). One possibility of negotiating this narrow strait may lie in acknowledging the human agency through which the perpetuation of culture takes place, in line with Bleiker's ambition of restoring agency in discourse analysis (2000). Although reintroducing the focus on agency does not 'disable' the power of structures – the established patterns of cultural praxis – it does emphasise the dependence of these structures on the reproduction through human agents, whose (at least partial) awareness of participation in this reproduction affects its terms in multiple and complex ways. The following is, consequently, an exploration of the dynamics of cultural meaning-making as seen from a particular position within culture, which also tries to keep sight of other cultural agents' creative (and competing) input. The label given to the offered account of culture – embedded cultural enquiry – is intended to convey both the situatedness of this exploration within, and its influence upon, its own material.

3. Theoretical Framework: Embedded cultural enquiry

> 'To know about the giggle loop is to become part of the giggle loop!'
>
> – *Coupling*, episode 3, series 1, BBC

Introduction

As follows from the discussion of culture in the previous chapter, to devise a concise, parsimonious and all-encompassing theoretical framework for the analysis of culture in the context of IR and politics is not only extremely difficult, but also counterproductive (cf. Chabal and Daloz 2006). If anything, a deeper look into the issues and processes associated with culture brings out discontinuities, 'ruptures' and incongruities in our understanding of not only how culture, but the related fields, such as the political, operates. Therefore, the value of a theoretical framework for cultural analysis of peacebuilding, I would argue, would be not in presenting a consistent and coherent picture of culture as it features or should feature in connection with peacebuilding, but in its ability to expose these points of rupture (see Foucault 2002a) and contradiction in our understanding of culture and its workings, and in exploring their implications for conflict and peacebuilding. In doing so, this chapter presents a conceptualisation of culture that is both critical in highlighting the problematic sides of the concept, and constructive in outlining the analytical and functional versatility of 'culture' (including its problematic aspects). The intention is, however, not to gloss over the imperfections of culture in an attempt to construct a grand methodological narrative, but rather to draw attention to the mechanisms of operation of the 'seductive' attraction of this concept, which can be helpful in unravelling the idealised visions of culture (e.g. EC 2007) and keep in check the scope of conclusions and regularities established in this work.

Consequently, the framework offered here does not aim to provide a fail-safe inventory of different aspects to consider with regard to culture and its treatment in peacebuilding (in general and with regard to individual case studies), as is the general trend in policy documents (e.g. EC s.a.; UNDP 2004a), but rather to illuminate the complexity of the issue of culture as a starting point for an inductive analysis. Nor does the presented consideration of culture offer salvation from the 'imperfections' of peacebuilding in the sense of resolving its dilemmas; rather, the ambition is to elucidate the dilemmas and responsibility involved in any event of intervention. Hence the labelling of the presented analytical approach as 'embedded cultural enquiry,' since the analysis will always be carried out from a perspective that is already unavoidably cultural, stymieing any ambition of reaching a 'culturally-objective' standpoint. Of course, the opinions regarding the degree of cultural 'determinism' this entails vary from the recognition of deep-seated, unaccountable influences which 'filter' one's perception of reality (cf. Chabal and

Daloz 2006: 71; Kapoor 2008: 21) to the view of cultural conditioning as 'avoidable' (Fetherston and Nordstrom 1995). While resolving this debate is beyond the means or objectives of this study, it is helpful in drawing attention to the role that cultural self-awareness and reflexivity play in establishing the parameters of 'the cultural' in research and analysis. Despite its potential for bringing out patterns and regularities of broader relevance (and notwithstanding the phenomenological assumptions of 'publicness' of mental processes and operations), a cultural enquiry is bound to remain an essentially individual enterprise, borne of questioning one's assumptions and the environment that is impossible to uniformalise in a single 'usable methodology.' Yet to deny its utility on these grounds would be tantamount to questioning the very possibility of situated knowledge – which, arguably, is the only kind available to us (cf. George 1994; Toulmin 1992, 2001).

Premises and limitations of embedded cultural enquiry

It is tempting to follow Chabal and Daloz in their inductive approach to culture and concentrate on 'the interpretation of meaning' – of what 'makes sense' in a given context (2006: 30, 60; cf. Geertz 1973). However, there are certain limitations as to what could be achieved with this approach. 'Interpretation' is an honest term to use in that it hints at the individual, 'subjective' nature of conclusions reached in the course of an inductive enquiry (which is not in itself a drawback, according to some recent thinking on methodology in IR and social sciences (e.g. Bleiker 2001; Sylvester 2001; Tickner 2005; cf. Denzin and Lincoln 2000). What it does not convey to the full extent, however, is the unfinished, fluid, and unfixed character of meanings themselves (cf. Douglas 2004: 88), which acquire a more stable form not least through the process of interpretation (cf. Bauman 1978: 180-95). Neither does it make clear that this process of arrival at fixed meanings (as well as its outcome) is a political phenomenon as much as it is a semiotic process: the assertion of meanings as 'real,' 'solid,' and 'complete' is part of their discursive representation (cf. Hansen 2007). Therefore, it seems more appropriate to focus on the processes through which meanings are produced – i.e. not (just) the interpretation but *generation*, constitution of meanings – as well as contested. As will be shown below, this process may be seen as constitutive of many forms and effects of the 'operation' of culture, and this common 'architectonic moment' (Bakhtin 1993[1986], 1994b: 51) unites what may otherwise appear as 'disjoint' areas of relevance to cultural analysis. The advantage of this perspective is also in that it allows for illuminating culture's inherent relations with power and the political, without (as it often happens) eclipsing the relevance of the concept of culture in the process.

Needless to say, in exploring these avenues I am not treading an entirely virgin terrain. The focus on the production of meaning, naturally, demands engaging with works of semioticians that have addressed this aspect in conjunction with an interest in culture (such as Lotman, his Tartu-Moscow contemporaries and subsequent commentators (e.g. Schönle 2006)), as well as thinkers that have sought to demonstrate the application of semiotic and literary insights in the realms of the social and political (such as Laclau (e.g. 2000) and many other figures associated with the French post-structuralism). In particular, I draw on Lotman's notion of tropological meaning-generation (1990) coupled with Laclau's tropological

movement and hegemonic closure (2000; cf. Selg and Ventsel 2008). Among other key inspirations, Bauman's analysis of 'culture as praxis' (1999) opened up the possibility of approaching culture with a focus on the production of meaning, and his analysis of cultural conditioning of human lived realities served as an avenue for developing the culture-power nexus below, and for linking the meaning-generation problematic to disparate anthropological insights into the cultural ordering of violence (such as Bowman 2001).

Apart from bringing together very diverse sources of insight into an interdisciplinary framework for analysis, the present work can claim other innovations. That individual meanings are mutable and unstable, and contingent upon their differentiation from other meanings, is scarcely a novel idea (e.g. de Saussure 1931; Barth 1969; Todorov 1998), and the attention of IR scholars has logically been focused on the processes by which they acquire stability (such as discursive articulation) (e.g. Campbell 1992; Bhabha 1994; Hansen 2006). The larger frameworks in which meanings are produced and articulated – such as 'language' or 'culture' – have also received coverage, but mainly in the light of their stabilising effects on meanings (e.g. Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Bauman 1999)). What is less apparent (and what the following discussion will seek to illuminate) is that such broader 'frameworks of meanings' themselves (most topically, culture) can partake of the instability usually associated with individual meanings, and are also subject to all the vagaries of meaning-making. This is particularly relevant in view of the application of the developed framework to the analysis of conflict, which is often claimed to have a destabilising effect on culture (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, such 'isomorphous' involvement in meaning-generation (cf. Lotman 1990) collapses the neat separation into the 'object-language' of culture and meta-language of cultural theory or critique (which greatly contributes to the notoriety of culture as an 'inconvenient' object for scholarly study (cf. Wuthnow et al. 1984)). As noted by Geertz, the attempts to 'make sense' of their own culture occupy the same discursive plane as the 'stuff' of culture conveyed by the informants, which makes the boundary between culture as the 'mode of representation and [its] substantive content' rather ephemeral (1973: 15-6). In this chapter I try to demonstrate that the processes and effects of meaning-generation not only occur at every 'order of discourse' (Gunnell 1998) but also account for the noted fusion between them (cf. Pechey 1989).

It may appear that a treatment of culture based on the examination of processes and effects of meaning-generation constitutes yet another example of 'evasion tactics' described in the Introduction, whereby discussion of culture is reduced to some easier definable aspect (e.g. identity) or to a select set of terms that on the face of it may even appear tangential to culture. Such a charge would not be totally unfounded. However, while the focus on meaning-generation is not the only one possible, or most direct, way of approaching a discussion of culture, it is not altogether arbitrary, since references to 'meanings' feature in most definitions of culture (see e.g. Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952: 81-90). Yet, meaning-generation can (as shown by generations of linguists and semioticians) also be discussed without reference to culture (e.g. as a 'technical' aspect of language). In this sense, the focus on meaning-generation offers flexible terms of engagement with the problematic of

culture, since it can be placed – heuristically – both within and outside what is considered 'culture,' which provides a useful angle from which to examine the problematic of delimitation of culture as such. With respect to the topic of culture, such flexibility, coupled with full awareness of the 'embedded' position of the researcher, appears more fruitful than (unattainable) methodological rigour.

In a practical sense, the offered framework has both an advantage and a disadvantage with respect to its possible applications. Advantage, because it does not in any way restrict the relevant material for analysis, and does not involve its implicit pre-selection in the way that general classificatory frameworks do (such as Douglas' grid-group theory (1970, 2004)). Its disadvantage consists in that the open-endedness coded into any inductive approach may appear intimidating to less critically inclined researchers, and certainly to practitioners attempting 'schematic' conflict analyses with a cultural 'twist.' However, one of the contentions behind the present approach is that cultural analysis of conflict and peacebuilding is fruitless (if not counterproductive) if conducted within the confines of pre-conceived categories which severely limit what is perceived as the relevant material for study (cf. Chabal and Daloz 2006), and that engagement with culture cannot be successfully accommodated within the dominant 'project-management' approach to peacebuilding (MacGinty 2003) with its language of 'objectives' and 'milestones' and proliferation of guidelines, checklists and inventories (e.g. EC s.a.; UNDP 2004a). An important ambition of this thesis is to provide a framework that would not in itself fix the terms of discussion about culture, but would offer tools for exposing the means used to 'stabilise' the debate in accord with one or another set of interests.

Aspects of cultural analysis (of conflict and peacebuilding)

The aspects of culture formulated below (with a heuristic purpose in mind, rather than following 'natural' analytical distinctions) is an attempt to unpack the logic of meaning-generation and world-making, which some analysts (e.g. Bauman 1999; Lotman 1990; cf. Demerath 2002) view as the 'prime' cultural activity. The first aspect refers to the isolation and production of particular meanings: 'culture as signification.' The second aspect covers the political dimension of this (i.e. emphasising and de-emphasising possibilities, selecting meanings as opposed to de-selecting and de-legitimising other possibilities of meaning): 'culture as politics.' The third aspect is that of a dynamic relation of the above to the processes and effects of change (setting the scene for a discussion of problems such as how to conceptualise and evaluate cultural change, the impact of cross-cultural communication, amalgamation etc.) and to the expressive dimension of culture: 'culture as rhetoric.[2]' In a sense, this proposed division into 'culture as'[3] is

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[2] 'Rhetoric' here should not be understood narrowly as a reference to the toolkit of literary 'embellishment,' but as a general 'tropological' property of language and text explored in post-structuralist and semiotic works (Lotman 1990; Laclau 2000, 2006; Jakobson 1971) that refer to the impossibility of 'pure' meanings and their unproblematic communication, and uncover instead the inherent 'contagiousness' of meanings borne out of tension and 'violence' of their production.

[3] Although the tripartite 'culture as …' classification is reminiscent of Bauman's (1999), it does not explicitly seek to replicate or enhance it, and focuses mainly on issues raised by Bauman's third perspective on culture 'as praxis'.

somewhat artificial, since each of the above aspects – meaning-making, power, and rhetorical 'contagiousness' – is a necessary prerequisite for the possibility of any of the others, so the justification for this sub-division is only in the degree of emphasis. Neither does this division strictly follow the areas of application. Contrary to the possible initial perception, the first aspect does not strictly refer to the micro-level of semiotics: meanings are created, and re-negotiated in daily life, as well as in high (and bureaucratic) politics, through a variety of means and avenues, from everyday practices and transactions to the separate and 'elevated' spheres of existence (art, philosophy, science, etc.). Similarly, the two other aspects affect both the production of micro-level, 'linguistic' meanings and the social-level discourses and practices. The remainder of this section will briefly introduce the issues which fall under the outlined three aspects of cultural analysis, while the more in-depth consideration of each of these in turn will follow in the subsequent sections of the chapter.

(i) 'Culture as signification'

This aspect refers to the process of constitution of meaning through *selection* of particular meanings from the wider array of possible meanings and their *naturalisation* as part of 'incontestable' social reality. Such *'ordering' of reality*, to use Bauman's term (1999), occurs on many levels, from the (micro-level) (re-)production of meanings that make up the 'stuff' of culture, to the delineation of 'culture' in general (as well as particular 'cultures') at the macro-pole of this continuum. The construction and production of identity – individual and collective – also fall under this category. Another way of referring to this aspect of culture would be through the problem of definition and delineation, taken broadly. While some aspects of this problem, concerning the difficulties of defining the concept of culture, have been outlined above, other problematic aspects include difficulties of grasping the limitations arising from being immersed in a particular culture, as well as the general mechanism of boundary-drawing which, as many theorists claim, is one of the fundamental principles of operation of 'culture' (e.g. Lotman 1992b; Bauman 1999). Since the delimitation serves to constitute the 'self' vis-à-vis 'other(s),' the issue of transgression of the borders of identity and alterity at many levels, including inter-cultural communication and understanding, also needs considering here, although it is more fully explored in relation to the third, 'rhetorical' aspect of cultural meaning-generation. The ordering/reality-making implications of casting the outlined problematic in terms of culture also form the subject of discussion in this section, since the isolation of a specifically 'cultural' domain and its delimitation constitute a case of meaning-generation. Although many of the noted issues can – and have been – addressed from the perspective of discourse analysis (e.g. George 1994; Said 1978; Kapoor 2008), references to discourse often have the effect of subsuming the array of underlying significational dynamics, rather than explicating them. For this reason, I largely leave 'discourse' out of the conceptual apparatus used here, other than in references to textual practices, as in 'discourses of liberal peacebuilding.'

With regard to conflict and peacebuilding, the relevance of the processes and effects of meaning-generation is manifold. Although the processes of meaning-generation underlie even the traditional terms of discussion of conflict and peace, they are seldom explicated (the symbolic-interactionist treatment of conflict and negotiation

being one of the rare exceptions (see Väyrynen 2001)). Yet, the very possibility of conflict rests on a curious mixture of agreement and disagreement over certain meanings and on the expansion and alteration of habitual channels for their expression and communication. Peacebuilding, in turn, can be seen not only as a vehicle for communicating specific meanings and interpretations, but also as a wider framework for their legitimation and stabilisation (and, as such, a culture with the accompanying traits and effects of reality-making). Through the inclusion (and exclusion) of practices, actors, concepts and ideas in the domain of 'liberal peace,' peacebuilding participates in the 'ordering of reality,' i.e. enabling some and disabling other terms of organising human affairs and articulating their ends. This 'ordering' has very real disciplinary connotations (in the Foucauldian sense), in terms of de/legitimising particular types of behaviour, instilling particular sets of values (while condemning others), and putting in place the mechanisms enabling surveillance and compliance with the established 'rules' (Kapoor 2008: 19-20, 25-8; DfID 2000b: 53).

Meaning-generation offers an interesting vantage point for examining the conceptualisations of peacebuilding (i.e. the ends and means of pursuing the liberal peace) from 'within' and 'without' the dominant discourse, which can help grasp not only how particular terms of discussing conflict and peace are enabled or disabled, but also how that shapes the construction of liberal actors and the production of identities 'compatible' with liberal peace (e.g. through delegitimising 'malignant nationalisms' (see Luoma-Aho 2002)). Liberal peacebuilding's 'mute' attitude towards culture (see Chapter 4), stemming from a self-image of a 'technical' fix which is outside and beyond culture, also presents an interesting issue for consideration in connection with meaning-generation: Quite apart from the blindness towards its own 'cultural' characteristics, what liberal peacebuilding defines as pertaining to 'local culture' and what it places outside it can say a great deal about liberal peacebuilding itself, from beliefs regarding the possibility (and plausibility) of influencing culture to culture's place on the conceptual horizon of liberal mentality. The reverse relationship (i.e. local reception of liberal peacebuilding and understanding of what it tries to achieve) is, of course, also highly relevant, as are ideas that local actors may have about the possibility of influencing the terms of created peace and interacting with peacebuilding actors. The theoretical grounds for analysing these aspects of liberal peacebuilding will be set out in this chapter, and applied to the relationship between the liberal peace and 'local culture,' and explicating the 'culture' of liberal peace itself, in the two chapters to follow (respectively, 5 and 4).

(ii) 'Culture as politics'

Not wholly distinct from the above, this section introduces an explicit emphasis on the power dimension of culture and (cultural) constitution of the political, through a focus on the selection and naturalisation of meanings and the related dynamics of totalisation and fragmentation (observable both on the conceptual plane – as separation or fusion of conceptual categories and spaces – and empirically, in the dynamics of commonality and societal boundary-drawing). A focus on the power dimension of culture highlights the meaning-generation and societal dynamics as two interrelated aspects of the cultural 'production' of reality, albeit taking place at

analytically distinct levels (earlier heuristically referred to as 'micro-' and 'macro-level' meaning-production).

The aim of this discussion is to explicate the connections between culture and power – the most contentious issue not just with regard to peacebuilding but for IR generally. In other words, the idea is to relate the power dimension not just to the constitution of knowledge (in the stride of Foucault (1965, 2002a) and Lyotard (1984)), but to the very constitution of meaning, thus emphasising the inevitably 'political' nature of culture. Power is involved in – and manifested through – the ambivalent nature of cultural ordering of reality, in which world-making is never far from world-unmaking, and the opening of some cultural possibilities is coterminous with the foreclosing of others. The cultural constitution of the 'political' as a realm 'legitimately' concerned with power issues in society also forms an important focus in this section, as do its particular outcomes (like the role of the 'invisible' realm in African politics (Ellis 1999; Chabal and Daloz 2006)). The redrawing of the boundaries of the political by the liberal peace discourse – evident in de-politicising many aspects of peacebuilding which are presented as technical rather than political issues (cf. Duffield 2001: 50) – also merits attention in this connection.

Needless to say, the issue of what kinds of worlds are created and put out of existence by liberal peacebuilding has a great empirical relevance. Liberal peacebuilding (as perhaps any approaches to conflict since the development of second-generation problem-solving approaches) is often accused of being somewhat insensitive to the issue of power: it ignores power asymmetries on the ground, and fails to factor them into assessing the impact of interventions (although attempts are being made to raise awareness of, if not rectify, this (*UN PBC 2007*)). Given that peacebuilding is also very similarly 'indisposed' towards culture (i.e. blind to its own 'culture' as well as its impact on cultures with which it interacts), a focus on the relationship between culture and power may assist in investigating the reasons for such attitudes (or at least their similarity). The power effects of liberal peacebuilding also refer to the spectrum of ideas about the permissible forms and limits of the 'political,' and their clashes with local understandings of power (as well as among the latter, as manifested, for instance, in a double-handed treatment of the involvement of diviners and their 'invisible' powers in state politics in Sierra Leone, which, Shaw claims (2002: 260), has arisen in response to a juxtaposition of 'backward' and 'enlightened' understandings of politics not least due to the decades of Western involvement). On a practical level, the question also refers to the cultural consequences (i.e. world-(re-)making involved) of using different kinds of power in the interventions. The adverse effects of the military habitus on peace processes is a case in point (Fetherston and Nordstrom 1995; Edkins 2003: 204; Echavarria 2007), and so is the employment of meaning-generation in the bureaucratic process of state-building – through the creation of new 'vocabularies' and introduction of new concepts (e.g. accountability, human rights, and the entire language of project-management in both state and non-state sphere) which engender their own societal and power dynamics (e.g. Helander 2005; Kapoor 2008: 27-8). The coupling of seemingly 'neutral' objectives of conflict resolution and reconciliation with promoting particular forms of political institutions and interests is also undoubtedly an issue worth looking into from the perspective of power dimension of culture;

Shaw's (2005) analysis of state-building connotations of Sierra Leone's TRC is a powerful example in this regard.

(iii) 'Culture as rhetoric'

The section on 'culture as rhetoric' focuses on the dynamics of encounters and exchanges, enabled by what can be referred to as the generally (and inescapably) tropological character of meanings. Tropes, the subject matter of rhetoric, have been shown in the late-twentieth century literary, semiotic and anthropological studies to constitute much more than accessory 'embellishments' of verbal expression. In fact, they have come to be viewed as the necessary prerequisite of expression, both verbal and beyond, and instrumental in the generation of any meaning (see e.g. Lotman 1990: 36-7; Laclau 2000: 232-5; de Man 1996; Clifford 1986b; Pratt 1986).[4] Operating through displacement, allusion, substitution and so on, tropes constitute 'a semantic transposition from a sign *in praesentia* to a sign *in absentia*' (Schofer and Rice 1977, quoted in Lotman 1990: 40), and pinpoint the dynamic aspect of culture and the fluid character of meanings. In Lotman's terms, tropes emerge at the points of 'illegitimate' rapprochement between (minimally) two 'mutually untranslatable languages' (understood broadly as different types of coding or organisation) which are both necessarily present in any situation of signification (Lotman 1990: 2; 36-7; Viktorova 2003). Tropes, thus, are the 'indissoluble' traces of such illegitimate translations as well as their means (Lotman 1990: 2). For Laclau, tropes serve as a prerequisite of signification as such, through, paradoxically, enabling 'closures' of the essentially differential structure of any discourse (2000, 2006: 114; cf. Selg and Ventsel 2008).

This section employs the notions associated with such tropological 'anomalies' for illuminating the situations of unlikely encounters that liberal peacebuilding and conflict routinely bring about, but also for explicating the tacit 'self-explanatory' connections between the overarching objective of building 'peace' and the particular institutional formats in which it is framed (see Chapter 5). The notion of rhetoric – both as it is employed here, and in the more traditional sense of the expressive apparatus of language – can also illuminate the processes of meaning-generation unfolding in the tension between the often contradictory simultaneous perceptions of the 'other.' Examples include Bhabha's analysis of the 'colonial stereotype,' which is 'split' in its 'enunciation' of the qualities of the colonial subject, coupling simple-mindedness with skilful lying, innocence with rampant sexuality, dependability with treachery, and so on (1994: 33, 82; Kapoor 2008: 7). But such rhetorical 'double inscription' (Bhabha 1994: 108) can also be observed in the tension between the condemnation of the local culture as a source of conflict (CEDAW 1979; Merry 2003; Kapoor 2008: 35) and idealisation of the 'indigenous' peace-making (MacGinty 2008; Richmond 2007a), as well as between the ameliorative ambitions and hegemonic power practices of the liberal peace itself. As well as enabling the generation of meaning, tropological connections also offer insight into its inherent instability (cf. Bhabha 1994; Kapoor 2008: 7-8).

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[4] James Clifford writes of a '"revival" of rhetoric by a diverse group of literary and cultural theorists (Roland Barthes, Kenneth Burke, Gerard Genette, Michel de Certeau, Hayden White, Paul de Man, and Michel Bonjour among them) …' (1986b: 100).

Inspired by a 'rhetorical' perspective on encounters such as those between the local culture and conflict; conflicts and their international environment; between the 'local' attempts at pacification and liberal peacebuilding; and so on, this section also looks at the issues of cultural continuity, dynamism and change, and relates them to the problematic of violent conflict and peacebuilding. One lens through which cultural change and continuity can be conceptualised is Lotman's 'culture and explosion' paradigm (1992a) which emphasises the co-existence of multiple cultural 'possibles' and delves into the questions of what triggers actualisation of one or another latent cultural 'template' (cf. Swidler 1986), and whether cultural development advances by means of gradual and imperceptible change, or sudden 'explosive' innovation. Other aspects enabled by a focus on the tropological constitution of meaning include approaching the discourse of liberal peacebuilding as a particular genre and exploring its constitutive principles and horizons of the possible (a theme that resonates with the second, power-related aspect of this framework) (cf. Bourdieu 1990: 64).

All in all, issues considered here are among the thorniest problems plaguing both cultural analysis of conflict and the discourse and practice of peacebuilding. Liberal peacebuilding seems to have immense trouble with conceptualising the change its activities effect in local cultures, as well as the changes introduced by violent conflict (see Chapter 2). It can also be argued that the liberal peacebuilding paradigm experiences difficulties with picturing the path of cultural change more generally, as can be gleaned from the dominant ideas of development. These do not leave much space for culture, betraying as they do an underlying belief in a linear character of development, a sort of 'end of history' thinking exemplified in the uniform ends of development and peacebuilding (cf. Echavarria 2007). The effective 'othering' of violence in liberal peacebuilding (cf. Richards 2005a; Nordstrom 1994) also contributes to the silencing of its problematic relationship with culture in the discourse of liberal peace (Nordstrom 2004). While on the one hand, this means that 'cultures of violence' remain unaddressed in peacebuilding operations, on the other, the poor understanding of constitutive relations between culture and violence may lead to wholesale condemnation of entire cultures once these links are suspected, which risks disabling their reverse potential – the cultural mechanisms of control over violence which could be instrumental for conflict transformation (or 'cultures of peace' (cf. Boulding 2004)). Relatedly, the recognition that cultural change is 'happening anyway,' regardless of the impact of liberal peacebuilding (e.g. *Large 2007*), begs a reconsideration of the impact of violent conflict on the pace and direction of such change and the question of its normative assessment. While the power dimension evident in this, once more, refers back to the section (ii), the definition of what constitutes the state of war or peace (cf. Zulaika and Douglass 1996) also invokes the definitional issues covered in section (i). Even aside from the liberal peacebuilding discourse, the relationship between culture and conflict (and violence) offers rich 'tropological' substrate for examination – as does culture-specific discussion of the possibilities of conflict resolution.

The question of what is achieved by elucidating a common 'cultural' dimension of the diverse issues discussed in this chapter is an important one, and will be

instrumental in assessing the possible impact of any discourse on culture in connection with peacebuilding. Among the benefits, one can suggest bringing out the particular dynamics or conceptual linkages inherent in culture, which allow the actors to grasp the common underpinnings of issues encountered in conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding. But therein lie also the dangers of naturalising these linkages; it is important, therefore, to preserve a sense of incomplete nature of this theorising. On the other hand, the question of what is lost by not positioning these various issues within a common context of 'cultural' vocabulary also needs looking into. This question will inform the following discussion and direct the investigation in the empirical chapters (4 and 5).

(i) Culture as signification

Although signification has traditionally been a province of semiotics[5] and linguistics, 'meaning-making' has also been branded as the prime cultural activity (Demerath 2002; Chabal and Daloz 2006; cf. Bauman 1999). In some conceptions of culture, even the function of communication in a broad sense is attributed to culture rather than to language, which is presented as but one of the domains in which cultural 'ordering' of reality takes place:

> we speak of communication whenever there are some limits imposed on what is possible or what can happen and what the probability of its occurrence is. We speak of communication whenever a set of events is ordered, which means to some extent predictable. If we now go from the sociological perspective to structural linguistics and not the other way round, we look at the totality of human activity as an endeavour to order, to organize, to make predictable and manageable the living space of human beings, and the language discloses itself to us as one of the devices developed to serve this over-all aim: a device cut to the measure of communication in the narrower sense. Instead of all the culture being a set of particularizations of the communicative function embodied in language, the language turns into one of the many instruments of the generalized effort of ordering, laboured on by the culture as a whole. (Bauman 1999: 74-5)

A certain blurring of boundaries between semiotics and culture studies is also evident in the frequent mutual 'contraband' of respective subject-matters: for instance, in Lotman's works, discussions pertaining to culture and the genesis of meaning are frequently employed for mutual illumination of these issues (e.g. 1990), while Geertz uses semiotic categories as a cornerstone in his *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). Such earlier 'transgressions' have paved the way for the ones attempted in the current framework.

In most post-structuralist accounts,[6] the issue of signification involves more than establishing the principles and mechanisms of correspondence between the signifiers

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[5] Here denoting all branches of the preoccupation with 'sign systems,' including de Saussure's semiology (1931), Peirce's semiotics (1931-58) and their contemporary applications and variations.
[6] Although semiotic post-structuralism is only one of the existing semiotic schools (grown out of de Saussure's semiology), its chief competitor – the 'pragmatist' school based on the works of Charles Sanders Peirce – employs similar notions regarding the genesis of meaning by way of irreducible non-coincidence between the signifier and signified (Peirce 1931-58; cf. Holquist 1990: 35-6), thus also opening up possibilities for interpreting the constitution of meaning in a tropological vein. Post-

(readily observable as elements of a language) and signified (the ideational plane of meaning). While some early 'provocative' notions, such as de Saussure's claim regarding the arbitrariness of connections between elements of these two planes, were duly honoured by post-structuralists (e.g. Laclau 2000: 234), other dominant structuralist ideas, such as the presumption of neat structural arrangement of languages into an 'alphabet' (constituent elements of language) and 'grammar' (a system of rules governing their use) which analytically precede, and 'preside' over, any actual utterances in that language, came under persistent critique (e.g. Derrida 1976, 1978; Barthes 1982). The primacy of the 'language' as an abstract construction of an all-encompassing system became questioned, and towards late 1960s-early 1970s the attention shifted to the actual instances, conditions, and effects of its use. This focus on 'speech' (and 'writing') yielded realisation that the meanings invoked by such instances of language use, far from being uncontroversially conveyed by (or 'accessed' through) the plane of signifiers, have to be re-negotiated and re-established with each use.

This realisation serves not to disclaim the empirical existence of recurring meanings and their means of expression, but rather to question any presumed stability of meanings, or the neutrality of signifiers in relation to the conveyed meanings. One reason for this lies in the intertextual 'residue' that the words acquire from their earlier uses, and thus in every utterance the speaker has to contend with what Bakhtin aptly termed 'the word of another' (*'chuzhoe slovo'*) (Bakhtin 1984; cf. Bauman 1978: 170; cf. Lotman 1990: 18-9; Todorov 1998: 10). But the tension of negotiating the intended meanings amidst the traces of previous uses is not the only issue making the 'identification' of meanings problematic. An equally tenuous problem is connected with the presumption of 'meaningfulness' as such, since the isolation of certain meanings from the infinite (and indiscrete) continuum of potential ones cannot proceed without a simultaneous 'de-selection' of others (cf. Holquist 1990: 47-48; Todorov 1998: 82; Kapoor 2008: 21). The resulting (partial) repertoire of meanings, nevertheless, assumes the connotations of completeness (cf. Doty 1998: 145; Kramsch 2003); thus, substitution and representation play an active part already in the constitution of language and its meaningful entities, which alludes to the essentially tropological nature of any meaning. Given the widespread acceptance among the post-structuralist thinkers of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity – implying that the existing repertoire of meanings defines our perception of the world and not vice versa (Sapir 1983; Whorf 1956; Žižek 1989) – it is easy to see how the creation of reality through the naming of its constituent parts and processes carries the connotations of power (e.g. Laclau 2006; Selg and Ventsel 2008).

'Ordering' and meaning-generation

Analytically, the organisation and generation of meaning can be understood in terms of 'ordering' that, in Bauman's view, constitutes the primary function of culture (1999: 75, 96). This generic function of ordering human lives arises in response to the 'under-determined' character of the human condition (Bauman 1999: xii-xiii):

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structuralism has been employed here as a reference point since it shares the focus on signification and rhetoric with another central issue of this framework – the problematic of power.

Although the natural 'determinants' specify the means and purposes of human activity to some extent, particular ways of going about things are largely left to human choice. The 'under-determined' character of life thus opens 'up a space for freedom and self-assertion,' but – simultaneously – allows 'the use of that very freedom to limit its scope,' since, although ultimately arbitrary, past choices affect future preferences and serve to trim the 'potentially infinite choices' down to 'a finite, comprehensible and manageable pattern' (Bauman 1999: xii-xiii). Although the choices made in the conditions of under-determinacy and the resulting patterns of practice are seldom immutable or invariable, particular ways of going about things become associated with achieving the vital ends of human activity and thus invested with value (and meaningfulness) of their own – order 'being synonymous with the intelligible and meaningful' (Bauman 1999: 96; cf. Demerath 2002). This process reduces unpredictability and increases the orderliness of human lives (Bauman 1999: xiv; cf. Katzenstein 1997: 49), with production of cultural practices mirroring, and sometimes converging with, the selection and establishment of meanings through what is traditionally labelled 'signification.' Culture, thus, 'fills in' and organises the space created by the arbitrariness of the human condition, allowing us to 'make sense' of our world(s) (cf. Demerath 2002), so that 'all human activity is conceived, imagined, and carried out in and amidst symbolic units and relations' (Friedrich 1989: 298, quoted in Donnan and Wilson 1999: 155). Thus, Weber's famous insight that 'man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun' (quoted in Geertz 1973: 5) has become a starting point for approaching culture as 'the structures of meaning through which men give shape to their experience' (Geertz 1973: 312; cf. Chabal and Daloz 2006: 25).

Bauman is not unique in attributing the genesis of culture to the under-determined character of human lives. Peter Berger, likewise, maintains that although the human species have natural drives, the manner for their realisation is unspecified and undirected, owing to the underdeveloped instinctual apparatus which leaves humans inherently vulnerable (see Wuthnow et al. 1984: 23-4). Culture thus comes to the aid of nature by introducing man-made means and procedures to compensate for the instinctual uncertainties of the 'functionally incomplete … human nervous system' (Geertz 2001: 205). The understanding of culture as accumulated wisdom of adaptation to given ecological niches, communicated and passed on to future generations, is echoed by Triandis (1994) and Lal (1999; cf. Cohen 1998: 117). In some instances, the noted freedom of choice offered by culture (Bauman 1999: xii) leads to its conceptual juxtaposition with the natural determinants, as well as to a symbolic re-appropriation of nature through the ascription of cultural meanings to 'natural' objects and drives (Lotman 1990). Although Bauman's (1999) account of culture stresses its origins (demonstrating how it came to 'fill' the gap left by under-determinacy), his portrayal of the workings of culture is not limited to its initial 'creation.' The genesis of culture is best understood synchronically, as a continuous and on-going (re-)'production of culture as being opposed to ambiguity' (Demerath 2002: 220): a 'pre-culture' stage in the human development is possibly an even greater abstraction than 'the state of nature' in political philosophy.

Given that the very possibility of meaning depends on the irreducible non-coincidence between the signifier and signified (i.e. to mean anything, a sign must

point beyond its immediate presence), signification reduces things and phenomena to one aspect which takes on the representational functions for the whole (Holquist 1990: 47-8; Todorov 1998: 82). The 'inadequacy' of representation (which is only made possible by a degree of distortion (cf. Doty 1998: 144-5)) thus accompanies every instance of human knowledge of the world and self, from signification in the strict semiotic sense to the generation of particular visions of human reality. Demerath admits as much noting that all 'three basic dimensions of cultural production through which we make our worlds meaningful' – articulation, typification and orientation of experience (2002: 208) – are 'forms of manipulation' (ibid.: 214). Story-telling or coming to terms with one's experience, for instance, also employ this 'technique' through isolating certain elements from the continuous flow of experience and re-connecting them with a view to a discovered 'purpose' of one or another sequence of events (Black 1991: 161). The same mechanism is at work in the world of social relations, where it creates the inevitably partial descriptions of social reality which naturalise 'one set of social relations at the expense of others' in the 'acts of hegemonic representation' (Kramsch 2003: 213-4), successfully blinding one to the fact of their partiality (George 1994: 9-11; Häkli 1996). In a similar vein, the particular cultural 'choices' often come to be seen as equivalent, in function and importance, to the (universal) ends they help to achieve, standing in for those ends in the 'shared construction of reality' (Cohen 1998: 117; cf. d'Andrade 1984; Ross 1998: 156). Contrary to Chabal and Daloz's ambition of excluding values from the cultural study of politics on the grounds that they represent a secondary valorisation of the established cultural options (2006), 'values' in this reading become very difficult to dissociate from 'meanings,' since the axiological dimension is invoked by the partial nature of selecting a set of meanings and naturalising it as covering the entire spectrum of the meaningful and possible.

Roland Barthes has noted that not all cultural conventions serve to signify (1969: 41): some function rather in a speech act-like capacity of enunciating a certain state of affairs which thereby effectively comes into being (Bauman 1999: 71; cf. Austin 1975). But even the signification 'proper,' through producing a set of meanings and the means for their expression, has a similar performative effect: particular states of reality may be seen as being 'called into existence' through evoking what is meaningful in their context (cf. George 1994). This is not necessarily to deny the existence of extra-linguistic reality, but to emphasise that 'if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences' (Thomas and Thomas 1928: 572, quoted in Massey 1998), and that the way in which real occurrences are interpreted defines how they are addressed by human agents (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 108; Selg and Ventsel 2008).

All that has been said about the cultural construction of meaning is, of course, also applicable to the concept of culture and the sphere of meaningfulness it engenders, once culture itself becomes an object of analytical scrutiny. And since situations usually enable variable terms of discussion, the question of what is imported into a discussion if it is cast in a cultural 'vocabulary' needs to be asked. What does a statement about culture introduce into a discussion of conflict and peacebuilding that is left untouched by the statements about, say, the economic or political? This is not

an idle question, since there is a perceptible trend of presenting culture as a concept best left alone in the context of conflict analysis (cf. Scott 2003); and the implications of doing so (as well as invoking culture) will be discussed below in relation to the power dimension of world-making (ii). Here, however, another mirror-effect (where the discussion of the workings of culture, in a tropological twist, is turned onto the analysis of culture as an analytical category and an element of discourse) needs considering – namely, the issue of definition.

Definitional dynamics

One of the greatest problems for the consideration of culture in the context of peacebuilding is definitional. It refers not only to the problems encountered on the path of defining culture as a concept (i.e. circumscribing what belongs to culture as opposed to that which does not), but also to the issue of identifying particular cultural entities and drawing boundaries between 'different' cultures. To complicate matters further, the process of isolating things 'cultural' from the rest largely mirrors the pattern of 'primary' meaning-generation Bauman (1999) associates with culture (i.e. its production of the realm of the meaningful), and falls under Lotman's notion of 'secondary' self-description of a semiotic system as a deliberate act of identification (e.g. 1990). While such deliberateness may be used to recognise the cases of 'secondary' delimitation as opposed to 'primary' production of meaningful entities, its concomitant naturalisation makes it as difficult to 'undo' as the interests and values inherent in 'primary' cultural meanings (cf. Brown 2005: 49). 'Primary' and 'secondary' signification, as will be shown on the example of defining culture(s), share many essential features which suggests certain isomorphism and isofunctionalism (Lotman 1990), and thus legitimately brings the issue of definition into the orbit of the meaning-generation problematic. One of the predominant trends of defining culture, based on its conceptualisation as 'the organisation of meaning' (cf. Hudson 1997b), bears witness to this.

Definitions of culture as *a system of shared meanings* (variations of this formulation notwithstanding) have consistently cropped up in the anthropological and other social science literature for over sixty years (see e.g. Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952; Kluckhohn 1957; Geertz 1973, 1983; d'Andrade 1984; Verweij et al. 1998: 2; Cohen 1998: 117; Rubinstein 1998: 190; Brumann 1999; Demerath 2002: 208), to refer to the ability of culture both to be learned and communicated and to serve as a common framework that makes communication possible. This is also in line with Wittgensteinian concept of 'language games' which expresses the notion that understanding can only be made possible through a conventional ascription of correspondences between words and meanings, shared by a number of speakers (Buckley-Zistel 2006: 8, referring to Wittgenstein 1993, section 65). In recent years, anthropologists have come to question the notion of 'shared meanings' in view of a more dynamic understanding of culture as a space of eternal contestation and negotiation of meanings (Förster 2006; cf. Ferme 2001). As a parallel development, the presumption of cultural coherence and homogeneity that governed earlier anthropological studies of the cultural 'wholes' seems to have given way to a recognition that 'the sharing of learned traits among humans is never perfect,' although this does not deny the non-random character of cultural distribution (Brumann 1999: S1; cf. Hannerz 1992; Avruch 1998). Scholars of politics and IR,

although noted for importing definitions of culture from anthropological literature (Greenhouse 1987), have not entirely caught up with these developments (see e.g. Verweij et al. 1998; Hohe 2002a; Chabal and Daloz 2006), which makes a case for revisiting the assumptions embedded in the understanding of culture as a system of shared meanings in view of the offered meaning-generation paradigm.

Ironically, the flaws inherent in the understanding of culture as a system of shared meanings duly reflect the most problematic aspect of culture that has become prominent in the context of peacebuilding. It relies on the notion of systemicness (i.e. inter-related character of meanings where each meaning is defined in relation to others) which, according to Bauman (1999), is an obsolete state for contemporary cultures, because of their openness and mutual illumination (Bakhtin 1975: 180-81, 455) as well as 'cross-contamination:'

> Even if cultures were once complete systems in which all units were crucial and indispensable for the survival of all the others, they most certainly have ceased to be such. (Bauman 1999: xliii)

Given the amalgamated, eclectic nature of most 'identifiable cultures' (Ferguson 1998: 24), it is surprising that we can still speak of cultures as delimited entities. However, the understanding of cultural delimitation as an ongoing process enables interpreting cultural change as a continual appropriation, negotiation, and 'digestion' of external cultural influences (as evident in Hohe's (2002a) mention of the Timorese 'subversion' of foreign powers through their addition to the traditional authority structure). This does not deny the impossibility of approaching 'cultures' in their 'pure' form, or counter de Certeau's observation that in situations where the initial 'communities' have all but dissolved into the state of hybridity and diffusion, re-communitarisation is often limiting and violent (1997). Nor does this deprive of substance Merry's warning that the '[t]hinking about culture as a homogenous, integrated, and consensual system' is problematic because it means that cultures have to be 'accepted or criticized as a whole' (2003: 56). But it does draw attention to the perceived need to re-effect cultural delimitation despite the fact that the '"[i]nside" and "outside" have lost much of their once so clear meaning' (Bauman 1999: xxiv). From this perspective, however, the presumption of 'natural' systemicness of cultures gives way to the recognition of 'cultural' constitution of such cultural 'wholes,' hinting at a multi-storey character of cultural meaning-making.

Delimiting culture on the basis of shared meanings is also problematic in another respect. The empirical reality of cross-cultural communication (however imperfect) suggests that at least some meanings are shared across cultures, and also begs the question of what makes cross-cultural understanding and 'translation' possible beyond the sphere of 'shared meanings' proper. Likewise, the self-evidence of cultural boundaries following the limits of shared meanings can be questioned from within: many scholars have noted the 'imperfect' cultural distribution of meanings within what is conventionally identified as single and 'unitary' cultures (with some meanings being limited to particular 'sub-cultures,' professional spheres or social strata) (e.g. Avruch 1998: 18-9; Brumann 1999: S6). Thus, 'objective' empirical grounds for determining the boundaries of a given culture become increasingly

shaky, since cultural boundaries appear to incorporate almost as much difference as they exclude. It may be argued that cross-cultural communication is enabled by shared cultural elements that, owing to modern cultural hybridity and amalgamation, have become truly global in reach (an argument that, as Avruch notes with reference to the studies of negotiations, has been used for discrediting the influence of 'local' cultures on the processes of international politics (1998)). However, that still leaves one with questions regarding the grounds for interaction between such globalised elements of culture and their 'local' counterparts. Much more promising for illuminating the processes of cultural delimitation and cross-cultural communication is Lotman's insight about identity as a product of arbitrary 'self-description' that elevates certain elements of difference and sameness into the defining features of a given culture (1990: 128-38; cf. Barth 1969). The deliberate singling out the corpus of 'relevant' shared meanings to define the 'essence' of one or another culture, although somewhat questionable as an analytical task,[7] seems to offer empirical grounds for cultural self-identification (ibid.; Neumann 1999; Chabal and Daloz 2006), and it also follows the dynamic of selection and naturalisation of meanings discussed above. Crucially, this makes even cultural 'discontinuity' (Schlee 2009) into a product of essentially cultural meaning-making and boundary-drawing.

All this suggests that the problem of defining culture falls prey to the same dynamics whereby any other meanings are established and defined through cultural practices and processes: in other words, the processes associated with meaning-generation as a (primary) cultural act are also manifested in the attempts to isolate the limits of 'culture' as a separate – semiotic or sociological – phenomenon. This also suggests that the problematic of isolation of meaning and delimitation as such collapses the neat separation into analytically distinct levels (such as object- and meta-level) at which academic enquiries into culture are traditionally conducted, placing the researcher into the very midst of, and making him/her a party to, meaning-generation. This positions the embedded cultural enquiry on methodologically ambivalent grounds. On the one hand, it is not entirely undirected, since the mechanisms of signification provide the 'common architectonic moments' (Bakhtin 1993[1986]) in the relational structure of different levels and orders of discourse, offering a 'legitimate' entry point for analysis. But on the other hand, the fact that the relations of substitution and representation also 'infect' the relationship between these levels, introduces a degree of unpredictability and 'anarchy' into cultural enquiry, subordinating its course to the dynamics of meaning-generation. Cultural enquiry, just as its object, thus becomes party to significational dynamics that, to borrow Graham Pechey's formulation, make it 'deeply metaphorical in the root sense of being always "carried over," always in "translation" from one context to another' (1989: 40).

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[7] This much is suggested by the critique of earlier anthropological efforts to 'pin down' the characteristic features of particular cultures, e.g. in Crapanzano's (1986) critique of Geertz (1973); or de Certeau's (1984) critique of Bourdieu (1977; see also Neumann 2002: 634-5). However, there are ways to circumvent the hazards of 'reifying' cultures. One is enabled by a focus on the 'local' as defined through 'the socially most significant context[s]' (Chabal and Daloz 2006: 124); another – through acknowledging the inherently 'fuzzy' character of cultural boundaries (at conceptual as well as empirical levels) (Avruch 1998) – although what this implies for the entities enclosed by such fuzzy boundaries is not often speculated about (although see Connolly 2002).

Certain isomorphism in the constitution of culture as a whole and its 'basic' elements – meanings – is also replicated in the cultural dynamics of delimitation of other, superficially 'non-cultural' spheres of signification, such as the political, social, or economic. This illustrates Katzenstein's argument that 'culture in the form of symbolic systems functions as a dynamic link between levels of analysis' (1997: 47), and offers a sound starting point for a discussion of culture 'as politics' below (ii). In the remainder of this section, the definitional dynamics will be extrapolated to the processes of identity-formation.

(B)ordering and identity

Despite the common basic functions that culture plays in human collectives (such as countering the instinctual under-determinacy of the human species), the realisation of these functions takes different routes and forms depending on the particular contexts, resulting in different patterns of meanings and social order, which will – in each case – be valorised as *the* unquestionably natural state of affairs. Plurality of 'cultures' thus arises as a result of commonality becoming localised and 'constructed as the basis of distinctiveness in relation to others' (Blaney and Inayatullah 1998: 64; cf. Avruch 1998). The distinctions between the spheres of local as opposed to generic culture (Avruch 1998) may be observed analytically, with a focus on cultural 'differences … among societies' (Black and Avruch 1998: 35), or drawn instrumentally, from within a culture – as boundaries of its identity. Indeed, the necessity of drawing a line between the self and other appears to be a truly universal cultural feature: 'the most generic element in culture is precisely its dividing, differentiating function' (Bauman 1999: 34). In this light, 'generality in culture is a by-product … of mankind *not* being united into a whole; of it being, on the contrary, split into separate units' (ibid.).

Because of the crucial role that culture plays in 'enabling identification of "us" and "them" around which conflict is organised' (Ross 1998: 158), the mechanics of separation and unification involved in identity construction warrant a closer consideration. Bauman's observation that 'the role of the rules of exclusion' in culture pre-conditions the 'applicability of all other rules' (1999: 99) is well in line with the mechanism of meaning-generation discussed above: because the repertoire of possible meanings is limitless, the attainment of a sense of sameness is only possible 'by virtue of strategies which expel the surplus meanings' threatening to upset its stability (Doty 1998: 145). Identity in this sense is as much a product as it is a process of the eternal labour of identification (Lévinas 1996: 25): 'cultural homogeneity' is continually 'forced, by conscious effort, upon inherently pluralist reality' (Bauman 1999: xlii). Such homogeneity also involves a considerable degree of simplification, at the meta-level of self-description, of the actual picture of inner diversity (Lotman 1990: 128). Identity is also, crucially, a self-imposed limitation: the excluded meanings are nothing but part of the subject which is always haunted by 'the spectre of non-identity' with itself (Doty 1998: 144; cf. Fuss 1989: 33-7), so that the 'partial' nature of the subject needs to be concealed and 'totalised.' The internal unity of the subject is thus ultimately conventional, with unification belonging to the level of 'meta-,' or 'self-description' of the cultural system (Lotman 1996: 170-3, 1992b: 16-17; 1990: 128; cf. Luhmann 1995: 10). With this in mind, the ordering effort of culture can also be conceptualised as boundary-drawing,

which helps to separate the internal space – postulated as structured and meaningful – from the chaotic, or differently structured, 'outside.'

Since the sphere of meanings is defined by the sphere of cultural praxis, 'not all "natural" differences are necessarily and in all circumstances perceived as frontier posts' (Bauman 1999: 118): whether or not certain features are granted the role of 'boundary markers of identity' (Neumann 1999: 4) – or, in Barth's terms, 'diacritica' (1969) – depends on their social meanings in 'the communal praxis' (Bauman 1999: 118). Likewise, the aspects of commonality across cultural boundaries may be glossed over in the face of 'significant' differences. As with culture, the very notion of the commonality of praxis is, of course, also conventional: in a sense, presenting practices as shared 'is a reification, derived from performances … accomplished slightly differently in varying conditions and circumstances' (Barnes 2001: 25; cf. d'Andrade 1981: 180). If the commonality of cultural praxis is a reification, the studies of cultural distribution – the reach of commonality – are of relevance for determining the 'internal' fault-lines within what is habitually referred to as a single culture (see Hannerz 1992; cf. Barth 1987: 77). With fragmentation and totalisation as inseparable aspects of signification, the function of boundary-maintenance is as important for controlling internal diversity as it is for keeping the 'outside' at bay.

Ironically, the reliance of self-identification upon the articulation of non-identity with the external 'other' has to proceed by way of making that 'other' an element of self-awareness, and such 'naming' of the 'other' brings the radical alterity back onto the plane of sameness as yet another of the internally meaningful elements (Lotman 1990; Laclau 2000; cf. Selg and Ventsel 2008; Connolly 1991). Every culture, Lotman notes, 'creates not only its internal organisation, but also its own type of external disorganisation,' its own 'barbarian' (1992b: 15). Thus, the ideas of (however) radical difference are incorporated into the very identity of culture, which assists with translating the extra-systemic difference into the familiar, 'domesticated' terms (Lotman 1992b: 19). The 'residual' internal difference, which, although excluded from the cultural self-description, remains in place and undermines the hegemony of the proclaimed 'identity,' provides the ready means for representing as well as mediating the images of the external 'radical' difference (Lotman 1990). Thus, the arbitrary boundaries of identity enable not only separation, but also cross-cultural communication and translation by way of such representational chains (Lotman 1990: 140; 1992b: 12-4). Translation mechanisms also operate in negotiating the internal divisions and differences, and the inevitable imperfection of any translation (across the external cultural boundaries or within them) generates dynamism that accounts for the bulk of cultural change and development (Lotman 1992b: 16-17). In this sense, identity maintenance has a stable counterpart in increasing the scope of non-identity with the professed 'self-description,' and this ambivalence alone points to a continual character of cultural boundary-drawing and identity formation.

Another aspect of ambivalence refers to the possibility of viewing the realm beyond the boundaries of one's own culture as either composed of other cultures, or representing 'non-culture' – the domain of chaos, disorder and unpredictability (cf.

Lotman 1992b; Viktorova 2003: 144). Whether the 'outside' is recognised as the abode of other cultures or not seems to depend on how far the sphere of praxis extends beyond the limits of one's own culture:

> The first and most fundamental distinction accomplished by the human-activity-in-the-world is the one between the realm shaped by human praxis and all the rest. … The regions inaccessible to praxis, or those forcibly introduced in between praxis-regulated stretches to underlie the frontiers of order, are left behind as domains of amorphism, vagueness, chaos. (Bauman 1999: 98)

The extension of praxis into the realm of the 'outside' (through trade, communication etc.) leads to a dialogical 'enlightenment' (Bakhtin 1975) of the structured character of the external space and thus to the perception of own culture as but one of the possible 'systems of references and meanings … heterogeneous in relation to each other' (de Certeau 1997: 67-8; Bakhtin 1975, 1990b: 514-22; Holquist 1990; Viktorova 2003: 150). This heterogeneity, among other things, extends to the evolving conceptions of the self and other: for instance, while dichotomising is indispensable for the delineation of the self, the nature of the relationship between dualistic entities can vary from opposition to complementarity (as, for example, in the Chinese philosophical tradition (see Bleiker 1998: 94)). With granting of the 'cultural status' to the 'outside,' the behaviour of the 'barbarians' is imparted with certain – albeit different – regularity and logic, instead of being considered simply irrational or 'wrong' (Lotman 1992b). Such recognition, in turn, directs further praxis, leading to a formation of expectations and 'assumptions about when, where, and how people in one's culture and those in other cultures are likely to act in particular ways' (Ross 1998: 160). Yet, both possibilities – viewing the 'outside' as a radical antipode ('non-culture') or as a realm of relative difference – are present in the cultural 'matrix' of possible meanings (Bauman 1999), which enables periodic relapses into a 'monologic' perception of the other (Bakhtin 1975: 455-7) when the sense of identity is endangered (Harrison 1993; cf. Bowman 2001: 33; Olsson 2004). This also implies that the understandings of the particularism of human collectives or the universality of humankind are themselves culturally conditioned and as such can assume different form and content in different cultural contexts (e.g. *ubuntu* (Louw 1996)).

The outlined conceptualisation of cultural boundary-drawing emphasises the constructed character of both unity and difference, and helps explain the varied character of the outcome of identification (e.g. whether the encountered external difference will be accepted as another culture or not, and even whether one's own unity will be postulated as culture, nation, people, ethnic group, family, and so on, with the addition of possible variations in external vs. internal identification). It also implies a possibility of dynamic revisions and reversals of 'identity,' for the acceptance of difference as belonging to the inside, or the attempts to 'purify' the basis of own distinctiveness, result in re-drawing the boundaries of (cultural) identity. All this obviously imparts a political dimension into the very definition of culture (generally and in terms of particular cultures), just as it exposes the politics of relations with difference as relevant for the constitution of the meaning of 'self'. Indeed, the term 'culture' itself has a long tradition of being used as a tool for delineation and boundary-drawing, from Arnoldian view of culture that either is or

is not 'possessed' (and thus used to separate the 'cultured' society from the uncultured mob) (see Avruch 1998), to the anthropological practice of deploying the notion of 'culture' to negotiate the spaces of otherness (see e.g. Abu-Lughod 1991; Scott 2003; cf. Brumann 1999). This consideration connects the problematic of cultural bordering to the topic of the following section – the 'political' dimension of culture.

(ii) Culture as politics

The involvement of culture in the shaping of one or another sense of reality or reinforcing 'particular interpretations of the world' (Ross 1998: 156) may be referred to as its 'world-making' property (Bauman 1999; cf. Goodman 1978, in Geertz 2001: 211). It operates through the mechanisms discussed in the previous section: the selection and naturalisation of one set of meanings at the expense of other possibilities. This applies both at the stage of 'primary' production of meanings and in the production of larger-scale meaningful units, such as identities and particular 'cultures.' Selection and naturalisation also have a counterpart in totalisation, evident in the impression of covering the entire available spectrum of meanings that each partial set of meaning creates, and in silencing the possibility of alternatives. Totalisation, likewise, operates both at the level of 'linguistic' production of meanings and at the level of group identity, manifest in the drawing of boundaries of commonality. Because each partial set of meanings can be totalised, totalisation also accompanies the processes of fragmentation in situations where the unifying 'self-descriptions' are drastically revised or fall apart under the pressure to exclude the dissenting 'otherness.' These two pairs of terms – selection and naturalisation, and fragmentation and totalisation – although more comfortably pertaining, respectively, to the nuclear-level production of meanings and to production of more complex meaningful entities, are isomorphic in terms of their power effects. These are particularly notable in that the understanding of culture 'as the shared "common sense," … "the realm of the given and the undeniable"' (Cohen 1998: 117, quoting Geertz 1983: 73-93) suggests that concealing its arbitrary and partial character is inherent in the constitution of culture *qua* culture.

Cultural 'world-making' testifies to the ubiquity of power within the realm of culture: the constitution of culture is never politically 'neutral' in that culture itself is generated and perpetuated in an endless exercise of power by opening up some possibilities and meanings while foreclosing others. As noted by Bourdieu (1990: 64),

> [t]he relation to what is possible is a relation to power; and the sense of the probable future is constituted in the prolonged relationship with a world structured according to the categories of the possible (for us) and the impossible (for us)

That such world-making is never conceivably a finite act is shown clearly by references to non-uniformity in the acceptance of its claims for incontestability – whether at the level of individual identities that tend to breach their stated limits (cf. Doty 1998), or in the evidence of 'unorthodox' deviance at the peripheries of areas united through self-descriptions (Lotman 1990, 1992b: 16-17, 1996: 178-9;

Tynyanov 1976; cf. Viktorova 2003: 155-6). Both the reassertion of identity against such constant, if covert, dissidence, as well as its contestation, reveal the power dimension of cultural 'ordering' and 'world-making.' On a broader scale, any articulation of meanings or, indeed, any attempt at their contestation, also carry power connotations.

The ambivalent nature of the cultural ordering of reality manifests itself in the inseparability of world-making and world-unmaking, since opening some cultural possibilities is coterminous with foreclosing others. This ambivalence is coded into the very cultural production of meaning which simultaneously invokes the freedom of choice on the one hand, and the limitations established by a realisation of that freedom on the other (Bauman 1999). 'The idea of "culture",' Bauman writes,

> served the reconciliation of a whole series of oppositions unnerving due to their ostensible incompatibility: those of freedom and necessity, of the voluntary and the constrained, of teleological and causal, chosen and determined, random and patterned, contingent and law-abiding, creative and routine, novel and repetitive; in short, of self-assertion and normative regulation. (Bauman 1999: xiii)

'The double-edged – simultaneously "enabling" and "constraining" – character of culture' (Bauman 1999: xii) is instrumental in demonstrating how the described power of shaping human realities can be seen as falling both within and outside human grasp. Needless to say, this problem is of utmost relevance for the issue of violence, both in the sense discussed above – the indirect, structural violence reflected in the construction of particular senses of reality (cf. Galtung 1964, 1969, 1990) – and in the sense of shaping particular social understandings of violence (e.g. what is recognised as violence or dismissed as such; its permissible and prohibited forms; ideas of the appropriate contexts for its use, etc. (e.g. Eskola 1987)) that will be discussed below in more detail. But equally, this issue is very visible in the lasting effects of cultural demarcation of the areas of specific activities and conventions.

Cultural constitution of the political

As pointed out by Chabal and Daloz, the 'political' cannot be delineated without taking into account the broader realm of culture from which it springs:

> culture is not merely an additional dimension of politics that requires attention. It is quite simply one of the key fundaments of social life, the matrix within which that which we understand as political action takes place. (Chabal and Daloz 2006: 21)

Arguments in favour of a greater role for culture in political analysis call for a reconsideration of the relationship between 'culture' at large and the more immediate domains of human activity. This relationship can be conceived in terms of constitution and mediation. In the words of Valerie Hudson, 'things "political" can be deconstructed and shown to have their roots in broad systems of shared meaning' (1997b: 10). Any instances of the specifically 'political' meaning-making take place within the broader domain of culture, as does the very delineation of 'the political' into a separate realm.

The issue of fuzzy boundaries of 'the political' and its constitution through a broader 'cultural' field has enormous relevance for the study of violent conflict. It is often observed that in situations of violent conflict where political institutions are weakened or defunct, violence shifts from political targets to cultural ones. Thus, rape camps in Bosnia, or the use of places associated with safety and comfort (such as kitchens in Mozambique or beauty parlours in Kosovo) for particularly heinous acts of violence, have been interpreted as attacks against the underlying cultural norms and values which, in the absence of viable political conventions, become the only remaining repositories of power (Crawford and Lipschutz 1997; Nordstrom 1994; Fetherston 2000b). This suggests that political conventions, although infinitely more 'accessible' to researchers, are also the more superficial (and less resilient) compared to the broader cultural ones. In situations of violent conflict, the layer of broader cultural conventions that is normally hidden beneath the workings of 'politics' (or other more specific areas of conventions) becomes prominent in substituting for the 'political,' and assumes direct relevance for any attempts at conflict regulation or research.

Extrapolating the noted relationship between culture and politics, it is possible to conceive of culture as accessible through its particular manifestations in the specialised fields of human interaction and conventions through which they operate, but which at a deeper level plays a formative and constitutive role in the generation of these specialised fields, by shaping particular domains of human activity as well as mediating between them. Imagining culture as a multi-layered system of conventions allows one to escape the unfruitful task of 'defining' culture (i.e. delineating the 'cultural' from the rest) (cf. Chabal and Daloz 2006: 21) and focus instead on the unifying 'cultural' activity permeating both culture at large and the more specific domains of human activity – the generation and organisation of meaning. In view of such a multi-layered conceptualisation of culture, power and the 'political' stop being an exclusive attribute of the specialised field of politics, but rather all of these concepts become placed in, and informed by, the overarching domain of culture.

Although this may appear to elevate culture to a status of undeniable and unquestionable ultimate 'reality' (see Geertz's warnings against such treatment (1973; 2001)), owing to a fusion of scales and levels of analysis, the means of cultural production can also be turned against the dictate of cultural 'hegemony' in the attempts to deconstruct the hidden biases of meaning-generation. In addition, as an all-encompassing sphere, culture also contains provisions for its own contestation (for example, through its sub-fields – art, literature, etc.), which can successfully expose its implicit political 'interests.' Nor is this to deny the usefulness of 'politics' as a field of human activity (or academic enquiry, for that matter), but rather to emphasise that its attributes are far from being alien to the broader framework of culture, since the 'isolation' of politics into a specific field is also culturally conditioned. This is highly relevant, given that the majority of peacebuilding efforts are directed at the so-called failed states plunged into the anarchy of the 'new wars' (Kaldor 1999) that effectively undermine the system of political conventions, so that political communication regresses to the stage of 'raw' or 'naked' power, i.e. violence (Russell 1986; Foucault 1994). Furthermore, the acknowledgement of

culture as governing the constitution of the more immediate and specific fields of interaction is important since (liberal) peacebuilding pursues similar objectives – (re-)establishment of politics, economy and society as circumscribed spheres of activity with corresponding systems of conventions. In this respect, the operation of peacebuilding closely replicates the ordering activity of culture, putting in place the realities designed to direct human praxis along particular avenues (and away from others, believed to be 'implicated' in conflict (cf. Duffield 2001: 127-32)).

The notion that politics is difficult to restrict to a particular sphere is not a novel phenomenon arising from the experience of post-Cold War violent conflicts. Notably, it is reflected in a critical notion of politics as happening 'everywhere' (Weber 2006), or, with respect to particular 'local' contexts, in the impossibility of neatly isolating the sphere of the 'political' from other societal and cultural processes, as is the case in Sub-Saharan Africa (see e.g. Chabal and Daloz 1999; Ellis 1999). Allowing for consideration of culture as the broader source of the political helps to understand how the seemingly unrelated (if not superficially 'irrelevant') spheres affect the ostensibly political processes (e.g. 'the occult' for African politics (Chabal and Daloz 1999, 2006; cf. Ellis and ter Haar 2004), or religious and clan basis of legitimation of authority in Timor Leste (Hohe 2002a, 2002b)). It also helps illuminate the very processes of sedimentation of the 'political,' exposing the inequalities of access to politics, and the latter's elitist connotations which are particularly condemning in fragile states and societies, where the representational battles may be fought out well before entering the 'official' realm of politics (cf. Richards et al. 2004). A deeper understanding of the mechanisms of formation of the political can safeguard interveners against ignoring the aspects of power relations that do not fit into a habitual picture of politics, thus helping them to avoid mistaking the lack of evidence of local political organisation for the lack of interest or stakes in one or another course of action (ibid.). The same applies to the delimitation of other 'specific' spheres such as the economic, and their relationship with the 'political' as well as 'pre-political.' Some local business customs may fall into the 'pre-economic' category (i.e. something that is not considered properly 'economic' or simply resists effective conceptualisation and operationalisation – in parallel to the 'occult' side of African politics which evades most comparativists (Chabal and Daloz 2006, 1999)). However, changes in such broadly defined economic sphere may trigger events in other areas of human activity, promoting, for instance, mobilisation along group or ethnic lines in response to the worsening relative economic conditions and thus affecting not only conflict dynamics, but also 'political' practice. A deeper understanding of cultural processes and functions can offer a reference point for interlinking what is sometimes perceived as very disparate concerns – for instance, the local acceptance of created state institutions, a particular direction or strategy for development, or the chances of success of economic restructuring – based on a deeper understanding of processes involved in the constitution and contestation of meaning, sources of legitimacy and otherwise, practices of power, and so on.

The issue of delimitation of the political is also immensely relevant with regard to conflict. The majority of frameworks for conflict analysis, although accepting a wider basis of sources of conflict than strictly political (for instance, by venturing

into psychological explanations of conflict behaviours or dynamics (e.g. Bartos and Wehr 2002) or promoting a socio-biological understanding of 'needs' (e.g. Azar and Burton 1986)), still often unquestioningly accept the primacy of political definitions or expressions of interests, as well as political solutions to problems. This effectively limits their ability to place conflicts into a wider socio-cultural context which may be constitutive of both the specific means and avenues of waging conflict as well as of the pursued interests and methods of pacification (cf. Richards 2005a), especially when conflicts appear to violate the conventional understandings of politics, as is often the case with the 'new wars' (Kaldor 1999). For this, literatures addressing cultural conventions regulating the use of violence and aggression ('cultures of conflict' in Ross's (1993, 1998) terms), images and status of violence in culture (e.g. Whitehead 2004), the local cultural mechanisms for dealing with conflict and violence and indigenous reconciliation techniques ('enthopraxes' and 'ethnoconflict theories' (Avruch et al. 1991)) become invaluable. The multi-layered structure of conventions – from generally cultural to more specific – also offers a novel perspective on the opposing views of violence either as responsible for a breakdown of a system of conventions, or as putting in place a different order of signification.

Cultural 'ordering' of violence

Looking at culture 'as politics' also draws into the orbit of this discussion the issue of cultural sanctioning of particular kinds of behaviours and regulating the use of violence. Although Riches' theory of instrumental and rational value of violence (1986b) may not be flawless on other accounts (see Stewart and Strathern 2002), it highlights the involvement of communicational and interpretational structures in both the performance and perception of violence. Being something that, however contentiously and controversially, is 'being made sense of'[8] draws violence into the ambit of meaning-generation. Together with the more explicit facet of regulating the conventions pertaining to violence, this makes violence an explicit subject of 'culture as politics.'

Approaching this matter through the cultural lens elucidates the variety of ways in which violence is entwined with the fabric of socio-cultural relations. Admittedly, any culture differentiates between certain kinds of violence (cf. Riches 1986b: 9), taking some for granted (the naturalised, 'hidden' violence – whether structural or cultural (Galtung 1964, 1990); the discursive 'approval' of violence (Jabri 1996); violent imageries or even physical violence considered perfectly acceptable by a society (cf. Brigg 2005)) while condemning others – either actively (e.g. through penal codes) or passively, through 'unwritten' societal norms. Culture 'sanctions particular ways to pursue individual or group interests and disapproves of others' (Ross 1998: 161), channelling and 'organising' violence and aggression (Riches 1986b: 9); shaping people's ideas about what violence is and what it is not (cf. Eskola 1987: 22; Cohen 1998) – all this at a level preceding strictly political organisation (not to mention statehood).

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[8] Murer (2008a) points out that although the trauma of violent experiences may be 'unavailable for description' for the person(s) involved, at the communal level such 'sense-making' takes the path of linking the experienced violence to the narratives of past suffering (cf. Schröder and Schmidt 2001).

Notably, the conventions regulating the use and perception of violence are not immutable. The apparent difficulties that many individuals and societies experience in coming to terms with war trauma testifies to the fact that conventions regulating violence are not readily 'available,' but exist in the same kind of dynamic flux as any cultural meanings (cf. Bauman 1978: 180-95) and are subject to re-evaluation, reinterpretation and revision. In addition, as with other meanings, certain types of violence are excluded from the horizon of cultural awareness – either 'accidentally' (so that the culture is largely unprepared to address them), or because they are perceived as severe violations of the self-image of a given culture and tabooed as culturally 'suicidal' (e.g. Ross 1998: 162). Breaching and redrawing of the boundaries associated with cultural regulation of violence reflects the cultural dynamics triggered by new violent experiences. The controversy surrounding such boundary dynamics refers to the extent that violence becomes part of the picture of the cultural 'self:' While cultural awareness of certain forms of violence testifies to their 'internal' status, actual violent occurrences more often than not provoke societal 'identity crises' and serve to reassert the identity against the possibility of violence (although in these instances the violent other becomes an internal 'other' – both one of 'us' and yet antagonistic – and, as such, instrumental for the perception of the self) (cf. Lotman 1992b). Such purposeful exclusion of the violence of the so-called 'new,' 'uncivil,' or 'dirty' wars (Kaldor 1999; Snow 1996; Nordstrom 1995) from the limits of self-awareness of the Western peace-loving liberal and democratic 'self' is highly visible in the attempts to present war itself as the enemy of the liberal peace (Richards 2005a). This has been noted to hamper its ability to engage with violence so as to address the underlying local 'cultures of violence' (Nordstrom 1994) and not simply to remove the physical conditions of its practicability (as with the majority of DDR programmes or peacekeeping interventions designed to keep the warring parties apart). This apparent need to exclude violence as detrimental to the self-image of liberal peace may help explain the pitiful impact that the critique of its cultural bias has made in the discourses and practices of liberal peacebuilding.

Cultural boundaries – both internal and external – expose the meaningful oppositions involved in the regulation of direct violence. An important corollary of conceptualising culture as a world-ordering activity is that one of the immediate concerns of cultural praxis is differentiating between various forms of direct and indirect violence and regulating the spheres of their application. Given that total exclusion of violence from any cultural order is unthinkable (after all, culture is predicated on the exercise of power and thus – at least – indirect forms of violence), this concern gives rise to two interrelated issues: firstly, cultural 'authorisation' of violence, and secondly – mediation between its direct and indirect forms. There is, of course, 'no one-to-one relationship between a given structure and a corresponding set of empirical events' (Bauman 1999: 52): 'the relationship between social structure and violence is one of *influence* and *opportunity*' (Riches 1986b: 25). And although it is true that the social structure does not compel violence (ibid.), ideas about as well as symbolic 'provisions' for open violence and war as 'a cultural possibility' (Fetherston and Nordstrom 1995; Jabri 1996) are always readily available to interested 'human agency' for turning them 'into violent practices' (Schröder and Schmidt 2001: 11). While it is debatable whether culture in and of itself can be a 'cause' of conflict (rampantly essentialist explanations

notwithstanding), it determines what paths of mobilisation for conflict are likely to 'work' and how, and can also offer an insight into the pathways of de-escalation.

What cultural mechanisms can be seen to play a role in the 'ordering' of violence? Schröder and Schmidt argue that in the cultural imagination, the experiences of collective violence are set apart and 'clearly marked off in space and time from everyday practice' as important, meaningful events (Schröder and Schmidt 2001: 7). It is these 'unique experiences … stored in a society's collective memory' that serve to legitimise new instances of violence, presenting it as a re-enactment of 'ideas and behavioural models from the past' and appealing to the 'feelings of social closure based on the experience of either superiority or suffering' (ibid.: 8; cf. Volkan 1991). The 'memory of former conflicts and past violence' is kept 'alive in stories … glorifying' either the group's 'achievements and benefits' or 'the perceived injustices, losses or suffering' (Schröder and Schmidt 2001: 10). Such narratives, however, belong to the sphere of everyday practice, and thus the distinction between the everyday and extraordinary 'events' of violence appears more blurred than Schröder and Schmidt's (2001) account suggests. Moreover, the circular logic suggested by the continuity of the patterns of violence and their symbolic meanings from the past, through the present and into the future (ibid.: 9), is likely to become 'contaminated' by the influence of the everyday practices which may explicitly concern themselves with different matters, but which have a bearing on the ways in which people think and talk about conflict and violence (Ross 1993; Bleiker 1998: 90; Jabri 1996). The very isolation of war into a separate 'bubble' of human existence is questioned the moment that violence becomes a pervasive part of daily life, when cultural taboos (such as 'do not kill') suddenly turn into norms and even 'musts' (cf. *BHC SL 2006*). The organisation, ordering and sanctioning of ideas and forms of violence brings the mythical 'meaningful events' of violence into the ambit of everyday cultural praxis.

The quick transition from violence as a 'unique' sphere (Schröder and Schmidt 2001) to a pervasive and ubiquitous feature in the 'new wars' gives rise to a number of interesting questions. For example, is there a difference in participants' (and victims') perception of the violence of the 'new wars' compared to that conveyed by the glorious narratives of the past, and if so, what cultural markers are used to set the two apart? Does the experience of direct violence trigger a reassessment of the 'mythical baggage' of past violence as perhaps not so benign for the group identity? Or does a contrary process take place, whereby the current violence is put on an equal footing with the myths of the past, and then what are the implications for the prospects for peace? The latter question is particularly topical with respect to the issue of societal healing and reconciliation – processes which also make use of the 'complicity' of culture in regulating violence. Since no form of social organisation can be free from some forms of violence (if only by way of excluding it), any attempts at restoring 'peace' are beset with difficulties of choosing between them. While it is true that mere restoration of life 'as it was' before the violent conflict would also recreate the conditions in which violence became possible in the first place (e.g. Nordstrom 1997, quoted in Buckley-Zistel 2006: 8), a recourse to the 'trusted' procedures of liberal peacebuilding hardly offers a solution either, since it not only introduces its own cultural 'economy' of violence but also does little to

engage with the existing local processes of legitimation, which can lead to variability in the societal codes of violence where no culturally 'sanctioned' (understood and accepted) response is possible.

Violence and the dynamics of bordering

Cultural ordering of violence is closely related to the issue of communal boundary-drawing discussed above. This is reflected in the distinctions that most cultures (or at least those of Ross' (1998: 166-7) 'differentiating' type) develop with regard to the kinds of violence permissible in relation to adversaries within one's own culture as opposed to those from the 'outside.' Bauman notes that the principles of non-zero-sum-games are reserved for the relations within the community, whereas with 'others', a 'zero-sum-game is what is to be expected as well as desired' (1999: 102), which leads to radically different cultural economies of violence within the community and in its external relations. Social and cultural boundaries are elucidated in the conventions regulating the use of violence, which specify, 'for example, the sorts of weaponry that might be used against particular adversaries' (Riches 1986: 9):

> The famous case is that of the Nuer of southern Sudan, for whom fighting between members of the same village is restricted to clubs whilst people from different villages may use spears; likewise, with fighting between different tribes there are restrictions against molesting women and children, destroying huts and byres and taking captives. This sort of ruling is only suspended where the opponents are non-Nuer' (Riches 1986: 9, referring to Evans-Pritchard 1940: 121, 151)

Most 'ethnopraxes' (culturally-specific conflict resolution mechanisms) (Avruch et al. 1991) are devised for addressing internal violence. Apart from the pragmatic interest of maintaining societal integrity (cf. Cohen 1998: 117-8; Schröder and Schmidt 2001), the confinement of ethnopraxes to the internal cultural space is predicated on the shared understandings and assumptions about conflict and violence ('ethnoconflict theories,' in Avruch and Black's terms (1994: 132)). In relations with the 'outside,' 'absence of common assumptions makes … conflict especially difficult to contain' (Ross 1998: 162). In some instances, peaceful resolution of disputes with external adversaries may not even be a desired course of action. A number of scholars coming from different perspectives and empirical cases suggest that violence may be instrumental in maintaining communal identity, and not an 'accidental failure of an unsuccessful exchange' (Clastres 1994: 158; cf. Girard 1988; Bowman 2001: 29). Violence may also play a role in strengthening cross-communal ties; as noted by Martín, 'the war was also an element of cohesion among all the tribal groupings of Saharawi society' (2005: 14). Curiously, understandings of external violence as instrumental and non-objectionable permeate some classic IR and strategic thinking (see e.g. Brown (2005) on how in Clausewitz-inspired realist tradition, war is considered a foreign policy option rather than an indication of its failure).

Although the claims regarding the instrumental role of violence in identity construction are by no means uncontested, the maintenance of identity, by definition, is premised on a differential treatment of in- and out-group members. As Stoller (1989) discovered in the course of his ethnographic research among the

Songhay of Niger in 1976-77, ethical codes of behaviour (such as the imperative of telling the truth) did not extend to outsiders like himself. There are, thus, limitations in the extent to which conflict resolution practices devised for application within a community can be extended outwith, to the realm of the 'other.' This is especially pertinent in view of the experience of dissolution of the habitual patterns of commonality as a result of violent conflict, where children are forced to commit atrocities against their families and ethnic boundaries may be redrawn in blood (HRW2003; Denov 2006b; Kaldor 2004). Yet, understanding the mechanisms by which commonality is constructed and maintained also provides an opening for therapeutic influences: Schirch's (2005) work on ritual in peacebuilding illuminates multiple possibilities of establishing and reaffirming commonality at the heart of conflict. Sometimes, discursive and symbolic re-establishment of unity precedes the restoration of internal cohesion, as illustrated by the extensive use of communal healing rituals across post-Cold War African conflicts (Fetherston and Nordstrom 1995; Honwana 2005).

The possibility of influencing the dissolution or re-establishment of commonality relies on the awareness of the cultural dynamics of selection and totalisation, and of the multi-layered structure of conventions. Although violence often has the effect of challenging the existing political conventions (especially if directed against the incumbent power) and sometimes succeeds in this, the dissolution of the conventional realm of politics does not, of course, herald the end of conventionality as such, as other layers of conventions become unveiled. It rather exposes the 'pre-political' (i.e. generally cultural) origin of the phenomena usually associated with politics, and draws attention to different sources of power outside the failed institutional arrangements (cf. Arendt 1969, 1986). The 'discovery' of power inherent in the traditional societal structure and values can explain the shifting focus of violence away from state institutions to civilians, typical of the 'new wars' whose perpetrators derive their own power from destabilisation and uncertainty (Nordstrom 1994, 1995; Crawford and Lipschutz 1997: 169; Viktorova 2005a). But equally, since cultural conventions are not confined to a single layer or set, the dissolution of some elements of the established bases of meaning and practices may open access to other, hereto latent areas of the 'meaningful.' Understanding this aspect of signification is as important for envisaging the opportunities for peace as it is for analysing the factors that drive violent conflict. This brings the discussion to the last aspect of culture theorised in this framework – the dynamic aspect of meaning-generation underlying the processes of cultural continuity and change, which allows for reconciling one of the most fundamental contradictions in any treatment of culture: the apparent 'fixedness' of the cultural (self-)image coupled with the incommensurability of its substance.

(iii) Culture as rhetoric

Given the universal 'currency' of delimitation as the basis for the production of cultural distinctiveness, the issue that still needs considering is what takes place between the entities established as culturally distinct and different, whether at the level of individual meanings and their conglomerates, or 'composite' social entities, such as identities or 'entire' cultures. The problematic of cross-cultural

communication in the broadest possible sense can be subsumed under the notion of translation, which takes place across a variety of cultural boundary lines, mediating between the forms of identity and difference representing different cultural 'orders' or organising principles which, with a view to a terminological affinity, can be labelled 'languages' (Lotman 1990). It is through a recourse to the problematic of translation in linguistic and literary theory that the following discussion will introduce the aspect of 'culture as rhetoric.'

The rhetorical dimension of language is invoked by the recognition that translation will always, to some extent, be tropological in nature, resorting to indirect correspondences embodied by the 'trope' as a figure of speech. Although the internal space of cultural entities is heterogeneous, and that heterogeneity is instrumental in representing the external differences for internal 'consumption,' this process can only establish conventional equivalences, by replicating the relation with the external 'other' in the array of possible relations with the internal alterity. Tropes emerge at (and represent) the points of intersection between the differently organised spaces, texts, or entire cultural 'selves.' This gives rise to the problematic of polyphony and intertextuality, but it also alludes to the instability of the produced meanings. The tropological movement of meaning in language and culture highlights not only the possibility of 'illegitimate' rapprochements enabling translation, but also exchanges and fusions between different levels and stages of meaning-production. The 'imperfection' of translation is responsible for the genesis of 'new' information, which invites a consideration of the problem of cultural change (Lotman 1990). This section engages with the question of dynamics and mechanisms of cultural change in relation to the situations of violent conflict and the objectives of conflict transformation, and looks at the problematic of tropological fusion and transposition of actualised cultural 'lexicons,' or 'templates.' The four sub-sections cover, respectively, the principle of translation, the effects of tropological movement, the issue of cultural 'templates,' and cultural continuity and change.

Translation

The problematic of translation arises in connection with the ubiquity of cultural delimitation and boundary-drawing, and is applicable to all levels and stages of meaning-generation. Translation refers to the manner of negotiating the boundaries between multiple spaces of identity and otherness; meaning as such, according to Peirce, 'may be defined as the translation of a sign into another system of signs' (1931-58: 127, quoted in Holquist 1990: 50). I have covered the mechanism of 'translation' between different cultures, 'languages' or semiotic systems as conceptualised by Lotman (1990; 1992b; 1996) in greater detail elsewhere (Viktorova 2003); here, I will highlight the points that are most relevant in view of the problematic of conflict and peacebuilding.

While logically, meaning can be seen as a prerequisite of translation, Lotman (e.g. 1990) reverses this relationship by presenting the very possibility of meaning as hinging on the existence and incomplete intersection of a minimum of two irreconcilably different principles of organisation (these may be exemplified by different languages, code systems, logics, cultures etc., at a variety of levels).

Translation is thus placed at the very heart of meaning-generation. The incomplete, or imperfect – owing to the impossibility of establishing fully equivalent correspondences between the different principles of organisation – character of translation logically leads to a 'skewing' of the 'message' as it passes the boundary between them. Thus, translation contributes to the creation of new information, which adds another dimension to the stipulated volatility of meanings. Lotman's view of information as a product, in a sense, of mis-translation may give rise to very controversial arguments, given the possibility of wilful abuse of this principle. However, the contention of his statement seems more reserved: far from fomenting the unchecked application of this principle, he sought to direct attention to the fact that fully 'adequate' communication would never produce any new information. 'We might recall Wittgenstein's remark that within logic you cannot say anything new,' Lotman writes (1990: 14; 36-7), arguing that 'mis-translations' are a source of creative potential both in art and science (1996: 47; cf. Feyerabend 1975). Even in a situation of auto-communication (where the message is intended for oneself), new information is 'imparted' into the message by the temporal non-identity of its 'sender' and 'receiver' (Lotman 1992b).

An important area of application of these ideas is cross-cultural communication (broadly defined). Since cultural delimitation is premised on a postulation and elevation of one's distinctiveness into an organising principle, the existence of a 'common' language for communication with a cultural 'other' appears to be a contradiction in terms. However, it has to be recalled that delimitation is inevitably conventional (based as it is on self-description (Lotman 1990)), and it serves to obscure not only a measure of external commonality but also internal diversity and difference. Translation across 'internal' boundaries of culture thus can be treated as 'pilot cases' of translation across the external limit, and images of internal otherness can step in to represent and mediate the external 'other.' Thus, a dilemma of untranslatability dissolves into a series of incomplete and imperfect translations involving both the degrees of internal otherness and external sameness. 'Translation' can also be used to conceptualise the shifts between the latent forms of existence of a language, practice, or the social structure and their articulation in individual utterance or action. The inevitable innovation introduced to collective 'templates of action' through the instances of their actualisation (cf. Spinosa 2001) serves to explain one of the aspects of cultural change. Others will be considered below.

The tropological movement

Rhetoric is well-placed to illuminate the ambivalence of the cultural production of meaning that arises from contrasting the empirical inaccessibility of culture in any other form than through actualised, articulated meanings (alluding to the inseparability of the cultural 'content' and 'form') with the insight into the processes involved in churning out such 'finite' cultural forms. Although explicitly concerned with the expressive dimension of culture, rhetorical analysis can also reveal the interests involved in one or another form of cultural production of meaning. With reference to the problematic of culture in the context of conflict and peace, rhetoric draws attention to what is expressed as pertaining to culture; in what manner it is expressed, and what that manner can reveal with respect to various interests at play and ways in which these are negotiated. In other words, since the 'politics' of culture

is played out rhetorically, rhetoric can offer an insight into what is involved in the making of this politics. However, for approaching this problematic it seems necessary to descend by a step and examine the means through which any rhetoric operates – the trope.

References to the trope in this work do not pursue the objective of mustering a toolkit for rhetorical analysis; rather, the idea is to grasp the generic quality of operation demonstrated by any trope, and identify the key features of 'tropological' movement and its place in the problematic of meaning-generation. Alongside their attempts to classify tropes according to the poetic devices they employ, literary scholars such as Roman Jakobson, Paul de Man, and Gerard Genette have pinpointed the tendency whereby the features which distinguish one trope from another are also found in other tropes: for instance, the possibility of metaphor is enabled by the operation of metonymy, and vice versa (e.g. Ohnuki-Tierney 1991: 182). Such tropological cross-contamination can also be observed when features isolated in an allegory are then noted, 'allegorically,' to reverberate in other areas of the text (and intertext) hitherto not perceived as allegorical (cf. Clifford 1986b). Similar effects sometimes plague the concepts employed in theoretical analysis: for instance, 'violence' (Riches 1986b) or 'culture' (Hudson 1997b) are often perceived to 'invade' the realms so vast that their initial dissipated definitions require a more rigorous secondary re-inscription of conceptual boundaries. Analytically, the described tropological movement can be conceived of as a different, 'secondary' phase of signification, but in practice it also forms the core of the 'primary' phase of meaning-generation (as was shown in section (i)).

The mechanism of translation discussed above relies on a tropological rapprochement of the mutually untranslatable 'languages' or principles of organisation within and across cultures. The trope offers the most convincing illustration of the self-referential character of the problematic of meaning-generation, through a 'seamless' oscillation between levels at which it occurs. Admittedly, even writing about trope involves thinking in 'illegitimately' tropological figures (as attested to by the increased number of quotes in the third section of this chapter). Referring to intertextuality of meanings is one way to grasp the rhetorical movement whereby meanings are tropologically 'carried over' from one context to another, forging, at times, very heterogeneous links (i.e. not only between the texts of similar cultural standing, but across genres, scales and levels of analysis) (cf. Pechey 1989). This aspect of rhetorical movement comes to the fore when contrasting the processual dimension of the cultural 'production' of meaning with the view of culture as an end-result of such collective practice – i.e. the manifestations of cultural activity embodied in social norms, structures, artefacts, beliefs etc. In this context, the rhetorical movement crosses over the separation into production and product, when the seemingly 'finished' elements or 'chunks' of cultural 'matter' re-enter the production process and participate in the creation of new meanings. In this light, second-order conceptualisations of culture acquire an equal footing with the first-order cultural 'material' (cf. Geetrz 1973b), and how actors speak about culture becomes a source of insight into how culture 'works.' This conclusion will be capitalised upon in the next chapter (4), while for the

present, the discussion will focus on another mechanism of cultural dynamics and change – the change of 'templates.'

Cultural 'templates'

Bauman's account of ambivalence regarding the simultaneous enabling and constraining effects of culture (1999), hinging on the processes of selection and naturalisation of partial repertoires of possible meanings, points to a host of other potentialities which culture excludes from any given self-description, but which nonetheless remain in place as latent, dormant possibilities that may or may not become actualised as a result of redrawing of the cultural boundaries of 'self.' This suggest a possibility of the existence of multiple potential parallel (albeit diverse and contradictory) 'tracks' of cultural development. Furthermore, according to Lotman, quite unpredictable 'switches' between these parallel tracks are possible which, on occasions, may redraw cultural boundaries in totally unprecedented ways (1992a). In addition to the mechanism of translation as a rapprochement between the elements of different languages or organising principles, there is a specific stage or form of the dynamic development of semiotic systems – Lotman calls it 'explosion' – which, as it were, removes the boundaries of untranslatability, merging the incompatible elements into a unified whole (Lotman 1992a: 40-43). Such 'explosion' marks the peak of indeterminacy in the system's development, and it can, on the one hand, be regarded as transcendental to the system's "normal" state, while, on the other, constituting a part of the system's own development logic (Lotman 1996: 321). 'Systemic' connotations notwithstanding (see (i)), the concept of 'explosion' can be utilised with respect to dramatic cultural change to refer to the fusion of meaningful oppositions and distinctions and the redrawing of divisions in novel ways. Situations of violent conflict, often noted to upset habitual patterns of cultural practices, would be a logical area of application for this concept.

As with the 'primary' selection of meanings, which can be revised and amended in the process of contestation, so, by way of 'tropological' extrapolation, is the case with the larger '"chunks" of "prefabricated" cultural response' (Swidler 1986, quoted in Hudson 1997: 7-9) – or the 'templates of human strategy' (Hudson 1997: 7-9). Bauman's view of culture as 'a matrix of possible permutations, a set never fully implemented and always far from completion' (1999: xxix) is also permissive of a large measure of dynamism. The presumption of multiplicity of possible cultural templates, including within a single culture, is based on the inherent partiality of cultural delimitation and on the dynamics between the actualised and latent cultural repertoire, predicated upon the exchange between the central areas under the control of 'self-description' and the largely invisible peripheral areas of dissent (see Tynyanov 1976; Viktorova 2003). Needless to say, the establishment of equivalence and continuity between the instances of following one or another cultural template relies on tropological approximation and translation.

The 'rhetorical' character of cultural continuity can help illuminate how culture's inherent mutability coexists with the perception of its longevity and self-identity. While the 'ways of surviving' in an environment are fixed 'by social custom' (Lal 1999), both elements of this equation may be subject to change. Environments periodically undergo change that will require adaptation of the 'ways of surviving;'

social custom, as a product of cultural ambivalence in terms of the enabling and constraining effects on human action and agency, should not be regarded simply as cemented once-and-for-all in particular choices, but rather viewed dynamically as a tension continually accompanying any cultural 'performance' or situation of choice. As with any cultural forms, the 'templates' of action are only conventionally 'readily fashioned:' many practice theorists allude to the 'improvisational character' of even 'instituted forms of life' (Spinosa 2001: 199; see also de Certeau 1984: 21; Neumann 2002: 633) in parallel to the recognition of situational (and variable) articulation of identity. In addition, the very idea that routinised customs lack 'novelty' can be disputed. Thus, scholars of ritual maintain that ritual behaviour may serve to re-actualise meanings of 'eternal' relevance, thus creating new instances of meaning (see Bell 1992; Schirch 2005); semioticians, likewise, emphasise the novelty imparted by every act of reading the same text (e.g. Lotman 1990, 1992b). Practice scholars also insist that even a limited repertoire of possibilities leaves significant (albeit not infinite) room for creative combination and innovation (de Certeau 1984; Schatzki et al. 2001).

The understanding of culture as a set of templates for action on the one hand, and the recognition of their variable actualisation (i.e. dormant vs. active templates), on the other, combine to explain the volatility of culture – the tension between continuity and change which can be realised in a variety of forms. The question of utmost relevance for the problematic of conflict and peace is not only how the times of violent upheaval contribute to (and are enabled by) the switching between the alternative cultural templates, but also how these templates may be differentiated in terms of the types of conflict behaviours they legitimise and order. The radical shifts from the 'state of peace' to the 'state of violence' (cf. Zulaika and Douglass 1996) can be conceptualised in terms of a change of templates, considering the rapid reorientation of cultural codes from peacetime norms to those of war and enmity. It is important to emphasise that the 'cultures of violence' or 'conflict' do not develop 'outside' culture, and do not necessarily follow a different set of templates 'to the letter' – rather, a creative reinterpretation of the existing cultural forms in the new context as well as 'invention' occurs, contributing to the perception of 'volatility.' What may be concluded from Zulaika and Douglass' view of 'peace' and 'war' as the states established foremost discursively (1996) is not that they are relative and arbitrary to the point of illegitimacy of distinguishing between them, but rather that each state has a corresponding 'baggage' of conventions which kick into action once one or the other state is convincingly articulated. The patterns and outcomes of cultural 'interpretation' and sense-making will change accordingly, bringing about novel and unpredictable repercussions.

The simultaneous presence of several cultural 'possibilities' in any given culture opens the question of the possibility of 'manipulation' in terms of enhancing the chances of actualisation of one or another template. Apart from deconstructing the instances of cultural 'steering' towards violence that may be exercised by conflict entrepreneurs, the acknowledgement of this broader repertoire of cultural options also bears a promise for culturally-informed conflict transformation, which implies retuning from the actualised violent options to the 'peaceful,' non-violent templates which are (or can be – bearing in mind the unfinished character of cultural

production) conceptualised by participants as part of their own culture (cf. Lederach 1997). In this light, it becomes obvious that neither of the predominant trends of relating culture to conflict – either idealising (or 'romanticising' (Richmond 2007a, 2009b)) culture as the answer to the troubles of conflict, or condemning it as the culprit behind the existence of 'harmful' or violent practices – is particularly fruitful for conflict transformation. Rather, cultural pathways into violence need to be examined together with those that lead away from it, and only addressing the cultural mechanisms through which the recourse to violence is regulated can open a route to identify the points at which more peaceful options can be actualised. Peacebuilding in its institutionalised form, of course, can also be regarded as an attempt to effect a change of templates, combining the reinstatement of templates associated with 'peacetime' behaviours with the creation of new ones to cement the cultural 'choice' in favour of non-violence. However, by engaging with the dynamics of cultural change in exceedingly superficial and unconscious manner, it usually contributes to the increase in cultural 'volatility,' putting into place additional avenues of meaning-generation (as well as social practices) whose outcome is an unknown variable (cf. *Large 2007*).

Cultural change and the issue of 'social fabric'

This sub-section revisits some aspects of the debate presented in Chapter 2 concerning the effects of violent conflict on the 'social fabric' and cohesion from the theoretical perspective elaborated in this chapter. In the light of the ambivalence (world-making cum -unmaking) of the cultural production of reality, any outcome of 'condensation' of culture into its 'final state' can be no more than a construct – a product of 'self-description.' Politically, this aspect is particularly important with regard to frequent references to the 'destruction' of culture (under the influence of conflict or globalisation (e.g. Sen 2004)), as well as to the ways in which cultural change is evaluated (both from inside and outside). Crucially, such appraisals also take place in a cultural context, and the approval or condemnation of changes are significant as both cultural and political possibilities. The issue of evaluation of cultural change (along the normative and/or axiological axis) is likely to be subject to the same 'political' biases as the production of culture itself – depending on which particular interests and rights are seen as 'natural' (on which there may be diverging internal and external perspectives). That, in turn, hinges upon the political act of identifying the legitimate agents (or subjects) of that change.

An important implication of the described ambivalence is that in situations where culture allegedly gets 'damaged' or 'destroyed' by violent conflict, it is both the enabling and constraining potential of it that is affected; the resulting loss of cultural inhibitions, in turn, may again be ambivalent: whereas it may negate the 'disallowing' of certain types of behaviour (thus possibly legitimising violence), the weakening of boundaries may also provoke their creative rethinking and result in opening up and enriching the existing repertoire of practices (related, for instance, to physical survival, or creation of new senses of reality) beyond the erstwhile cultural ambit of the community (Nordstrom 1994). (For example, Förster's research (2006) demonstrates the emergence of alternative bases of trust and patterns of social dependability in situations where violent conflict appears to have destroyed the general climate of trust.) In this sense, it is difficult to determine where cultural

change and adaptation end, and 'destruction' begins: the irreversibility of change is a poor criterion since it fits most change; and the opinion of the bearers of a given culture can also be influenced by their personal sense of loss vs. gain with regard to the change. In some cases, temporary compromises with regard to surviving in ways perceived as not culturally 'appropriate' create a gap between the cultural norm and actual practice, which also leads to reshaping of the idea of the cultural self. Yet this gap could be negotiated differently, either acquiring 'positive' connotations where the actual practice receives cultural legitimation (for instance, through connection to earlier cultural norms of however 'mythical' status, as with the supposed desirability of the Biblical 'milk and honey' that is reiterated in folk and fairy tales (cf. Grigorjeva 1998)); or it may be conceptualised as 'negative' – a state of cultural 'impurity' where the golden age of culture is left behind, and the present is seen as a degrading compromise. Although either possibility can be regarded as belonging to the ideational level, and partial nature of any interpretation leaves room for conflicting appraisals, such interpretations routinely inform specific practices which may have a bearing on conflict behaviour (as illustrated by the positions of 'hardliners' in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict). The outcome of interpretation would also depend on whether the culture can fall back on 'emergency strategies' in the form of established alternative templates for action (e.g. the system of remote farms that can be turned into 'emergency' settlements in rural Sierra Leone (Ferme 2001)), as well as the cultural connotations of their deployment. This, in turn, connects to the cultural status of survival and the self-image of cultural resilience, as reflected, for instance, in the existing cultural narratives of survival (such as the blockade of Leningrad during WWII).

Chabal and Daloz (2006) note that the myths of identity – e.g. of common heroic descent – are invoked at times of crisis; rather than a product of age-long tradition, the 'tradition' is called into being by the perceived insecurity of identity. This tallies well with Bakhtin's notion of identity as belonging in the realm of 'otherness' (i.e. of the 'self' being delimited and defined only through an encounter with 'others' (cf. Barth 1969), while to oneself the 'self' always appears unbounded and 'unfinished') (Bakhtin 1986: 34, 39-40, 82, 87, 103, 117). Emphasis of some writers on the continual, processual character of identity production is reflected it the terminological preference for 'identification' over 'identity' (Kaiser and Nikiforova 2006; cf. Lévinas 1996). A consideration of these two factors – the increased salience of cultural identity at the times of crisis and the continual character of its 'production' – should allow for reasonable doubt with regard to claims that violent conflict inevitably has devastating effects on 'the social fabric'.

Finer aspects of this issue of course depend on the definitions of 'social fabric,' and what is understood as its destruction. To take Bakhtin's analogy of identification as 'consummation' further, the act of delineating one's identity signals both the beginning and an end of one's correspondence to oneself: the 'identity' is fixed in its definition while one continues to evolve beyond, and regardless of, one's boundaries (cf. Viktorova 2003). In this sense, 'identity' signifies non-identity; a past sameness that is fixed in a discursive mode of existence (Hansen 2007). A similar logic underlies Lotman's self-description which is produced at the expense of non-identity with oneself (1990; Doty 1998). Likewise, the momentary non-identity of de-

familiarisation – one of Heidegger's two 'modes' of experiencing things – is postulated as crucial for grasping the essence of the practice, its embedded character, its connections with other practices and ideas about one's life (see Schatzki et al. 2001). However, the non-identity required for de-familiarising one's view of culture as a whole can come with a price of a non-negotiable breach with its essence: to take the Heideggerian allegory further, 'the "essence of hammer" comes to our attention, and so becomes object of cognition, only when the hammer has been broken' (Bauman 1999: xxiv). With respect to the problematic of cultural change, this again suggests endless possibilities of controversy: if every definition of culture signifies a breach with its identity, how is it possible to differentiate between a heightened awareness of one's culture at the time of conflict, and its perceived destruction? It appears that the possibility for performing such appraisals hinges on the availability of *some* cultural perspective, and will be directed by the inscribed cultural biases and interests: outside of a cultural perspective (whether the same or a different one), any talk of the destruction of culture would ring hollow. This relationship also seems to apply in reverse, for if the identification via de-familiarisation of human relations and beings carries such a problematic 'destructive' potential, then it must be at the very heart of culture as organisation of meanings, since delimitation and non-identity are involved in every instance of cultural production of meaning.

A further problem in view of such 'destructive' connotations of the heightened awareness of culture is whether cultural re-familiarisation – i.e. the sinking of the 'social' and 'cultural' back into the unarticulated context of culture as 'common sense' – is possible or desirable. One implication of this problem is that the turning of communal identity more salient during reconciliation by no means predefines the exact terms of the renewed self-description: the ambivalence coded into the processes of identification may result in either acceptance or rejection of people with contested identity, such as the former combatants, abductees, their children and so on. Re-definition of the boundaries of identity may take a 'generous' path by making people reflect on the deeper principles and bases of their commonality (cf. Just 1991) enabling inclusive identification; or it may turn to the exclusive delimitation, especially in situations where 'purity' of identity (cf. Malkki 1995) is linked to loyalty in terms of mutual protection and survival. Another aspect of this is that the allusions to 'cultural ruptures' also engender their own meaningful fields, and, albeit this way of presenting the problem alludes to certain political interests which become 'naturalised' through its discursive currency, such naturalisation also implies that meanings and values with which this particular way of 'fixing' reality is invested are perceived as coming under blows when the boundaries that fix it are endangered. Thus, the dissolution of meanings, the perception of violation of identities of personal and cultural 'selves' also forms an important aspect of the problematic of instability of meanings, although it cannot be dismissed as a 'natural' part of meaning-production process that will happen anyway, because its axiological connotations are also drawn into the process of constructing meanings.

Conclusion

Building on the understanding of culture as the realm of the meaningful (Geertz 1973), the offered conceptualisation analysed the processes and mechanisms of

signification (or meaning-generation) as the 'common architectonic moments' (Bakhtin 1994b: 51-2; cf. Pechey 1989) which connect the diverse manifestations and functions of culture. Although the theoretical framework has disassembled meaning-generation into different aspects, this is a heuristic simplification of processes which in 'real life situations' usually perform simultaneously, so that a reference to one of the aspects (e.g. 'self-description') automatically entails the presence or functioning of other aspects of meaning-generation. The prime purpose of the resulting framework has been to substantiate the terminological framing of the subsequent analyses of the 'culture of liberal peacebuilding' and its relationship with the 'local' culture in the case of Sierra Leone's conflict, so as to permit me to refer to notions such as 'the regime of signification' or 'rhetorical totalisation of the "template" of peace' without inviting too much controversy. However, the analytical vocabulary was designed with a view to enable its application to other empirical cases as well, and therefore its potential limitations require at least a perfunctory examination before it is used in empirical analysis.

One of the practical limitations of the offered approach (which is perhaps a feature of any critical account) consists in the inconclusive nature of 'embedded' cultural analysis. As demonstrated above, culture cannot be exempted from the domain of human interest (as a 'thing' of supreme and supra-circumstantial value – an understanding that is often casually implied in the laments about culture being destroyed by violent conflict, or in praising the achievements of a particular culture). Yet this should not be read as an invitation to a relativistic cynicism where everything is reduced to 'mere' interest which (e.g. unlike 'needs' (Burton 1990)) is ultimately expendable and negotiable (Chabal and Daloz 2006: 71). On the contrary, the examination of meaning-generation serves to demonstrate how interests are tied in with the very basic needs of survival (via naturalisation of meanings that complement the deficient human instinct apparatus), and these ties are often laid bare by situations of conflict in which habitual cultural patterns are disturbed, and the meanings (and patterns of signification) are re-negotiated amidst radically different circumstances and by different means (and with varying degrees of success). These processes (and the fundamental significational 'dramas' involved in them) illustrate the seeming contradiction between the claims about the damaging effects of conflict on the social fabric and the stark revelations regarding cultural adaptability and resourcefulness (Duffield 2001; Nordstrom 1994; *NP 2007a*). Both views can be politically problematic, since in their upshot they lead either to taking local culture for granted (de-problematising what is sometimes referred to as 'harmful practices,' such as the exclusion of women) or to a view that it is mouldable and pliable to a point where its precise substance ceases to matter (which, in turn, de-problematises the unreserved political and societal reform characteristic of the dominant paradigm of peacebuilding interventions). These considerations draw any cultural analysis into the midst of dilemmas related to representation, or 'fixing,' of certain cultural images without which a study of culture cannot proceed, and illuminate the complicity of the analyst in constructing the object of enquiry. While awareness of these dangers will inform the application of the developed analytical framework in the following empirical chapters, they do remain an overall matter of concern, especially for peacebuilding practice.

Since no perspective can be elevated above interest or culture, there is no uncontroversial vantage point from which to judge the 'righteousness' of one or another cultural 'cause.' That conflict can, indeed, unsettle the habitual cultural patterns does not necessarily lead to either condemning it as harmful for culture or abetting it as an opening for the institution of more liberal and democratic governance: While it does create cultural volatility and opportunity for 'revision,' such opportunities should, perhaps, be evaluated in view of the multiplicity of local interests and stakes in the direction(s) of change (where cultural and political change may well be fused together). Policy-wise, refraining form involvement is perhaps not a feasible option, considering both the established 'culture' of interventionism and the more ominous transnational forces that are already shaping conflict dynamics (Kaldor 1999). But if uniform allegiance to the liberal-democratic dogmata could be made less formalistic (for instance, by reducing the scope of bureaucratic procedures directing the development of 'civil society'), peacebuilding could open a way for a more balanced, 'insider-partial' (Lederach 1997) involvement. As argued in the next chapter, a greater awareness of 'local' culture, as well as cultural processes and dynamics in general, may provide a necessary impetus for unsettling the uniform discourse of the liberal peace.

The above discussion leads to another problematic issue of utmost relevance. Given that partiality and interests are so deeply embedded in the social structures and invoked regardless of the intentions of the speaker/user, what to make of cases where these mechanisms are consciously (ab)used? How does the intentional 'production' of bias affect the underlying processes of signification? And more generally, is there a principled difference between the unconscious 'use' and conscious 'abuse,' given that the boundary between the two is drawn from within the selfsame system of conventions that is given life by the inherently biased processes of meaning-generation? It can be argued that drawing attention to the inherently biased quality of signification may open ways for intentional manipulation and thus pave way for 'crooked' political practice. On the other hand, leaving these mechanisms implicit cannot guard anyone against manipulation, for only a genuine understanding of cultural mechanisms of meaning-production will command a deep awareness of the ambivalence (to do with the power dimension and its often incalculable implications) that any discussion about, or involvement with, culture will generate. And it is this awareness of manipulability which can help counter the abuses of the 'dangerous knowledge' that a critical examination of culture commands, while imposing certain limits on its own 'power.'

For example, one identifiable recipe for abuse lies in the possibility of casual lumping together of diverse parts of the critical argument (about the interrelations between power, violence, culture, meaning, boundary-drawing etc.) into easily digestible sound bites as a guide for monological policy-making and implementation of 'truth' into practice (cf. Fall 2008) in the approach of liberal peacebuilding. The often lamented lack of 'practical' applicability of critical scholarship becomes a contributing factor to the seductiveness of monological simplifications and associations, manifested in the contraction of hosts of inherently debatable and contentious terms into mythological certainties. Yet, cultural critique offers more than a mere possibility of cooptation into the dominant discourse, for it is uniquely

positioned to illuminate the rhetorical devices that lead to the fusion of dialogical debates into monological axioms. (Keeping an eye out for rhetorical allusions to universal solutions and answers, although a simplistic tool, is surprisingly useful, as demonstrated in the following chapter.) However, this is where the ambition of the critical enterprise meets its limit, because ultimately, the effectiveness of such exposure hinges on a wider awareness of dangers and devices of monological closure, and this carries an inevitable 'missionary' component in that the general public needs to be 'educated' in this regard. This premise, in turn, implies presenting such 'educational effort' as universally useful, which would reposition the critical thought in the province of 'traditional' disciplinary knowledge. Yet, this ultimate indefensibility of the critical position is its surest safeguard against hegemonic closure, and it is in this light that I confess the inherent partiality of the offered analytical framework.

As argued in the Introduction, the avoidance of culture in the analyses of social processes and phenomena is not an altogether tenable option. Discussion of meaning-generation without reference to culture, while technically feasible, would fail to communicate its far-reaching effects on the production of reality, both semiotically (through the chosen and articulated meanings) and practically (through action informed by cultural worldviews and beliefs). Moreover, avoidance of engaging with culture, far from a manifestation of a thoroughly a-cultural stance, would in itself represent a cultural strategy, affecting the construction of reality and generation of meanings. Given the impossibility of avoiding the discussion of culture, awareness of the risks outlined above constitutes the only, however nebulous, safeguard against analytical and political abuse of the vocabulary of cultural analysis. In short, the impossibility of finding a 'foolproof' way of approaching culture is a concomitant effect of the embeddedness of any serious cultural enquiry, and to pretend otherwise would imply underestimating the full implications of situatedness of the cultural problematic.

4. The Culture of Liberal Peacebuilding

> … in this sorry world, the symbol *is* the thing.
>
> – Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*

Introduction

The culture of liberal peacebuilding as a whole has not been an explicit focus of scholarly enquiry, although numerous studies have probed different aspects of this issue. Some explicitly concern themselves with culture as institutionalised patterns of practice and thought that characterise various aspects of peacebuilding. For instance, Kapoor investigates 'the culture of development policy' based on the choice and framing of issues in a succession of development paradigms (2008: 19-37). Duffey scrutinises the practices and assumptions which structure the interactions of different agents within peacekeeping interventions (peacekeepers, aid agencies and so on) as well as between them and the recipient populations (2000; see also Fetherston and Nordstrom 1995). Others focus on symbols and collective rites, which endow peacekeeping (both in terms of individual operations and as a general activity) with a sense of continuity and meaningfulness shared by its agents (peacekeepers) (Rubinstein 1998). Yet other studies, albeit not necessarily explicitly concerned with 'culture,' through their critique of the liberal peace offer important insights into ideas which bolster the liberal approach to peacebuilding and practices it engenders (e.g. Fetherston 2002a, b; Richmond 2005; Jabri 2007). These studies have served as a major source of inspiration for the analysis attempted in this chapter, not only through indicating the trends in the interpretation of liberal peacebuilding, but also by helping to illuminate its degree of receptiveness towards critique (which is suggestive of certain aspects of the culture of liberal peacebuilding). Needless to say, texts produced by various agents of liberal peacebuilding (policy documents and statements, reports, and so on) have also been instrumental for capturing its cultural 'self' from the perspective outlined in the theoretical framework.

Before attempting an analysis of liberal peacebuilding as a 'culture,' some caveats are needed to justify the very possibility of approaching the issue in such a way. 'Peacebuilding,' whether liberal or not, subsumes a wide range of activities, methods and palpable objectives – albeit united in their ambition of creating conditions for self-perpetuating sustainable peace. It is also an agenda pursued by a variety of actors at very different levels (cf. Barnett et al. 2007). What grounds, therefore, can there be not only for unifying these under a single banner of (liberal) peacebuilding, but also for conceptualising it as a particular culture, given the widespread recognition that the liberal 'consensus' regarding the causes of violent conflict and appropriate remedies (Duffield 2001: 73) in fact masks a considerable

degree of 'dissensus' regarding the immediate aims and means of peacebuilding (e.g. Richmond and Franks 2006; MacGinty 2008)?

Some grounds for this, ironically, are provided by the breadth of the concept of 'peacebuilding,' and by the largely unspecified nature of its objective, 'peace,' combined with the general agreement regarding its desirability. This may account for '[t]he willingness of so many diverse constituencies with divergent and sometimes conflicting interests to rally around peacebuilding' (Barnett et al. 2007: 43-4), and 'also suggests that one of the concept's talents is to camouflage divisions over how to handle the postconflict challenge:'

> In this respect, it functions much like a favored political symbol. Symbols are often highly ambiguous. Ambiguity can facilitate collective action because different constituencies can support the symbol without necessarily achieving consensus on the substance. (Barnett et al. 2007: 44)

Furthermore, the lack of agreement among its proponents is usually restricted to the question of 'how' best to implement the liberal peace, not 'why' or 'whether.' Agreement on these latter points is ensured by the matter-of-factness of its objectives and accompanying understandings – a known feature of culture as 'the realm of the given and the undeniable' (Geertz 1983: 73-93, quoted in Cohen 1998: 117). The aspiration towards the universal observance of human rights, the rule of law, democracy and market economy is perceived as self-explanatory, and that its implementation may clash with local realities or cultural differences 'is not a dilemma' (*UN PBC 2007*), but rather a cause for reassurance in the rightness of the chosen course of reform, given that local practices are viewed as a deviation from the norm. References to these markers of the liberal peace also 'streamline' the rhetoric of peacebuilding agents, strengthening the perception of their uniformity despite possible differences of opinion – a process also underpinned by a convergence in donor priorities (Llamazares and Levy 2003; Holscheiter 2005). Although vast volumes of critique directed at various aspects of liberal peacebuilding do serve to expose its internal inconsistencies and contradictions (e.g. Smith 2003), they also inadvertently contribute to its representation as a single paradigm – whether or not they fall into the trap of 'caricaturing' the liberal peace (MacGinty 2008).

Undeniably, this chapter also engages in 'authoring' liberal peacebuilding from outside, 'writing' its subject together with its alleged culture (cf. Clifford 1986a). Yet exposing the mechanism of such authoring – both external and internal, coming from the agents of liberal peacebuilding – is hoped to provide an antidote to essentialising the liberal peace (or, indeed, to the flaw of 'Occidentalism' in response to the 'Orientalising' tendencies of the dominant peacebuilding paradigm (cf. Said 1978; Kapoor 2008; Richmond 2009b)). The homogenised picture of liberal peacebuilding (both as presented here, and as it features in the bulk of the critique) makes use of the cultural mechanism of totalisation of meanings; but arguably, so does an internal perspective on the liberal peace. The reality of negotiation and contestation of meanings is much more complex, but tends to be obscured in the perception of 'ready' cultural texts. This chapter is trying to preserve a 'double vision,' by presenting a critique of such 'finished' text as 'the culture of

liberal peacebuilding' while drawing attention to the mechanisms 'fixing' its perception as uniform and uncontroversial, and the incompleteness and inconsistencies within its self-description, which may evade its advocates and critics alike. Although in doing this, I implicitly underwrite the totalising image of the liberal peace, to deny the existence of certain common features in its interpretational economy would perhaps constitute an even greater violation of the subject (cf. Brumann 1997).

Ironically, one of such identifying features of 'the culture of liberal peacebuilding' concerns the understanding of the place and role of culture in the business of furthering peace. The prevalent perception among the agents of liberal peacebuilding is that culture, while important, is an auxiliary consideration, which can follow, but not precede, the cornerstones of peacebuilding identified as the spread of democracy, respect for human rights, good governance and so on (*UNDP 2007*); for a more comprehensive 'laundry list' of peacebuilding activities, see Barnett et al. (2007). The core elements of liberal peace are thus presented as a-cultural (or supra-cultural) and not as a product of a specific cultural environment and tradition. Yet, that they should be fundamental to any well-functioning society is seen as common sense – something that is internalised and naturalised as the very 'stuff' of culture (see Chapter 3). At a closer look, the presumption of an a-cultural character of the core elements of liberal peace betrays its universalist cultural assumptions (cf. Black and Avruch 1998: 36). While in itself, a universalist orientation does not imply disregard for culture (in fact, many of the mechanisms of its functioning presented in this study are arguably also 'universal'), it makes accounting for cultural difference more of a challenge – especially when one's own position is seen as beyond or above culture. As argued below, the inability of the practitioners of liberal peace to view it as a particular culture is largely responsible for the lack of dialogical engagement with other cultures, which liberal peacebuilding fails to utilise as a point of reference from which to 'enlighten' its own cultural premises (cf. Bakhtin 1975; Chapter 3)).

The argument that the awareness of one's own cultural framework is essential for understanding one's impact on the world (cf. Kapoor 2008: 21) applies to the liberal peacebuilding in a doubly negative sense, as neither of these two issues appear to draw attention of the majority of its practitioners. Yet, the existence of a specific cultural 'lens' (ibid.; see also Chapter 3) makes liberal peacebuilding susceptible to seeing and interpreting the issues of conflict and peace, as well as act upon them, in certain ways and not others, which serves to perpetuate this culture through praxis (cf. Bauman 1999). The identity of liberal peacebuilding actors is very much captured in their understandings of what they *do* – the set of practices and meanings in which their repertoire of actions is framed. In this light, the reluctance to engage with critical perspectives on the impact of liberal peace is also telling with regard to its 'culture,' as is the centrality of writing in assessing this impact from the perspective of the liberal peace itself (as evident in the proliferation of texts – reports, programmes, strategies etc.).

These issues and concerns are discussed throughout this chapter. Part I addresses the issue of 'culture of liberal peacebuilding' from the perspective of meaning-

generation, exploring the specifics of significational dynamics which characterise liberal peacebuilding and the forms of knowledge and action enabled by it, and particularly with respect to its framing of the issues of conflict and peace. Part II looks at the applications – and implications – of this culture in its dealings with its 'others' – such as the issue of culture itself, the critical perspectives on liberal peace and alternative conceptualisations of peacebuilding (e.g. Boege 2006; MacGinty 2007), and last, but not least, local cultures. In preparation for the case study of liberal peacebuilding's impact on, and ability to engage with, local culture in Chapter 5, this chapter also sets a context for exploring the challenges of accommodating the 'local' in the overarching frameworks of the liberal peacebuilding enterprise.

I. Significational dynamics of liberal peacebuilding

The 'monologism' of the liberal peace

The meanings evoked by the liberal peace – such as 'democracy,' 'human rights,' 'good governance,' 'the rule of law,' and so on, hinge on very peculiar significational dynamics. In one sense, they are clearly juxtaposed with their 'illiberal' counterparts (such as autocratic or corrupt regimes, replete with abuses of domestic populations and complicit in economic failure), thus forming a classic series of hierarchical binary oppositions characteristic of Derrida's logocentrism (1976). Yet, simultaneously, the 'unworthiness' of these illiberal opposites communicated through the juxtaposition effectively obviates them as rightful counterparts of the liberal peace, which appears to face a *lack* of governance, of development, or civil society (cf. Duffield 2001: 27). This makes the liberal peace unfold as the sole 'real' paradigm, ideally placed to fill the perceived political, normative, cultural, and economic vacuum amidst, or in the aftermath of, violent conflict. Although the discourse of liberal peacebuilding does invoke the illiberal, undemocratic, and undeveloped state of dis-organisation (cf. Lotman 1992b: 15; Bauman 1999: 98; Chapter 3; EC 1996b: iii) that it comes across in addressing conflict, these references serve to reaffirm its self-positioning as the only practicable solution.

Such 'obliterative' significational dynamic suggests that liberal peacebuilding tends towards monologism as the overarching regime of meaning-generation. A concept coined by Mikhail Bakhtin, 'monologism' has a counterpart in 'dialogism,' which reflects the inevitably dualistic, dialectical character of formation and functioning of meanings, as though always on the cusp between identity and alterity, the 'self' and 'other' (Bakhtin 1975, 1984, 1986, 1990b; Holquist 1990; Todorov 1998; Viktorova 2003). Albeit appearing simpler and more rudimentary, 'monologism' represents the (artificial) reduction of dialogism's complexity, belying an effort at streamlining the 'self' and subjugating its constitutive difference (Bakhtin 1975: 455). This, as discussed in the theoretical framework, is achieved through the mechanism of self-description, a 'secondary' act of signification which establishes and 'polices' the boundaries of identity (Lotman 1990: 128, 1992b: 16-7, 1996: 170-3). In the case of liberal peacebuilding, its 'self-description' is maintained through the numerous discursive and institutional practices, comprising programmatic statements and

rationalisations of its core assumptions in documents, policy planning and implementation, as well as reports and reflections on successes and shortcomings, 'best practices' and 'lessons learned.' As with any self-description, its dictate is not absolute, yet its strength is checked not so much by the existence of contradictory significational dynamics as such, as by the challenge of reabsorbing it into the unifying totality of self-description. In view of the ability of the liberal peace 'to co-opt as its agents many of those actors that one would expect to champion alternative (including traditional and indigenous) modes of peace-making,' among them NGOs and non-Western international and regional organisations (MacGinty 2008: 143), its monological self-description appears exceptionally powerful.

Presenting the realities faced by liberal peacebuilding as lacking in organisation (Lotman 1992b: 15; Bauman 1999: 98) makes for an effective bordering strategy: unlike capitalist imperialism, the liberal peace has been noted to function on the basis of exclusion, not inclusion (Duffield 2001: 4). But, as discussed in Chapter 3, any boundary also performs consolidating functions, keeping the liberal peace consistent despite its internal heterogeneity, as all the different strands of thinking and action appear to fuse together in the face of juxtaposition with the chaos of conflict (Debrix 1999: 53-5). Many alternative sources of thinking on conflict and peace, which cannot be co-opted into its framework, tend to get dismissed as either impractical or complicit in the ills of illiberalism (Duffield 2001: 32-3); while those which share its core assumptions (such as development) become part of the overall framework of 'liberal peace' which appears to fill the entire horizon of thinkable political practice. The qualifier 'liberal' becomes bracketed out of 'liberal peacebuilding' not only in the perception of its practitioners and ideologues, but also in the ways that the paradigm is presented to its subjects as well as wider audiences, betraying its 'hegemonic' status. Yet the inevitable lack of finality coded into any self-description manifests itself in the perceived need to reaffirm the liberal peace as not only the sole possible, but also the most benign platform for addressing conflict (cf. Mandelbaum 2002; Lal 1999).

The shimmering of ambivalence characteristic of this perceived need for dual justification – which, ironically, weakens the effect through internalising a contradiction (for surely, one cannot be *both* the only and the best) – constitutes something of a leitmotif of monological signification. Although this appears to reaffirm the idea that any meaning relies on a correspondence established between two incompatible logics or media (which prompted its characterisation in the theoretical framework as 'tropological'), in monologism, the distance between the two poles of this correspondence all but disappears, and the tropes 'collapse' onto themselves as their irreducible duality is fused together. As a result, distances between the opposites cease to exist; signification *becomes* reality, and policies and practices of the liberal peace – despite the elaborate rhetoric of objectives and milestones – *are* the peace offered to populations in post-conflict environments.[9] In

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[9] I am deliberately avoiding commitment to Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum here (1983), for although it can be juxtaposed with representation, both concepts can be subsumed within the signification problematic of culture (cf. Debrix 1999). Although Debrix utilises Baudrillard's concept in his analysis of peacekeeping to great effect, the emphasis I wish to make here is not on the absence

a similar vein, as will be discussed below, the liberal peace all but collapses the distinctions between policy and action; writing and doing; a positive and negative view of culture; as well as (most controversially) peace and conflict themselves. Although the contradictions between these are still notable despite their fusion, monologism proves very effective at disregarding them: the liberal peace functions as 'a master signifier that may sometimes silence any thought or discussion of other alternatives' (Richmond and Franks 2006: 4).

'Monologism' implies, quite literally, silencing, or subsuming other voices within itself, which is notable in the interaction of liberal peacebuilding with its 'others.' Even in cases where the liberal peace makes use of other approaches to conflict (such as traditional or indigenous peace-making), it tends to dominate the exchange; furthermore, the 'co-opted' techniques suffer something of a loss of identity, authenticity, and specific social function or niche (MacGinty 2008: 156). But losing the ability to discern other 'voices' also leads to the inability to perceive itself as a particular voice, or perspective (cf. Bakhtin 1975: 180-1; 190b: 517). As argued by Fetherston,

> The extent to which conflict resolution and peacekeeping in both theory and practice are fundamentally mis-directed is the extent to which they are unable to make visible the political framework within which they are formed… (2000a: 198, quoted in Martín 2005: 12)

The monological predisposition also contributes to the effacement of internal inconsistencies within the liberal peace paradigm – for instance, between the elements of classical liberalism and neoconservative ideology (Gowan 2008) – with distinctions losing their acuteness in the face of the absolute difference of the external other of conflict and its illiberal motors (cf. Laclau 2000). Similar approximation can be observed with regard to the array of policies of liberal peacebuilding, which fuse the objectives with very different rationale requiring different terms of engagement – such as developing civil society, economic liberalisation, human rights, reconciliation, and security sector reform – into a single 'package' of liberal democratic governance. Everything becomes the same within the liberal peace, and is presumed to submit to the same logic of policy and governance. A consequential effect of such uniformalisation of the internal space of signification is the inability of liberal peacebuilding to discern the points of (in)compatibility between itself and the existing political, economic and social practice, making it impossible to fathom the resilience of, say, corruption despite the introduction of new institutional formats. Nor does it allow for estimating the degree of its own impact, since monologism lacks the semiotic tools necessary to discern all but the most radical difference, making it difficult for the liberal peace to zoom in on the gradations of its own success and leaving but one viable indicator of failure – the relapse into violent conflict.

Of course, despite representing an overarching tendency, the monologism of liberal peacebuilding is neither entirely dominant nor uniform, being but a 'self-

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of the signified, but on the disappearance of difference and distance between the signifier and signified.

description,' albeit a very powerful one that is also buttressed by its 'external' portrayals. Yet, this tendency is hardly accidental, for many of the core conceptions and practices of the liberal peace, as demonstrated throughout the following sections of this chapter, consistently erode the spaces of otherness from which its monologue could be interrogated. In this regard, liberal peacebuilding could be styled as an heir of the colonial discourse, whose monologism renders its subaltern colonial 'other' voiceless, and even instances where it appears to be spoken for by those consciously trying to empower it lead only to its continual subjugation within the hegemony of the colonial monologue (cf. Spivak 1988; Kapoor 2008: 9). The colonial discourse shares another feature of significational dynamics typical of liberal peacebuilding – the 'shimmering' of opposites merged in one, which both cement and unbalance its dictate (Bhabha 2004; Kapoor 2008: 7-8). The power of monologism itself can be linked to its affinity with the mythological mode of perception which operates within the confines of a single 'language' (Lotman 1990, 1992b; Viktorova 2003). The function of myth is to provide the 'founding stories' which 'address the giving of being, and hence what is considered most fundamental and existential. Myths are answers to questions like: why life, why being, why responsibility' (Laustsen and Wæver 2000: 717). These themes are very noticeable in the rationalisations that the discourse of liberal peacebuilding offers for its policy on issues like conflict, poverty, development, security, and so on. The mythological/monological leanings of the liberal peace present it as a universe in itself, while simultaneously disabling alternative conceptualisations of life, being, and responsibility – as well as peace, conflict, power, culture, etc. In the case of the liberal peace, the power of 'myth' is further magnified by the apparent reliance of liberal peacebuilding on a highly rational approach to knowledge, which is traditionally juxtaposed with myth (Lotman 1990, 1992b; Viktorova 2003). Internalisation of this paradox within the 'monologue' of liberal peacebuilding will be discussed in one of the upcoming sections of this chapter. For now, the discussion turns to the merging of another opposition – that between peace and conflict (or war).

The merging of peace and war

The co-existence of seemingly incompatible significational modalities corresponding to peace and war within the same cultural horizon was addressed above (Chapter 3) through the concept of cultural 'templates.' Clearly, the 'othering' of war by way of creating 'a dichotomy between war as some kind of inherent "bad" … and peace as an ideal "good"' (Richards 2005a: 3), points to a separation of the templates of war and peace within the culture of liberal peacebuilding. As with the 'others' of underdevelopment and illiberalism, the template of war is negated as a radical other to which liberal peacebuilding juxtaposes itself as the only viable option, thus positioning the template of war entirely outside the culture of liberal peace. Such radical 'othering' creates a curious twist in its interpretational schemata, whereby whatever takes place within the liberal peace is not war by definition (cf. Zulaika and Douglass 1996: 13). As a result, the liberal peace loses receptiveness towards the manifestations of war within its own domain. Far from signalling unwavering pacifism, therefore, the radical exclusion of war 'smuggles' it back inside the template of peace.

Peace and war have always been entwined in political practice and thought, with war often regarded as the ultimate instrument of peace (St Augustin 1945; Russell 1977). The recognition of 'the intimate and constitutive relationship between war and peace' (Jabri 2007: 2) is underscored by the impossibility of their conceptual isolation, manifest in the frequent practice of defining them through one another (cf. Hobbes 1985: 186; Jabri 1996: 34). Although the early liberal thought in IR sought to present war as an unnecessary deviation from politics proper (e.g. Brown 2005: 21-2, 103), this view of war forms rather an exception in political philosophy and practice, which is mostly oriented towards the regulation of war rather than its abolition (cf. Jabri 2007: 3; Brown 2005: 103). In addition, violent conflicts of the post-Cold War era have powerfully exposed peace and war as poles of a continuum rather than mutually exclusive states (e.g. Darby and MacGinty 2000; Richards 2005b), which is also reflected in the recognition of 'inconclusiveness' of liberal peace interventions with regard to their success in ending wars (e.g. Paris 2004). The impression of 'inconclusiveness' also extends to the attempts at a rhetorical banishment of the 'other' of war (cf. Richards 2005a) from the liberal peacebuilding paradigm.

The opposition between peace and war in the discourse of liberal peace is supported by presenting violent conflict as dysfunctional, pathological (Jabri 1996) or irrational (King 1997: 13) – a failure of governance mechanisms (EC 1996b: iii) and a corresponding dissolution of order (Brown 2005: 103). The governance arrangement of the liberal peace, with its 'built-in quality of peaceful conflict resolution' (Rummel 1996: 21; Miall et al. 1999: 22), is designed to counter the ensuing chaos and reintroduce order and intelligibility. From this perspective, 'war' as a *political* pursuit can only be envisaged in the context of lack of an appropriate framework of governance, and the application of liberal peacebuilding is believed to disable the rationale for it. (Accordingly, where this strategy fails, warfare is believed to be apolitical – a product of irrationality often institutionalised in 'cultures of violence.') War violence is rationalised as a *want* of governance mechanisms, which sidelines the arguments regarding the utmost 'rationality' and profitability of violent conflict for some actors (Nordstrom 1995) as well as the ambivalent role of the illicit transnational economic networks that both help to fund violence and support civilian populations at times of crisis (Duffield 2001; Richards 1996). Such rationalisation is often accompanied by imparting the warring factions with political agendas which submit to peaceful accommodation within the framework of liberal peacebuilding (Viktorova 2005a). Controversially, the resort to violence serves as an entry ticket into political bargaining, vindicating violence as a method of achieving political goals in the perception of local populations, given that 'peace constituencies' are frequently left out of the negotiations of political settlements (ibid.; Kaldor 1999; Duffey 2000; de Goede 2007). War thus re-enters the framework of liberal peacebuilding as the very rationale of its application – both as a cue for its deployment in particular situations, and as an overarching *raison d'être* of the liberal peace (cf. Jabri 2006).

Controversially, the radical 'othering' of war does not eliminate it from the toolkit of the liberal peace itself. Despite the noted propensity of the liberal peace to fill the entire horizon of thinkable political practice, there is a clear sense in which the

ongoing violent conflict precludes its application (Richmond 2009a: 560). The conceptual division into 'peacekeeping' and 'post-conflict peacebuilding' that permeates the policy literature (e.g. UN 2008) – despite the attendant recognition that peacebuilding also has a role to play as a set of preventive developmental/transformative measures – underpins the perception that not much can be done about reforming the target states before the violence subsides. Either possible course of action – to effect a forceful pacification with military means, or to postpone the intervention until there is a 'peace to keep' – isolates addressing violence into a separate continuum distinct from the array of instruments of liberal reform. The two are, nonetheless, integrated in the dependence of liberal peacebuilding on 'hard' military measures, which allow for active 'creation' of post-conflict conditions for deployment of peacebuilding missions (cf. Brahimi Report 2000: viii). The 'assumption that basic security can exist *a priori* to an institutional, constitutional, and civil peace' thus undermines the claims of liberal peace to transcend the framework of 'victor's peace' (Richmond and Franks 2006: 4, emphasis in original). Dependence on forceful pacification reintroduces war as an inherent part of the cultural self of liberal peace, collapsing clear distinctions between war and non-war and, ultimately, peace. This allows for a range of approaches and preferences with regard to 'forcefulness' of the offered solutions (e.g. from ECOMOG-style military interventions vs. the UN's 'soft' approach in West Africa) to be perceived as pathways towards the same objective of (liberal) peacebuilding. But in addition to conveying legitimacy onto military intervention (cf. Richmond 2005), the merger between peace and war also produces a reverse effect by exposing the offered peace as a hegemonic project implemented from the position of power (cf. Martín 2005).

Through negating the conceptual existence of the 'template of war,' the liberal paradigm turns war into an element of the template of liberal peace, echoing St Augustin's observation regarding the necessity of war for its abolition (cf. Jabri 2006). This leads to normalisation of war, not only as an instrument of countering 'worse' wars that would otherwise rage unchecked, but also as a global 'technology of social control' (Jabri 2007: 2). Distinguishing between 'war' as waged by the agents of liberal peace and 'war' as that against which it is waged becomes a matter of identity of its agents – something that the 'liberal sensibility' of the rationalist approach to politics and conflict sought to overcome in the first place (Williams 1998). Such 'mythological' affixing of properties to their bearers (Lotman 1992b: 58-63; Viktorova 2003) stops the continual 'sliding' of signifiers – which characterises meaning-generation in open, dialogical conditions (cf. Laustsen and Wæver 2000: 727; Chapter 3). This reinforces the monological nature of the liberal peace, given that connotations of military emergency serve to stifle debate and disagreement (cf. Wæver 1995) not only in the initial phase of ensuring 'basic' security, but also through 're-securitisation' of the post-violence liberal state (Richmond 2009a: 562). The following passage from Jenny Edkins (2003) brings together several strands of arguments pursued in this section and beyond:

> Since the rule of law and the police reform are now seen under the light of 'multi-dimensional civilian-military' efforts, the military takes over civilian spaces. The effects of the militarization of civilian life are devastating for human freedoms. Military language which disallows discussion and debates, the codes of behaviour of the soldier as a human

without attributes and the threat of using violence against others who do not comply, reproduce a state of affairs in which political processes in developing societies are de-politicized. (2003: 204, quoted in Echavarria 2007: 7)

The fusion of peace and war serves to reaffirm the monological tendencies of the culture of liberal peacebuilding, reducing further the available spaces of otherness within its paradigm. The 'emergency' connotations which accompany the application of the liberal peace effectively keep in check the potentially destabilising effects of 'double inscription' (Bhabha 1994) discernible in the noted 'shimmering of ambivalence' produced by the merging of opposites. One further instrument which holds such ambivalence at bay is the apparent reliance of liberal peacebuilding on 'rational' notions of knowledge and action – although, as discussed in the following section, this is also achieved by internalising seemingly irreconcilable paradoxes.

The fusion of rationality and myth

In Lotman's treatment of 'myth' as a mode of perception and organising principle, it is juxtaposed with another such principle variously referred to as a 'discrete,' 'historical,' or 'logical' mode of consciousness (e.g. 1990, 1992b; Viktorova 2003). Where myth displays tendencies towards iconic and spatial representation, its opposite tends towards conventionality and verbal expression; a similar tension is notable in their respective inclinations towards a cyclic vs. linear mode of organisation, and forging metatextual as opposed to metalanguage-based connections (ibidem.). In terms of habitual dichotomies carrying the normative charge of 'logocentric' binaries, 'myth' is frequently juxtaposed with 'rationality,' which conveys the celebratory connotations of the Enlightenment and poses as the unquestionably 'real' alternative to the fiction of myth. It would be tempting to use 'rationality' as a label for Lotman's opposite of 'myth' – if 'rationality' did not, on many accounts, lean towards the qualifiers of the 'mythological' pole of this continuum.

Investigating the historical origins of modern rationality, Toulmin (1992) portrays it as a vehicle for producing 'certain' knowledge which could counter the destabilising effects of the 'improvable' convictions at the heart of the Thirty Years' War. While it is usually pictured as a resolute and laudable departure from the parochialism of the Middle Ages, Toulmin finds Cartesian reason a very regimented paradigm, which compares unfavourably to the openness of the late Renaissance humanism. In its quest for eliminating the possibility of human error from the sphere of scientific reasoning, rationalism succeeded in all but eliminating the human relevance of knowledge achieved with its help, since the rigid definition of standards of 'scientific' knowledge relegated most human pursuits beyond the scope of the scientifically 'knowable' (ibid., Toulmin 2002). Yet, the professed awareness of the limits of the scope of scientific knowledge often gave way to negating the relevance of other forms of knowledge and activity (cf. George 1994; Chapter 2), with the result of elevating the historically bounded achievements of rationality and liberalism of the late modern era to the status of a universal wisdom and 'good' (Morgenthau 1946). This reinforces the self-perpetuating and -legitimising

tendencies of scientific rationality, moving it closer to monoglossia and monologism characteristic of myth.

The relevance of this discussion of the origins of the Enlightenment rationality consists in the adoption of its 'mythological' (McCormick 1997: 91) legacy by the liberal peace. The very idea of the possibility of 'resolving' conflict is based, according to Martín, 'on the "positivist faith" in science to resolve social problems and accommodate all parties through positive sum games and "cake sharing" processes' (2005: 11; Burton 1990). The rational approach to conflict is presumed to command a perspective on the conflictive issues that is unaffected by emotion or vested interests of the parties, thus allowing for unbiased resolution. '[A] neutral, "objective" approach to conflict assumes a certain neutral and "objective" view of the world' (Salem 1997: 18, quoted in Martín 2005: 11), and although the perfect impartiality admittedly remains an unattainable ideal (e.g. Bercovitch 1996), the authority conveyed by the 'non-perspective' (Häkli 1996) of rationality extends to those attempting peacebuilding from its positions. The appeal of the non-perspective of science for addressing inherently social problems has been felt throughout the late modern era, as pinpointed by Morgenthau's critique of putting politics onto a scientific basis (1946), Oakeshott's scepticism towards the rationalist 'politics of the felt need' (1962a: 4-5), or Habermasian critique of the intrusion of purposive-rational action into social sciences and corresponding ideas about managing the social (see Wuthnow et al. 1984). Perhaps more than other issues, conflict and war have attracted explanations in terms of the *lack* of Enlightenment and rationality (Brown 2005: 21-2), positioning the liberal peacebuilding enterprise as a 'civilising' mission premised on the 'rational' know-how of organising social and political affairs (Fetherston 2000b; Martín 2005; Salem 1997; Echavarria 2007).

One repercussion of the Enlightenment rationality in conflict studies is the view of human cognition and development as linear and cumulative (Fetherston 2000b). They are, furthermore, viewed as interlinked, which accounts for the 'problem-solving' assumptions of the dominant approaches to conflict underpinned by the advancement of technology and science (ibid.). In the discourse of liberal peace, conflict is portrayed as a problem undermining 'development,' which is thought of as a rightful destiny of humankind (cf. Duffield 2001; Esteva 2003; Echavarria 2007). Conflict is thus 'pathologised' to legitimise the enactment of a 'normalising' logic of conflict prevention and resolution in order to restore favourable conditions for development (Echavarria 2007). However, despite purporting to carry with it the Kantian Enlightenment connotations of the liberation of man 'from self incurred immaturity' (Rengger 2000: 144), liberal peacebuilding does not invite freedom of rational deliberation and informed decision-making: On the contrary, the non-perspective of liberal peacebuilding has already determined the nature of peace that can best counter the backward-propelling chaos of conflict (cf. Duffield 2001: 50). Scientific rationality is thus subsumed within the liberal progressivist teleology, and tied in with specific – neoliberal – 'forms of social/economic/political organisation' (Fetherston 2000a: 200).

What are the implications of this for the 'culture of liberal peacebuilding'? For the liberal peace, self-positioning on the grounds of scientific rationality limits the scope

of applicable academic knowledge to the rational choice social science, which is particularly noticeable in what Rao and Woolcock (2007) deplore as a 'disciplinary monopoly' of economics in the policies of the World Bank and other IFIs. This may account for highly selective use of conflict theory of which the policies of liberal peacebuilding make use, as well as the limited receptivity towards critique. This also structures the dominant ideas regarding the kinds of knowledge considered essential for peacebuilding, which narrows the space allocated to culture to the point of inconsequentiality (cf. Kapoor 2008: 26). Decisions regarding interventions are usually made on the basis of 'fact-finding' missions (Hume 2009), yet the criteria of what constitutes relevant 'facts' are predetermined by the chosen terms of engagement and the availability of instruments which could be called upon in the framework of intervention. Furthermore, in view of the Foucauldian link between knowledge and power, the understanding of conflict as 'rational' also implies the ability to control and subordinate the unruly conflict dynamics. Yet, the deliberately limited scope of rationality (which becomes obscured by its mythological self-perception) means that this control is partial at best: as noted by Duffield, the agents of liberal peace are readily oblivious to the continued existence of the illiberal economic realities alongside, and despite, the ongoing reforms (2001: 142-4). Although this problem is seldom denied outright, the rational view of politics and economics appears to lack the capacity to address the issues which so mismatch its ideas of knowledge and practice (ibid.; Nordstom 2001). As a result, control is simulated rather than effected (cf. Debrix 1999: 20, 85), with the uncontrollable dynamics dismissed as irrational, and thus – from the perspective of signification hinging on rationality – meaningless and, effectively, non-existent (cf. Bauman 1999: 98; Chapter 3). This is consistent with Baudrillard's remark regarding the 'imperialism' inherent in the practice of 'present-day simulators' to 'try to make the real, all the real, coincide with their simulation models' (1983: 2, quoted in Debrix 1999: 22). The only interlocutor that the culture of liberal peace makes it receptive towards is thus, effectively, itself (bearing in mind the homogenising effects of myth and monologue on its internal diversity) (Lotman 1990; 1992b; Viktorova 2003).

This is also evident in the relationship between the liberal peace and its recipients. The implicit superiority of rationality as a paradigm which is projected to triumph over its lack structures this relationship as a hierarchical one. Echoes of the colonial discourse reverberate in the portrayals of the developing countries as a site of backwardness not of their own making (cf. Kapoor 2008), 'child-like societies' in need of direction and supervision (Echavarria 2007). The 'pathological' connotations of conflict give rise to the framing of interventions as therapeutic (ibid.), giving rise to a plethora of medicinal metaphors (e.g. the 'trauma' of conflict; the 'pathology' of violence; post-conflict 'recovery,' and so on) (cf. Pupavac 2005, 2007; Luoma-Aho 2002). Although there is no denying that issues of ill-health are exacerbated by violent conflict (e.g. *PRIDE 2006*), the presentation of intervention policies as therapeutic is highly problematic, as this tends to erode local agency in both conflict and peace (Echavarria 2007; Pupavac 2005, 2007) and carries 'biopower' connotations with respect to the implemented governance solutions (Dillon and Reid 2001; Duffield 2007). Referring to the effects of violence in terms of medical conditions obscures their origin in (often deliberate) human action, while imparting medicinal connotations to the social processes of reconciliation links them

to pre-determined objectives of state- and nation-building under the auspices of liberal peacebuilding (Pupavac 2005, 2007; Shaw 2005; Chapter 5). The Western belief in medicine and psychotherapy, once again, reveals the power granted to science and rationalism as the ultimate guides in social and political affairs (cf. Foucault 1965, 1973; Wuthnow et al. 1984: 288-9, 226). Such rational treatment of politics (and human affairs at large) effectively eliminates the 'poetic' as a means of exploring 'the political possibilities of human being' (Dillon 1996: 9; cf. Oakeshott 1962a, 1962b), while also – as will be argued in the following section – destroying the 'political' itself.

Liberal peace as a technology

The (non-) politics of liberal peacebuilding

Parallel to the critique of a 'scientific' worldview of liberalism, there is a strand of thought exposing its 'technicist' orientation, from Schmittean critique of 'technological' propensities of the liberal view of politics (McCormick 1997) to the more recent post-structuralist observations regarding the technologisation of politics manifest in its widespread replacement by 'policy' and bureaucracy (Edkins 1999: 1-6). The impact of actors in the international sphere, in particular, is increasingly conceptualised in terms of administration rather than political contestation (cf. Duffield 2001), and 'project management' rhetoric and mentality has encroached into the domain of peace processes and interventions (e.g. MacGinty 2003).

As noted above, securitisation of the liberal peace in the face of danger of violent conflict and related instability shrinks the space available for doubt or interrogation of its premises (cf. Wæver 1995): The threat of failing states becoming terrorist havens or epicentres of regional instability compels a rapid enactment of measures to bolster the defunct economies and governments. Solutions to these problems are believed to be well-known, and consist in following the principles of liberal democratic governance. Although 'liberalism' and 'democracy' appear to be pursued in tandem (leading some to brand the essence of liberal peace as 'market democracy' (Paris 2004)), synergy between these two elements of the liberal peace is by no means assured. Indeed, a number of analyses suggest a gradual sidelining of democracy from the agenda of liberal peacebuilding (Duffield 2001; Baker 2006), echoing the conclusions of researchers questioning the inevitability of the coupling of liberalism and democracy in the first place (Huntington 1991; Lal 1999; Chan 2002). The commitment to democracy appears to suffer on two fronts, both as part of the package of implemented reforms in recipient societies, and as a feature of the liberal peace itself (cf. Doyle 2000).

Democracy, as a regime, presupposes a possibility of open disagreement and political contestation. In view of the seriousness of the threat of violent conflict, however, the acceptance of the premises of liberal peace by the subject populations and governments appears too important to be left to open deliberation (cf. Duffield 2001). Therefore, the optimal course of reform is prescribed, and 'various forms of aid conditionality' (ibid.: 29-30), used as incentives for its acceptance, far from being external to the framework of liberal peace, work as an illustration of the universal validity of its economic wisdom (in that the offered incentives are

universally economically desirable). In many ways, democratisation has entered the reform package in the 1990s as an afterthought, when neoliberal macroeconomic transformation had already been underway for a decade (Duffield 2001: 50). But instead of adding openness to the promoted reform agenda, the addition of democracy served to reinforce the righteousness of its monological dictate, for the incontrovertible rationality of the liberal economics was conjoined with the undeniable benignity of values embodied in the notions of democratic governance, human rights, civic freedoms, and the rule of law. Although, as follows from this example, dialogism of 'politics' is not automatically ensured by the availability of democracy, the emphasis on the 'technology' of governance definitely contributes to its erosion.

While few would deny the Western origin of the promoted paradigm of liberal democratic governance, its ideologues emphasise the ultimate cultural compatibility of its underlying motors (such as rational profit-maximisation) (Lal 1999; cf. Kapoor 2008: 26). The liberal 'bias' of the reform and reconstruction agendas is justified by the certainty of rational knowledge and vindicated by the historical experiences of the developed West (Lal 1999). Liberal peace, from this perspective, is a 'technology' – 'a supposedly neutral force' (McCormick 1997: 6) which can be put in the service of betterment of the fortunes of populations in the post-conflict environments. Coupled with securitisation, the presentation of the liberal peace as a technology completes the work of 'de-politicising' the liberal peace: the very '"political" character of politics' is annulled by 'arguing that there is only one feasible option, only one interpretation of the current state of affairs' (Laustsen and Wæver 2000: 727). Such conceptualisation of interventions leaves little space for any principled discussion or disagreement; nor is such need envisaged in the framework of liberal peacebuilding, since all the necessary mechanisms for a 'correct' conduct of politics are provided as a package of values and institutions of the liberal peace. The space for 'political' debate on peacebuilding gives way to the ideological certainty of myth (cf. Laustsen and Waever 2000).

Securitisation of the liberal peace also disables the 'political' nature of settlements achieved within its framework. Although the rhetorical commitment to democracy as an end of interventions has not disappeared, there is plentiful evidence that the potentially conflictive nature of democratic politics is perceived as problematic (Paris 2004). For instance, Kofi Annan speaks of 'a *politicised* ex-combatant population' among other dangers besetting a DDR programme in Angola (quoted in Baker 2006: 39, emphasis added). Examples of drastic censorship of political agendas and imagery in the Bosnian peace process (Chandler 2000; MacGinty 2008: 145) testify to a situation where the limits of 'politics' are set from without rather than within. The monological inclinations of liberal peace have a direct bearing on the space it allocates to politics. The prescribed liberal reforms are presented as a-political, technical solutions to the problems which are identified as stemming from the ills of the illiberal 'condition,' such as 'bad governance' or disrespect for human rights. The banishment of 'politics' eliminates the slightest possibility of conflict or contestation inscribed in that very notion (ibid.; Jabri 2007: 14). The liberal peace heralds, to paraphrase Fukuyama, the 'end of politics' (1992), and politics itself becomes viewed as a risk for the success of liberal peace transitions. Yet, similarly

to the effects of 'othering' war, the banishment of politics from the liberal peace makes it unable to discern the evidence of politics occurring in the multiple spaces of resistance called into being by, among other things, the inflexibility of the liberal peace paradigm itself (cf. Richmond 2009a).

The technology of peace

The shift in the priorities of liberal peacebuilding actors from democracy to 'governance' (Baker 2006) allocates the authority to the 'technical' knowledge of governing – a knowledge that is arguably lacking in the post-conflict environments. The ousting of the 'political' is noticeable in the diagnoses offered to characterise the conditions that led to the outbreak of conflict, for the habitual rhetoric of 'bad governance' and mismanagement places the causes of conflict (along with the remedies) along the line of policy and administration, not politics. This offers the agents of liberal peacebuilding legitimate grounds for simulating the state and its institutions on behalf of subject populations, whose agency supposedly underwrites the policies of state- and nation-building orchestrated through strategies and programmes, funded projects, donor-overseen commissions, and direct expert involvement. Similarly to the monological silencing of the 'other' which can be traced to the colonial discourse, the technological orientation of liberal peacebuilding leans on its forerunners in the fields of conflict resolution and functionalist political science, which approached the issues of conflict and co-operation in thoroughly a-political ways (Brown 2005: 121; cf. Burton 1968). The combined influence of the various rhetorical devices employed by liberal peacebuilding, however, far outstrips the comparatively modest impact these earlier paradigms have had.

In addition to the 'bureaucratisation' of politics that it effects, the sheer scale of the institutional machinery of liberal peacebuilding ensures the dissemination of the introduced bureaucratic formats as essential *for* peacebuilding. The liberal peace

> is not just a framework, it is also a mechanism for the transmission of Western-specific ideas and practices whereby its local agents are not merely compelled to receive, they must also transmit. Thus they become facilitators and enforcers of the liberal peace for municipalities, communities and individuals further down the political chain. (MacGinty 2008: 144)

The involvement of local actors in the liberal peacebuilding enterprise may appear as an opening for a greater sensitivity towards the local context and preference for 'home-grown' solutions to violent conflict. But if anything, local actors display a tendency of upward, not downward accommodation, which is particularly noticeable in the pre-set agendas of local NGOs which have more to do with the priorities of external donors than the situation on the ground (*Thompson 2006*; cf. Duffield 2001; Helander 2005). Similarly, the increased role of regional organisations tasked with shouldering a greater 'burden of responsibility' for peace-making in their respective geographic areas (e.g. Council of the EU 1995) is less about diversifying the range of approaches to conflict than moulding these organisations into the familiar vehicles of liberal peace. The delegation of responsibility is accompanied by sizeable delegation of funds (e.g. under European Community assistance schemes (EC 2001: 8, 2006: 9)), enabling an almost autonomous functioning of the liberal peace in conflict and transition zones.

The dominance of 'technology' is visible both in the way that liberal peacebuilding interventions are carried out and in the 'perfecting' of their instruments on the part of the peacebuilding agents. The latter process is driven by the recognition of limited success of the policies of liberal peacebuilding, which prompts periodic 'seismic' revisions of its cornerstones. However, it is questionable whether even the most fundamental efforts at ameliorating the liberal peace, such as the Brahimi Report (2000) or Annan's 'prevention' initiative (2001), produce more than a reshuffle of emphases or streamlining of the procedures: as a response to the problems identified from the perspective of the liberal peace and for the liberal peace, they prove ultimately self-referential. Since the progress on genuinely political issues is often impeded by the impasse coded into the very structure of the UN, the attempts at feasible reform are often reduced to rewriting the 'rulebook' (*UN PBC 2007*).

On the substantive side, the perception that the success of interventions is a matter of the correct 'technique' is conveyed by the popular concept of 'best practices,' which are often 'transplanted' from mission to mission regardless of the contextual requirements (Malan et al. 2002: Ch 8). The tension between the 'standard components' of liberal peacebuilding and the local practices and expectations constitutes one of the thorniest issues with regard to the 'global' ambitions of the liberal peace. Instead of carefully examining the points of mis-match as a cue for rethinking the approach of the liberal peace, however, compatibility issues are regarded as technical problems, with reflection directed at possibilities of reconciling the tensions and subordinating the 'dissident' dynamics (Chopra and Hohe 2004). As noted by MacGinty,

> the liberal peace is operationalized in highly standardized formats that leave little space for alternative approaches to dispute resolution. External peace interventions, under the auspices of internationally sponsored peace-keeping, peace-building or reconstruction in contemporary civil wars, increasingly follow set templates. At the macro-political and programme levels this manifests itself in ceasefire monitoring, formalized peace negotiations, Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), Security Sector Reform (SSR), civil society capacity-building, postpeace accord elections, civil service reform, good governance, marketization and economic restructuring. … To a large extent, Western peace support interventions often follow a formulaic path … It becomes peace from IKEA; a flat-pack peace made from standardized components. … off-the-shelf peace interventions reflect the accumulated skills and capacities of the intervening parties rather than the precise needs of the recipient society. (2008: 144-5)

Despite some evidence of institutional reflection regarding the correctness of policy dogmata (*UNDP 2007*), certain ideas about alleviating the 'root causes' of conflict are remarkably resilient. For instance, despite a general sense of disillusionment with structural adjustment policies on account of their role in exacerbating conflict potential in the cultural settings where the basic societal security operates by means of client-patron networks (e.g. Uvin 1998; *UNDP 2007*), the EU peacebuilding documents still reiterate the need to downsize the civil service to make it more competitive with the private sector (EC SL s.a.: 17). Similar resilience characterises the belief in the primacy of the material needs which underlies the (by now transcended) development paradigm of 'basic needs' – the assumption that 'basic' human needs are material and that the realisation of spiritual needs is contingent

upon their satisfaction (Kapoor 2008: 22-5; cf. Richards et al. 2004). The 'profane' orientation of development policies may appear value-neutral; yet it is indicative of the normative dimension of 'realities' enunciated by the liberal peace. The very admission that seemingly 'empty' (of any prescriptive meaning) institutions of liberal democratic governance direct the expression of conflict away from violent means to a peaceful accommodation of difference (Rummel 1996: 21; Miall et al. 1999: 22) testifies to its cultural dimension evident in the restructuring of social possibilities and re-coding of constraints upon human behaviour (Bauman 1999; cf. Douglas 2004). Thus the rhetoric of 'conflict dampeners' or 'built-in qualities of conflict resolution,' despite its seeming technicality, is by no means culturally or normatively neutral.

'Technology,' in the present era, is usually conceptualised a means to an end; yet, this is perhaps where the metaphor of 'technology' starts to unravel, since the 'ends' and 'means' in liberal peacebuilding are curiously indistinguishable. This is yet another manifestation of the disappearing distance between the signifier and the signified (as discussed above) in the collapse of signification onto itself. Yet, in this case, the tandem of the sign (the technology of liberal peacebuilding) and its ultimate referent (peace) acquires two additional overtones. One of these elements is the (endless) deferral of the signified, and the other refers to the 'staggering' of indistinct milestones which supposedly herald its arrival. Both these overtones are noticeable in the way that liberal peacebuilding agents conceptualise their praxis.

The 'praxis' of liberal peacebuilding refers not only to the practical output of peacebuilding policies, but also the place that conceptualising what it is that liberal peacebuilding 'does' occupies in the self-awareness of its agents. Notwithstanding the burgeoning recognition that 'doing something' is not necessarily always preferable to inaction (Yanacopoulos and Hanlon 2006: 9), the mentality behind liberal peacebuilding clearly prioritises action (as opposed to contemplation or deliberation) (cf. Bleiker 1998). Hence many of the programmatic assumptions of liberal peace concern its achievements – the changes implemented as a result of interventions. Yet, the scholars of liberal peace often point to its scant track record of grand successes (e.g. Paris 2004); and a closer scrutiny of liberal peacebuilding operations in the field demonstrates that a great share of efforts is directed at supporting its own apparatus – reporting, staff security, policy coordination with other peacebuilding agents, and so on. Yet, this apparent paradox seldom comes to the attention of liberal peace practitioners, since the impact of peacebuilding operations is assessed within a framework almost entirely derived from this *modus operandi*, which disables other perspectives on its successes and failures. This also leaves liberal peacebuilding myopic with regard to other possible motors of change taking place on the ground, or indications of its direction(s) – which is particularly evident in the usual approach to assessing the course of progression of post-violence environments towards 'peace.'

When peace is conceived as (liberal democratic) governance (Richmond 2005; Paris 2004), the institutional moves towards a 'better governance' are taken as a legitimate substitute of peace, which is postponed and deferred to an unspecified future (cf. Echavarria 2007). The immediate concerns of interventions focus on institution- and

state-building, and the nature of the peace as their end product is seldom conceptualised other than in terms of 'self-sustaining' or 'positive peace.' How this peace is different from the middle-stage of establishing the mechanisms of governance to subordinate the destructive effects of violent conflict, is not discussed. For instance, the mid-range efforts of the EU's peace operations focus on creating 'structural stability,' whose characteristics are 'sustainable economic development, democracy and respect for human rights, viable political structures and healthy environmental and social conditions, with the capacity to manage change without' having 'to resort to conflict' (EC 2001: 10). How this is distinct from peace is not specified; in fact, the paper does not elaborate on what 'peace' is supposed to mean at all, referring to it in the context of 'peace agreements,' 'peace processes' or 'consolidation of peace and prevention of future conflicts' and, occasionally, in combining 'peace and stability' as objectives of the external policies of the EU (EC 2001). Once again, a 'technological' approach to peace can be seen as steering the culture of liberal peacebuilding along the monological path.

II. Unclosing the monologue? The culture of liberal peacebuilding and its 'others'

As demonstrated in Part I of this chapter, liberal peacebuilding establishes a monological regime of signification, manifest in the collapsing of crucial distinctions (such as between war and peace, or between the policies and their objectives), mythologisation of the power of rationality, technologisation of peace, and reduction of the available spaces of otherness. Monologism accounts for the extreme resilience of the liberal peace paradigm, yet, as a closer scrutiny of the concepts behind its policies reveals (e.g. Kapoor 2008), this does not make it unchanging – although it has the effect of suppressing the perception of non-identity between the different stages in its evolution. The task of this part of the chapter is to examine the instances of non-identity which emerge across the range of manifestations of liberal peacebuilding so as to gauge their impact on its monological culture and its potential for change. Such instances are best revealed through the interactions between the liberal peace and its 'others,' from the critique of liberal peacebuilding to the very idea of culture in relation to the issues of violent conflict, peace and governance. Although the dynamics that such interactions unleash on the 'mutinous' periphery of the monological self-description (see Chapter 3) may not be sufficient to overthrow its dictate, it is necessary to examine its potential for directing the liberal peace towards a dialogical 'unclosure,' as well as the resistance to change that it meets from the present culture of liberal peace.

The 'other(s)' of culture in liberal peacebuilding

The first 'other' of the liberal peace considered here is culture itself – both in terms of its conceptualisations and the sets of practices which the liberal peace represents and that it comes across in the context of interventions. The 'otherness' of culture is manifested in the scant attention that it receives in the liberal peacebuilding discourse, and in that, despite the budding recognition of its importance for the matters of conflict and peace among peacebuilding practitioners (CPR 2005; *WB 2007b*; EC 2007; *USAID 2007b*), its treatment bears definite signs of awkwardness

(cf. Witharana 2002: 11). Culture is clearly an issue which exposes the 'insufficiency' of the monologue of liberal peacebuilding, directing attention at the instability of fused tropes and glossed-over contradictions. Yet the extent of its disruptive influence on this monologue requires closer investigation, especially in view of the fragmentation of the overall 'otherness' of culture into separate (and more 'manageable') facets.

Whose culture?

Despite occasional references to 'culture of [conflict] prevention' (Annan 2001; OECD 2001), or 'culture of consensus' (UNDP 2004a) in documents framing a liberal approach to peacebuilding, culture is not thought of as pertaining to liberal peacebuilding itself. It is acknowledged that the implementation of peacebuilding policies can have a 'social and cultural impact' on the recipient populations, affecting 'group social attitudes or coping mechanisms' (CPR 2005: 22-3). But it is also assumed that such effects are unintentional (ibid.: 23), occurring as a result of 'crossover impact' of 'projects intended for one sector … on other aspects of the community' (ibid.: 22), and not as something related to liberal peacebuilding approach as a whole. This points to the underlying belief in culture-neutrality of liberal peacebuilding, its self-positioning outside culture. Accordingly, the aspects of culture recognised in the discourse of liberal peacebuilding pertain – almost exclusively – to its local counterparts, and not to itself.

This said, the conception of culture developed in some documents of liberal peacebuilding indicates a greater degree of awareness of culture than warranted by the unqualified references to 'culture of participation,' 'culture of violence,' 'culture of impunity' and so on (e.g. UNDP 2004a). Upon a closer look, even these references testify to an implicit understanding of culture in terms of durable patterns of behaviour and interpretation. Furthermore, 2007 saw the appearance of a document which makes explicit use of the 'anthropological' understanding of culture, as

> the basis for a symbolic world of meanings, beliefs, values, traditions which are expressed in language, art, religion and myths. As such, it plays a fundamental role in human development and in the complex fabric of the identities and habits of individuals and communities. (EC 2007)

However, the rhetorical incorporation of cultural complexity has little impact on policy, and already the rest of the 'Communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalising world' (EC 2007) reverts to a largely material view of culture (cf. IMF 2005a: 54), as testified by an emphasis on the support to 'cultural operators' and artefactual culture (arts), 'cultural actors and events' (EC 2007: 10). Attention to 'local culture' is taken to mean ensuring 'people's access to culture and to the means of cultural expression' (ibid.: 11; *EuropeAid 2007*), again in the sense of its atrefactual production. Incorporation of culture (in this abridged form) into the agenda of liberal peace is believed to 'strengthen a new cultural pillar of global governance and sustainable development' (EC 2007: 7).

Upholding a vision of culture compatible with the agenda of liberal peacebuilding requires purging the concept of its 'uncomfortable' ambivalence, as evident in the

urgency with which the same document insists on presenting culture in a wholly positive light. It speaks of '[i]ntercultural dialogue as one of the main instruments of peace and conflict prevention' (EC 2007: 7), and of culture as 'what brings people together, by stirring dialogue and arousing passions, *in a way that unites rather than divides*' as well as 'promoting an inclusive society' and thereby 'preventing and reducing poverty' (ibid.: 2-3, emphasis added). Potentially divisive and problematic aspects of culture, to which other European Commission's own documents allude (e.g. EC s.a.), do not come into consideration – presumably, because it is believed that sufficient amounts of funds and diplomatic efforts at institutionalising intercultural dialogue (e.g. in the form of 'Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures' (EC 2007: 7)) will alleviate the very need for considering them. The 'project-management' rationality of liberal peacebuilding is projected to 'streamline' culture itself into a predictable and controllable phenomenon.

At the same time, many of the elements of an 'anthropological' understanding of culture are being addressed in the policies of the liberal peace, but often without reference to culture. For example, an IMF document outlines the need for projects aimed at improving the local communities' capacity to 'identify, prioritize, and plan for their needs *within their own value systems*' (IMF 2005b: 112, emphasis added), although it does not employ the 'cultural' vocabulary. Similarly, the World Bank's studies of 'social capital,' focusing on issues of economic capability and recovery after conflict, have accumulated a lot of knowledge that would also be highly relevant in cultural terms. One of its potential contributions could be to the 'social fabric' debate (see Chapters 2 and 3), with some recent research allowing for greater optimism with respect to its survival and recovery after violent conflict. Some of the criteria these studies use as economic indicators (e.g. voter registration) arguably also make sense in political terms – even within the limited ambit of 'politics' within the liberal peace. Contrary to the accepted axiom that violent conflict 'is the major obstacle to development in the contemporary world' (Drèze 2000: 1171), Bellows and Miguel found, in their study of post-war recovery in Sierra Leone, that

> a mere three years after the end of the civil war there are no lingering impacts of war violence on local socioeconomic conditions. … [the] measures of local community mobilization and collective action – including the number of village meetings and the voter registration rate – are significantly *higher* in areas that experienced more war violence, conditional on prewar and geographic controls. … if anything areas where there was greater violence against civilians during the recent war have arguably better local collective action outcomes in the postwar period. These findings obviously speak to the remarkable resilience of ordinary Sierra Leoneans. They also echo the claims of other observers of Sierra Leone who argue that the war generated far-reaching institutional and social changes, including increased political awareness and mobilization. (Bellows and Miguel 2006: 1)

Bellows and Miguel's conclusion that '[t]here is … no evidence of lingering adverse effects of the violence on local institutional performance' (2006: 17) is echoed by other scholars of Sierra Leone: '[Sierra Leoneans] have sometimes turned [social instability] into a creative, though violent, opportunity to refashion themselves vis-à-vis their own institutions' (Ferme 2001: 228, quoted in Bellows and Miguel 2006: 18). The narrow focus on institutions notwithstanding, this research suggests a more versatile relationship between culture and conflict than acknowledged by the bulk of

liberal peace discourse. Yet, as lamented by one researcher associated with the World Bank (who wished to remain anonymous), the impact of the researchers' awareness of culture rarely trickles down to policy, and the little that does is usually not the most constructive part of the debates. This is exacerbated by the conceptual 'isolation' of these studies from the cultural problematic and vocabulary, which limits the conceptual connections between different areas of policy and praxis.

Culture as a 'problem'

In policy documents of liberal peacebuilding, culture may participate in the definition of the problems, but rarely in solutions, as illustrated by the 'European Commission Check-list for Root Causes of Conflict' (s.a.). Although it is clear that the lack of respect for cultural and minority rights or freedoms of identity expression is indeed indicative of conflict potential (cf. Azar and Burton 1986), the document creates an impression that observing the listed criteria of respect for cultural rights automatically takes care of any culture-related problems. True, culture is also mentioned in connection with dispute-regulation mechanisms, but in this case, only as a potential hindrance in view of the 'perpetuation of negative stereotypes or mutual suspicions by collective memory and culture' (EC s.a.). The foreseen reconciliation mechanisms, on the other hand, are limited to 'justice commissions,' while the role of 'wisemen, elders, ombudsmen,' although considered, is not related to the cultural potential for reconciliation (ibid.). The very format of a 'check-list' stands contrary to any prospect of in-depth engagement with culture, betraying a belief in a possibility of formulaic solutions following a correct 'diagnosis' of the problem, which invokes the mythological power of rationality in overcoming the 'disorder' of conflict. The check-list criteria also betray their grounding in the Western norms of secularism, which may be at odds with the very definition of authority and legitimacy in some cultures (e.g. East Timor – see Hohe (2002a)), without which the prospect of achieving legitimacy of the state and regime (and with it, according to the logic of liberal peacebuilding, a hope of lasting peace) as a result of an intervention is questionable.

Presented in this way, culture becomes yet another problematic 'force' (on par with violent conflict itself) which requires disciplining through application of the technology of liberal peace. Anticipated problems with culture concern, first and foremost, the expression of identity (ethnic or religious), which may take exclusive and violent forms, and gender inequality, whose perpetuation is viewed as a product of local cultural practices. Although incorporation of the 'second-generation' conflict resolution approaches (cf. Azar and Burton 1986) within its framework had ensured liberal peacebuilding's attentiveness to the importance of identity expression opportunities as a measure of conflict prevention, the dangers carried by politicisation of identity have directed the 'resolution' of this problem away from collective formats. Cultural rights and rights of indigenous peoples are viewed as part of the human rights agenda (EC 2007), which carries the individualist bias of the liberal ideology. The collective dimension appears to be served by relating the agenda of 'cultural rights' to socio-economic opportunities and political rights given to identity groups (see Brown 2004: 14), but realisation of these rights is presumed to fit within the habitual formats of electoral politics. Furthermore, for all the rhetorical valorisation of cultural difference (e.g. UNDP 2004b), the emphasis

remains on its controlled expression (cf. Richmond 2009a: 560). As evident from the 'sanitisation' of identity politics in the Bosnian peace process, the permitted parameters of difference are prescribed, and the forging of cultural commonalities is heavily supervised, being mostly directed into nation-wide moulds (cf. Shaw 2005). Few documents acknowledge the cultural nature of policies aimed, for example, at gender equality (e.g. USAID 2007a: 3), preserving an a-cultural view of the offered governance solutions. Ultimately, the need for special provisions for identity expression is projected to fall away with the establishment of liberal democratic governance, which automatically takes care of the 'respect for difference,' whether grounded in gender or ethnic identity. Yet, the apparent need to ensure such provisions in the immediate term (as evident in the gender policies of liberal peacebuilding actors themselves, such as the EU) betrays the uneasy fit between the identity problematic and liberal ideology, whose rationalism appears to position it above such petty concerns (which tend, therefore, to become sidelined).

One of the few areas where culture may be viewed as part of a 'solution' to the problem of violent conflict concerns the utilisation of local dispute resolution methods in reconciliation and 'transitional justice' (e.g. UNSC 2004). However, this issue raises as many problems as it may solve, given the likelihood of the cultural mismatch between the local peace-making practices and the universal norms of human rights, which liberal peacebuilding agents view as unequivocal and uncontroversial (e.g. *UN PBC 2007*; *UNDP 2007*). Albeit from a less rigid normative perspective, scholars critical towards liberal peacebuilding also point to problems with many local cultural practices of conflict resolution and reconciliation (e.g. Uvin and Mironko 2003; MacGinty 2007). In particular,

> 'peacebuilding from below' has been criticised as being blind to social justice, when local 'unjust' power structures are strengthened through the engagement of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Amongst this view the gender critique exposes the term 'local actors' as highly problematic in masquerading inequalities between men and women that are obscured by such homogenising labels.' (Llamazares 2005: 11)

One could argue that the problem of idealising local peace-making techniques is exacerbated by the lack of in-depth knowledge of cultures with which liberal peacebuilding interacts, for otherwise the awareness of patterns of local social hierarchy and mobility would enable the interveners to see beyond the homogenising façade of the 'local community' by discerning the attributes of power and status, opportunity and voice(lessness) (cf. Richards et al. 2004). But instead of inspiring enquiry into culture(s), the recognition of the inherent 'faults' of cultural peace-making mechanisms by liberal peacebuilding leads it to disaggregate local cultures into 'usable' and 'harmful' aspects, without further discussion about how the two may be entwined or related from an 'insider' perspective. For example, a USAID conflict analysis guide (2005) identifies patrimonial networks as a contributing factor in conflict (due to the exclusion dynamics they may generate), but leaves unaddressed a deeper cultural dimension of patrimonialism implicated not just in the recurring patterns of societal organisation it produces, but in the fundamental worldviews of sociality (cf. Ferme 2001). The resulting impression is that patrimonialism is an unfortunate deviation which is 'curable' through projects addressing, for instance, civil society or institutional development (USAID 2005).

However, it is doubtful that such projects, however well funded, will make much headway in 'eradicating' patrimonialism, since, as shown in Chapter 5 with regard to Sierra Leone, from the local perspective, donor efforts and their very role are easily slotted into the existing – patrimonial – interpretational structures (cf. Hohe 2002a). A similar 'superficial' understanding characterises the fight against corruption (*WB 2007a*).

 The tendency of splitting culture into 'positive' and 'harmful' aspects is problematic not because they are ultimately inseparable by way of a 'systemic' relationship (Merry 2003), but rather because the exact terms of the relationship between the 'desirable' and 'undesirable' elements remain unclear without deeper cultural knowledge. Furthermore, any such separation is premised on a particular (cultural) perspective with its own set of criteria of harmfulness and utility, which obscures the possibility of other scales for determining the functions and ethical implications of cultural practices. While both the discourse of liberal peacebuilding and its critics may be found wanting on this account, there is a difference between a critical 'interrogation' of local cultural practices (e.g. MacGinty 2008) and judging them for compatibility with the normative framework of liberal peace. While the former's purpose of constructing more equitable cultures, although affected by its own cultural premises, lacks prescriptive character, the latter tends to deny the cultural terms of such 'compatibility tests' in the first place. Since the values embodied in the liberal peace are positioned above culture, this problem is not presented as a matter of cross-cultural compatibility, instead acquiring connotations of an objective approval (or otherwise) of particular cultures by an unbiased higher authority:

> UNICEF's Declaration on the Rights of the Child, for example, allows aid agencies to present themselves as leading a civilising mission of enlightenment in the South. Whole societies can be placed beyond the pale according to how children are treated.' (Duffield 2001: 32)

The supposedly a-cultural grounding of values advanced by the liberal peace conveys upon its monologue a universal and impartial sense of legitimacy, removing the grounds for questioning its power and underlying interests.

Towards a dissolution of the monologue on culture?

Representations of culture that emerge from the above overview demonstrate an almost schizophrenic ambivalence, with culture portrayed as both a victim (WB 2003; UNDP 2004a) and a perpetrator complicit in maintaining the social structures of inequality that help foment conflict (e.g. HRW 2003; EC s.a.); an alleged force for peace (EC 2007) and as something problematic in this respect (CPR 2005; EC s.a.). The majority of the documents, as though attempting to avoid the untenability of such ambivalence, gloss over the issue of culture altogether. Ironically, even where violent conflict produces a heightened awareness of culture as a result of conflict, its discussion is hampered by the peacebuilders' considerations of political correctness and the assumption of excessive sensitivity of the issue for the local communities (Witharana 2002: 11). Although some documents communicate a more balanced view of culture – for instance, CPR's *Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) Handbook* instructs to consider both the possible impact of

'attitudes, systems and structures' on violations of economic rights, and the issues of trust and confidence between communities (CPR 2005: 22) – the overall treatment of culture in the liberal peacebuilding discourse emerges as both atomistic and contradictory, sometimes in the documents of the same actor. If such apparent contradictions can be taken as evidence that the monologue of liberal peacebuilding is struggling with 'subjugating' culture to its rule, the cumulative impact of the unwilling admission of 'otherness' is hampered by the atomism of these revelations. The awareness of the controversies related to culture is also suppressed by the monologism of the very language of policy documents, which present the realities of conflict and peace in a markedly common-sense, uncontroversial fashion that makes them readily susceptible to the application of liberal policy solutions. Given that the issue of culture is generally deemed 'policy-relevant' only with reference to particular issues, deeper cultural connections between these issues mostly escape the attention of policy makers and practitioners. By way of a self-fulfilling 'mono-logic,' the missed relevance of cultural links between various issues pertaining to conflict and peace also justifies, for liberal peace practitioners, *not* reflecting on culture in all its complexity.

In this light, it is unsurprising that the full scope of culture's ambivalence is noticeable across, rather than within, the discourses of individual actors. This is well in line with the general trend of reflection on the overall impact of liberal peacebuilding falling outside the domain of its own policy framework, being instead accomplished by external critique with varying degrees of sympathy for the project of liberal peace (e.g. Cousens and Kumar 2001; Paris 2004; Richmond 2005). Although liberal peacebuilding actors routinely scrutinise their own field operations (as evidenced by the vast volume of reports and the rhetoric of 'lessons learned'), there is little reflection, among the policy community, on the impact of the liberal peacebuilding enterprise as a whole. For some, this confirms the external construction of the liberal peace which exaggerates the degree of actual commonality between its agents. Yet, it could also be argued that the presumption of shared principles and understandings behind the liberal approach to peacebuilding effectively removes the need for mutual interrogation (or even curiosity) on the part of its practitioners (although see EPLO 2006). Indeed, the proliferation of coordinating bodies and the development of common methodologies for conflict analysis (e.g. UNDP 2004a) could be seen as an attempt to counter the default practice among liberal peacebuilding actors to engage little with each others' policies or activities – except where organisations are connected by way of decision-making hierarchy or financial accountability.

This results, among other things, in the limited possibilities for assessing the impact of liberal peacebuilding 'from within.' Yet the need for such critical introspection on the part of the liberal peace cannot be overstated, in view of the apparent contradictions between its methods and objectives, which routinely undermine their achievement (cf. Smith 2003). For example, the issue of militarism, widely blamed for the destruction of local culture and the onset of a 'culture of violence' (e.g. Rosenblatt 1993: 88), is rarely addressed by liberal peacebuilding actors in connection with the military ethos of peacekeeping and its role in the formation of local ideas of power and political influence (Fetherston and Nordstrom 1995; see

also Jabri 1996; Edkins 2003; Ellis 2004; Hoffman 2007). Yet this connection suggests that the exercise at 'demilitarising the mind,' which a DfID document professes to be a key element in the success of peacebuilding (2001: 20), should start with addressing the culture of liberal peacebuilding itself. Similar disregard for the impact of their own methods is notable in the practices of relief agencies in South Sudan, which, according to Rackley (2000), may be even more harmful than violence for cultural resilience of the recipient communities (manifested in extended social networks and 'safety nets'). The difficulties which liberal peacebuilding experiences with achieving an internal critical perspective upon its policies and their implications are consistent with its monological culture. By purporting to fill the entire space of thinkable political practice with respect to conflict and peace, liberal peacebuilding disables alternative perspectives from which to illuminate – and critically examine – its own fundamental premises. Apart from hampering its capacity for self-reflection, this also makes the liberal peace extremely vulnerable to the opportunism of local actors versed in its rhetoric, who are able to hijack its considerable resources in pursuit of their own agendas (e.g. Helander 2005; Richmond and Franks 2007; Richards et al. 2004; see also Chapter 5).

Within the liberal peace itself, the 'peripheral' dissidence with respect to its 'monologism' is more noticeable among the smaller actors, such as NGOs whose staff is closely involved in practical work in a limited number of country cases. Such actors tends to highlight the importance of the issue of cultural traditions, including assumptions about communication, norms, and codes of interaction between themselves and their local beneficiaries, preserving an awareness of potential problems and 'culture clashes' in communication (*Large 2007*; *NP 2007a*). For smaller actors, cultural awareness of the staff is a high priority; for example, the NGO Nonviolent Peaceforce conducts extensive country-related training programmes for its peace workers (lasting between 1 and 3 months). The content of such training is not prescribed, but left to the discretion of the staff in situ (*NP 2007b*). Although larger organisations taking part in liberal peacebuilding also offer training to their staff, the issues covered are largely prescribed from above, as with the European Commission's gender sensitive training for peace missions personnel (EC 2001: 25). And although appreciation of the importance of local cultural knowledge for the success of peacebuilding missions is increasingly commonplace in programmatic documents (e.g. UNSC 2004), it is not often upheld in practice (cf. Kent 2005: 38):

> Some international NGOs (INGOs) are in effect casual visitors. Senior expatriate staff work on short contracts, spend most of their time in the capital, and build up little or no direct knowledge of social conditions in the rural communities they serve. Nor is there much interest in filling this void. (Richards et al. 2004: 28)

The hierarchical organisation of much of the peacebuilding on the ground, in that the initiatives of local actors are often enveloped in 'the standard operating procedures of large organisations that depend upon the standard operating procedures of other large organisations' (Kent 2005: 38), effectively limits the potential impact of cultural awareness. The same can be said about the scant (albeit hopeful) evidence of scrutiny that policies of major liberal peacebuilding actors receive from their smaller counterparts (as, for example, with the EPLO drawing attention to the

possibility of 'very different values, aspirations, needs and approaches to governance and to development' (2006) in their criticism of the European Commission's Issues Paper on development cooperation). If anything, the recent decade has brought about evidence of further monological consolidation of a liberal approach to peacebuilding. Driven by an increasing formalisation of the relations of NGOs with their donor governments on the one hand, and a convergence between policy priorities of national actors, on the other, this 'homogenisation' of approaches as well as the very 'definitions of what constitutes a successful peacebuilding process' (Llamazares and Levy 2003: 11, 13; Holzscheiter 2005) leaves little space for debate within the discourse of liberal peacebuilding. In this respect, total exclusion from the networked relations which characterise the liberal peace (Duffield 2001), coupled with freedom from its discursive commitments and prescriptive agendas, may bear greater promise of changing the approach to peacebuilding in real terms (see Appadurai 2004; Boege 2006). Needless to say, this conclusion does little for optimism with regard to cultural sensitivity of the liberal peace.

The 'other' of the critique of liberal peacebuilding

Many of the limitations of liberal peacebuilding discussed above appear to be coded into its monological mode of perception of itself, the problems at hand, and available policy responses. This is reflected in the inability of the liberal peace to gain an alternative perspective upon itself that would expose the essentially *limited* nature of its enterprise, and possibility of other – different – understandings, visions, and recipes for action. This latter function is apparently fulfilled by critical approaches to peacebuilding, including a vast literature focusing specifically on the critique of liberal peace. Yet, for all the effect that it is having on its policy discourse, the bulk of the critique might just as well not exist. The puzzle of this apparent obliviousness of the liberal peace discourse towards an array of approaches attacking its core beliefs and foundations deserves investigating, given how much the prospect of reforming the dominant approaches to conflict hinges upon its ability to be receptive towards critique. Although many of the effects of this rather one-sided dialogue between the critique and the liberal peace may be explained by the latter's monological stance, their interaction needs analysing in a greater detail if this section is to come up with ways of 'unclosing' that monologue.

Quite aside from (albeit in keeping with) the 'monologism' of the liberal peace, the differences between its paradigm and the critical approaches to peacebuilding can be traced to their respective epistemological and methodological (in Tickner's sense of the term 'methodology' (2005)) preferences. The liberal peace operates within a 'problem-solving' economy of 'traditional' theory, while the nature of critical enquiry is by definition never-ending, directed as it is towards questioning the very parameters of thought in which 'problems' are formulated (Cox 1981). This leads to the mutual perception of incompatibility between these two bodies of thought and practice. The critique of the liberal peace views its 'problem-solving' ethos as limited and misdirected, bound to replicate, in the offered solutions, the very problems with which they attempt to grapple. And conversely, the 'continuous' character of critical theorising (cf. Richmond 2009a: 580) is something of an anathema for a result-oriented rationalist economy of liberal peacebuilding and

development theory, whose 'problem-solving' ambitions are reinforced by the application to a context which seems to compel successful and final (re)solutions with particular urgency – violent conflict.[10] Even despite the growing evidence that its own problem-solving efforts fail, in the end, to achieve the professed objectives (e.g. Paris 2004), the alternative in terms of a 'sustained scholarly' effort (Chabal and Daloz 2006: 97) that is difficult to measure in terms of concrete outputs is difficult to accept.[11] From the perspective of liberal peacebuilding, the bulk of critical literature appears quite beside the point, little as it does to replace one set of 'solutions' with another (and, presumably, a better one). And although it would be a gross exaggeration to claim that the critique goes entirely unnoticed by the policy community of the liberal peace, its impact is more pronounced when it addresses concrete assumptions and methodologies (e.g. the 'tyranny of participation' (Cooke and Kothari 2004; *UNDP 2007*), or misdirection of development aid (Uvin 1998; *UNDP 2007*)). In its general implications, however, the critique is far less influential – which is perhaps understandable given that these are sufficiently radical to entail a fundamental rethinking of the nature of peacebuilding practice (and perhaps its demise in the current form).

A counter-critique?

Although the encounter with critique appears quite damning for the limited 'certainties' of the liberal peace, there is an element of its dissatisfaction with the critical stance generally that is worth investigating, for it has direct relevance for the ability of critique to be perceived as offering viable alternatives to the current liberal peacebuilding 'monologue.' It concerns the problematic of action within the critical theory and its post-structural elaborations, and in particular, the question of whether action can be legitimised outside a 'problem-solving' interpretational economy.

The apparent inability of the critique to offer alternative practical solutions to the perceived 'problems' has not escaped the attention of scholars within the critical camp – even considering the discrepancies between the 'traditional' and critical understandings of what constitutes a problem in need of addressing (e.g. Kapoor 2008: 14-6). All too often, the effects of critical questioning and 'undoing' of the hegemonic realities are inaccessible for anyone not sharing the premises of critical enquiry. Although Connolly's point that the study of political discourse *is* political analysis, and not just a prelude to it (1983), stands valid, it is also clear that too often, critical scholars operate on the assumption that 'because a narrative has been read and deconstructed epistemologically and theoretically, "therefore it has been displaced *politically*"' (Kapoor 2008: 16, quoting Hall 1996: 249, italics Hall's). Overall, there seems to be little awareness among critical scholars about how their writing is perceived by those whose discourses they endeavour to deconstruct. But it seems likely that on the average, policy-makers beset by problems which defy simple resolution are not going to favour knowledge which increases the uncertainty

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[10] The very title of e.g. 'the Results Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF)' – Liberia's reconstruction programme to which international donors had pledged approximately $500 million (Kent 2005: 34) – is indicative of this trend.

[11] One might speculate that the addiction to demonstrable outputs and quantifiable results accounts for the relative neglect of conflict prevention (cf. Brown 2004) as part of the 'integrated' approach to peacebuilding – despite all the official rhetoric in its support (e.g. Annan 2001).

of their situation. And even where decision-makers may be receptive to the full implications of the critique, it seems that – to use Robert Harris' elegant formulation – 'inertia, the product of always seeing both sides of every question,'[12] undermines the very possibility of uncontroversial action. This problematic is succinctly captured in Simon Critchley's account of Derrida's view of politics:

> Deconstruction can certainly be employed as a powerful means of political analysis. For example, showing how a certain dominant political regime ... is based on a set of undecidable presuppositions is an important step in the subversion of the regime's legitimacy. ... But how is one to account for the move from undecidability to the political *decision* to combat that domination? If deconstruction is the strictest possible determination of undecidability in the limitless context of, for the lack of a better word, experience, then this entails the suspension of the moment of decisions. Yet decisions have to be taken. But how? And in virtue of what? How does one make decisions in an undecidable terrain? (Critchley 1992: 199, quoted in Buckley-Zistel 2006: 9-10, emphasis Critchley's)

There seems to be a sense in which 'action' – in terms of political decision-making – involves a slide into Habermasian 'rational-purposive' mode of engagement with the world (cf. Wuthnow et al. 1984: 188-9; Critchley 1992: 200). For many critical theorists, this effectively limits the repertoire of action borne of critique to its perpetuation, since its application in political practice risks 'substitution of one power with another' or 'even reappropriation [of critique] by the dominant' paradigm (Kapoor 2008: 8; cf. Ashley 1989; Rengger and Thirkell-White 2007: 9). Yet, bearing in mind the self-designation of critical theory as an approach tasked with questioning the parameters within which problems are defined, it may be ideally placed to reconceptualise the whole problematic of action, especially in view of the narrow understanding of what constitutes politically consequential action, and the predominant adversarial and exclusive connotations of political decision-making. The critical stance could legitimise a very different understanding of action, free from the connotations of finality, irreversibility and 'non-perspective,' one in which 'problems' are not exactly resolved, but discussed from a position enabling multiple perspectives and transcended at the level of non-adversarial engagement and dialogue (cf. Coker 1997; Buckley-Zistel 2006; Viktorova Milne, forthcoming). Although the risk of sliding into the problem-solving mode of action is never entirely superseded, the 'critical' awareness of typical discursive entrapments allows for making more informed choices with regard to which (inevitably) empty signifiers to employ so as to accommodate the notions of (illusory) commonality and responsibility in least harmful ways (cf. Laclau 1989). Albeit these may seem like scant practical returns from the overall effort put into critical theorising, they do contrast favourably with the 'unintended' effects of the dominant problem-solving 'rational' type of action, which tends to reproduce the very problems that it considers serious enough to necessitate 'resolution' (see e.g. Campbell 1992; Fetherston 2000a). For such 'rational' paradigms, the lack of realisation of the embeddedness of the actor also constitutes an obstacle to grasping the value that cultural enquiry could carry for peacebuilding.

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[12] Robert Harris, *Enigma* (Random House, 1995), p. 181.

The monological 'retaliation' of liberal peacebuilding

Given that seeing oneself as a situated actor also forms a prerequisite for perceiving the existence of other points of departure, it is perhaps possible to explain how the monologism of the culture of liberal peacebuilding mediates its perception of critique. If from an outlook informed by a critical awareness of multiple perspectives, the critique of liberal peacebuilding may indeed appear too radical for incorporating into the policy 'mainstream,' then what limits its impact from a monological viewpoint is, paradoxically, that it may not be perceived as sufficiently different from this mainstream. Lacking the apparatus to differentiate between perspectives, voices, and 'languages,' the monological discourse of liberal peacebuilding effectively distorts the distance – theoretical, epistemological, ontological – between itself and (however radical) critique. As a result, it distils critique into aspects which speak directly to its policies (e.g. how to 'improve' local participation or accountability), simply discarding the radical implications 'invisible' from its position. Various instances of critique thus appear to be 'taken on board' through appending them to the existing repertoire of policies, without major reconsideration of the compatibility between these policies and the gist of critical arguments. The manner of 'including' culture in the policy agenda of liberal peacebuilding bears all signs of such superficial add-on to the monologue of liberal peace – a move which appears to assuage any valid concerns with culture while avoiding an in-depth commitment to it.

The pinpointed tendency of monological 'digestion' of the other of critique (cf. Critchley 1992) may explain how the awareness of critique coexists, for the practitioners of liberal peacebuilding, with the unwavering belief in the rightness of its overall policy course.[13] It may also explain the occasional incursions of the monologue of liberal peace into research displaying an overall critical intent, as in the case of Chopra and Hohe's (2004) recommendations for bridging the cultural gap between organised peacebuilding and local culture. Their suggestion of scrutinising local cultural practices with a view to their inclusion and subjugation within the liberal peace framework is especially unexpected given that Hohe's earlier research on East Timor (2002a, b) had demonstrated the extent of the incompatibility of Timorese notions of politics and society with the ones introduced by the liberal peace, which often results in parallel authority structures instead of integration between the two. The liberal peace does, indeed, emerge as 'meta-peace' (MacGinty 2008: 158) from its encounters with critique, replete with paradoxes and clashes between its elements, yet continuing undeterred by virtue, it seems, of lacking a perspective from which to illuminate its own incongruities.

Conclusion

The monologism of liberal peace effectively displaces concerns with culture from the peacebuilding agenda. The 'disrupting' influences of the 'others' of liberal peace, although both notable and noticeable from the critical perspective, seem insufficient to rock the certainty of its monologue, which absorbs and disables

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[13] As I gleaned from interviews at the UNDP and UN PBC in 2007.

difference through its inability to recognise it. Despite its self-reinforcing stability, however, the monological culture of liberal peacebuilding is not immutable. And although at present, the outlined aspects of its culture work to reinforce one another, by themselves, the monological mode of signification, the mythologisation of rationality, the securitisation of the liberal peace project, and the resultant banishment of politics and technologisation of peace are not invulnerable to a dialogical 'unclosing.' The doubts concern not the possibility of a dialogical unclosure but the manner in which it may occur.

Some space for reflection that could bring about such unclosure can be found within the established parameters of the monological culture of liberal peacebuilding. For example, the high regard for problem-solving rationality, for all its distortion through mythological absolutisation, entails a degree of reflection upon the (mis)fit between the methods, objectives, and practical outputs of peacebuilding policy and reform. Indeed, there is a growing sense of humility among the peacebuilding practitioners about the extent of change in (post-)conflict environments that can be achieved through the application of liberal policy models (Chandler 2009). Once the liberal peace begins to see itself as an inherently *limited* enterprise, it is but one step away from acknowledging other perspectives and approaches to peacebuilding. And although it may regard its 'illiberal' counterparts, such as the reconstruction efforts of Hezbollah in Lebanon (MacGinty 2007), or 'hybrid' political orders of the Pacific (Boege et al. 2008), as unacceptable in view of its own core beliefs, this may lead liberal peacebuilding to reposition itself as one type of peacebuilding practice among others. It may also contribute to the de-coupling of peace from other aims and means of liberal reform, such as state-, nation-, and institution-building, the liberalisation of economics and politics, and *de facto* marketisation of the civil society. From there, the path of dialogical unclosure may take it to de-mythologise rationality – a possibility which resonates with the ambition of many a critical work to rediscover the inherently circumscribed – by its very design – nature of scientific rationality (Toulmin 1992, 2001; George 1994). That, in turn, may contribute to the recognition of other types of knowledge, especially in view of their potential for illuminating the irregular, incalculable ramifications of violent conflict with which the problem-solving rationality of liberal peacebuilding has been struggling (Viktorova Milne, forthcoming). And from there, there is only a short distance to reintroducing concerns with culture as a framework and vehicle of knowledge production, and to reflection over the culturally-situated nature of the liberal peace.

Ultimately, of course, there is no way of ensuring that such dialogical unclosure does occur, and that the recognition of the perniciousness of problems such as 'neopatrimonilaism' or 'corruption' does not, instead, inspire devising yet more failsafe ways to eliminate the 'immature' local agency from the imposed governance solutions (such as Paris' 'institutionalisation before democratisation' approach (2004)). Similarly, there is every possibility that a greater prominence in liberal peacebuilding of aspects pertaining to culture, such as gender, ethnicity, capacity for action, or local distribution and workings of power, instead of leading to a serious engagement with culture, will result in its co-option by the dominant rationalist paradigm. However, this possibility does not entirely justify shying away from pinpointing the monological closures, or refusing to exploit the silenced ambiguities,

such as in the liberal peacebuilding's treatment of culture, on the grounds that this will only strengthen its capacity for 'unethical' digestion of the other (cf. Critchley 1992: 6). As discussed above (Chapter 2), the relations of domination yield complex patterns of dependencies and resistances, and the latter may well be an outcome of such surreptitious encroachment of the cultural problematic into the traditional domains of liberal peacebuilding – especially given the latter's track record in submitting to subversion from 'within.' The steady accumulation of dissident voices and dynamics within the monological self-description of liberal peacebuilding is bound to have an effect sooner or later – but the difference is on whose terms – the liberal peace's own, or the dissidents', it will take place.

In fact, the recent trend in policy discourses of liberal peacebuilding towards uncovering the connections between issues that have, for a long time, been tackled separately – such as the wider social implications of development policies, and especially their impact on conflict and its avoidance or resolution (UNDP 2004; DfID 2002) – creates a definite niche for cultural enquiry as offered in the present work, given its emphasis on reconnecting the diverse spheres of human activity and experiences through the recognition of their common cultural constitution and role in the production and negotiation of meaning. An attempt at such enquiry into the conflict and peacebuilding in Sierra Leone is offered in the next chapter. Of course, the uncharted, inductive character of 'embedded cultural enquiry' makes it unrecognisable as a conventional attempt at 'conflict analysis,' yet the issues outlined through the lens of cultural constitution of meanings appear very pertinent for the understanding of conflict in Sierra Leone and the subsequent efforts at pacification. Whether or not such an analysis can yield knowledge which speaks to liberal peacebuilding, is another matter.

5. Peacebuilding and 'Local' Culture: Cultural dynamics of war and peace in Sierra Leone

> Their collecting tins were already full of donations for the poor of the city, or at least those sections of the poor who in Mrs Huggs' opinion were suitably picturesque and not too smelly and could be relied upon to say thank you.

> – Terry Pratchett, *Hogfather*

Introduction

This chapter pursues the twin tasks of assessing the ability of liberal peacebuilding to engage with 'local' culture, and of uncovering a wide spectrum of cultural processes which informed and framed the violent conflict and the subsequent peace transition in Sierra Leone. Based on the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 3, I outline the possibilities of approaching the dynamics of Sierra Leone's civil war from a cultural perspective, and analyse the cultural implications of other interpretations of this conflict which had been put forth by academics and peacebuilding practitioners. In particular, I try to show how pre-conceived conceptual frameworks, in which conflicts and their causes tend to be examined, produce explanations which reaffirm the terms of established vocabularies while remaining remote from topical local dynamics and their cultural framing in Sierra Leone (cf. Jackson 2005: 53-4). Yet, a situation of encounter between different cultural 'world-making' regimes inevitably results in some degree of mutual influence and 'translation,' and opens possibilities for an enhanced awareness of one's own cultural perspective – something that applies both to the interaction between liberal peacebuilding and 'local culture,' and to the interplay between different interpretational regimes within the latter. I attempt to map these instances of translation and mutual illumination by examining the local reception of the interventions, as well as the perceptions of the war violence and the peace process (reconstructed on the basis of case study research, interviews and available recent ethnographies).

Given its ubiquity as a discursive if not actual presence, it would be erroneous to treat the liberal peace as altogether external to Sierra Leone's realities; yet it is important to sustain an awareness of realities that are 'unmade' as a result of its application. Sierra Leone features prominently in discourses of peacebuilding agencies, being one of the few countries on the agenda of the recently created UN Peacebuilding Commission (*UN PBC 2007*). In Sierra Leone itself, institutional frameworks of national, regional and transnational scope proliferate, and even when ineffectual in their functions or achievements, they dominate the parlance of actors engaging in peacebuilding and set precedents for its possible institutional organisation. For example, despite the largely defunct government structures over

the last decade in all countries involved, the Mano River Union between Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea supposedly provides an established framework of cooperation on cross-regional issues, thus detracting attention from the everyday realities of the border areas which are virtually unregulated, permeable to actors of any description and intent, and ultimately marginal (cf. Richards 1996: 42-6, 128-9; Jackson 2004: 183-4). Yet such remote areas can also become sites of small-scale peacebuilding activities that respond to local needs and visions of peace, not all of them institutionalised according to the habitual forms of 'civil society initiatives' (for an example of one that is, see Clifford (s.a.) or *Accord* 9 on Sulima Fishing Community Development Project). In order to gauge the resonance of liberal peacebuilding in Sierra Leone, it is important to understand the remits of 'local' relevance of different institutional formats, as well as the connotations that these may have in the local context.

At the same time, care must be taken not to reify the 'local' through investigating the (ineffectual) attempts at engaging with it on behalf of international actors, or to condone its analytical (as well political and normative) isolation from the 'international.' The idea, rather, is to emphasise the production of the 'local' that is taking place through the interactions between a variety of cultural perspectives, both internal and external to Sierra Leone. And while the discussion in this chapter highlights the impossibility of arriving at a universal reference point against which to measure the 'truth' or 'falsehood' of any ideas about conflict, peace, change, and their agents, it also demonstrates the totalising effects that any terms of enquiry have on the framing of its subject. These reservations, admittedly, also apply to the present enquiry, since openness to the possibility of multiple frames of reference for interpreting reality does not give the conceptual framework of cultural analysis any privileged access to said 'reality.' However, its awareness of the reality-making mechanisms inherent in any attempt to 'make sense' of the conflict and peace in Sierra Leone guards against ignoring its own totalising potential (perhaps to the detriment of definitiveness of some conclusions reached below). The terms of the adopted theoretical stance, thus, inevitably colour the presentation. They also inevitably represent an outsider's perspective on Sierra Leone, and cultural embeddedness of my own subject position predisposes it towards a dialogue with other outsiders' attempts at analysing the encounters between Sierra Leone and the liberal peace (or the West) rather than an objective, 'unbiased' examination of these encounters themselves. While this is likely to entail 'under-representing' African perspectives on such encounters (as well as those of the liberal peace), the task of the following analysis lies more in exploring the possibilities of a culturally 'receptive' outside approach to violent conflict in Africa, than balancing the current external approaches with internal views. (While the latter would also constitute a valuable aspect of cultural enquiry, its impact would be limited without sketching out a way of a 'different' kind of external perspective on Sierra Leone.)

The chapter omits a separate historical overview of the conflict and interventions, weaving the account of events into the narrative of how the conflict has been approached by academics and peacebuilding practitioners, seeking to show how the very isolation of meaningful events from the bulk of other happenings is predicated upon, and serves to reaffirm, a particular perspective on the conflict. Producing a

definitive chronological account would also be at odds with the intention of emphasising the necessity of in-depth engagement with the case study which is likely to uncover tensions, contradictions and inconsistencies upsetting any linear presentation of events. Instead, the received accounts are examined side by side with alternative perspectives on cultural dynamics yielded by the case study research, probing, where possible, the implications of alternative conceptualisations on the viability of peace(building) in Sierra Leone.

The chapter is divided into three broadly defined parts. While the first part concentrates on the interpretational economies of the templates of peace and war, and explores the reasons behind their limited validity in Sierra Leone, the second part addresses the wider cultural structures involved in the production and stabilisation of particular meanings related to conflict and peace, bringing out the contradictions between 'local culture' and liberal peace. The third part continues the analysis of the interaction between these competing cultural logics, focusing on the production of Sierra Leone as the subject of conflict transformation and the accompanying processes of the 'making' of peace.

I. The making of the conflict in Sierra Leone: The templates of peace and war

This part revisits the interpretations of Sierra Leone's civil war, its origins and dynamics from the perspective of cultural production of meaning, focusing on the role of interpretational schemes consolidated by the 'templates' of war and peace. It enquires into the dynamics and peculiarities of meaning-generation corresponding to one or another template, as well as the factors contributing to the stabilisation of either template as the dominant avenue of sense-making. It also prepares the ground for discussing the broader cultural 'fields' responsible both for stabilising individual meanings and validating the templates' interpretational schemes.

External agency played a major part in 'making sense' of what had taken place in Sierra Leone, imposing, in the process, its own 'realities' on the conflict, even when naively purporting to present things as 'they really are' (e.g. Gberie 2005: 11). While the evolution of the donor approach to conflict has been noted to follow the 'vogues' in development discourse rather than the actual needs on the ground (Duffield 2001), many scholarly studies, even those relying on close-up, ethnographic research, also appear to answer at least as much to the topical debates within their own fields as to the 'puzzling' conflict realities (e.g. Richards 1996, cf. Richards 2005a). Because the chosen terms of enquiry largely predetermine which aspects of the reality on the ground will appear relevant or even visible (in accord with Sapir and Whorf's idea that we see what our language enables us to see (e.g. Whorf 1956)), the studies of Sierra Leone's conflict inevitably conceal as much as they reveal. In part, this helps explain why the habitual terms of enquiry into conflict and violence yield so little 'cultural' evidence, or why they are not best suited to illuminate the 'local' interpretational schemes, whether pre-dating, or originating in, the conflict.

Some of the terms in which explanations of the conflict were cast – originating both in the general conflict literature and the studies of specifically African, or 'Southern' conflicts – have found their way into the rhetoric of liberal peacebuilding agents. But what is perhaps more significant, is how 'neutral' the explanations in terms of 'root causes,' 'violations of human rights,' 'greed versus grievance,' 'bad governance' or 'political marginalisation' sound to a lay observer. A cultural analysis of the representational space of Sierra Leone thus refers to uncovering the disparate descriptions of Sierra Leone's reality and interactions between them, to attempts to superimpose some descriptions over others as the basis for the ensuing patterns of practices, as well as to processes which make these descriptions 'stick.' One of the consequences of pre-conceived terms of approaching the conflict in Sierra Leone has been the 'streamlined' and homogenised vision of the 'war,' in which rebel groups and militias feature as counterparts of the international UN contingents and national and regional security forces. Yet a focus on the top-level dynamics of the war (where the 'top' is coterminous with military success) (e.g. Mortimer 2000) obscures the character of representational links which lead 'down' from this top, reading the assumption of impersonal and bureaucratised hierarchies into the 'rebel' command structures (Hoffman 2007). This downplays the importance of the socio-cultural dimension of Sierra Leone's conflict (cf. Chabal and Daloz 1999) as well as a whole host of peace initiatives that have taken place at the societal level, both together with and independently of the official peace negotiations (e.g. *PRIDE 2006*; *CR 2006*; *FAWE SL 2006a*, *b*; *Accord* 9; *SCG SL 2006*).

Ascription of the habitual significational patterns to the dynamics of Sierra Leone's conflict resulted in its near 'illegibility' to the outsiders, despite the wide currency of its meanings in rural Sierra Leone (cf. Ellis 1999). Thus, in contrast to his own argument that there are 'social factors feeding the conflict,' Paul Richards cites a view prevalent among the 'diplomatic circles [around 1994] … that the rebel movement had been destroyed and the violence was exclusively the work of bandits and military splinter groups' (1996: xvii). He also quotes Luttwak's view that the 'chaos' engulfing Sierra Leone 'cannot be described as civil war, inasmuch as the contending forces – notably including the "government" – represent nobody but themselves' (1995, quoted in Richards 1996: xvii). Curiously, this has also been claimed of subsequent 'governments,' such as the 1997-1998 AFRC/RUF 'interregnum' (Gberie 2005: 98), in comparison with which the 1992-1996 NPRC junta of young disillusioned army officers (cf. Hirsch 2001: 35) looked positively representative, resonating as it did with the sentiments of many 'excluded youths.' The cases of 'misreading' the local signification schemes also abound in the analyses of the peace process. While, for instance, there were good reasons to believe that starting a peace process with the staging of elections in 1996 may not have been the most considered decision, Malan et al.'s criticism of it has to do with the contravention of the 'UN-prescribed pattern of ceasefire, peace agreement, disarmament, demobilisation, and then elections' (2002: Ch 2) rather than with the recognition of the highly contentious cultural baggage of electoral politics in Sierra Leone (Ferme 1998). Presenting the conflict itself as 'an aberration of the true Sierra Leone' (Tony Blair, quoted in Gberie 2005: 3) serves as a marker of the inability of many traditional approaches to conflict to address the issue of cultural continuities

between the states of war and peace, or the extent of their mutual constitution (Richards 2005a; Jabri 1996). The following analysis seeks to remedy some of the deficiencies of 'reading' the conflict in Sierra Leone by illuminating the local significational patterns as well as their interaction with the introduced interpretations.

The rhetorical unevenness of 'peace' and 'war'

Many observers have criticised the international community for taking several years to start treating the conflict in Sierra Leone seriously (e.g. Hirsch 2001). Yet this uncertain status of the conflict on the radars of the international actors also offers important clues to its character. Directing the analysis towards the reasons and circumstances behind not only external, but also internal unevenness of the acceptance of 'the state of war' (Zulaika and Douglass 1996) in Sierra Leone can help in re-examining the received wisdoms regarding the causes of the conflict, together with appropriate remedies, from a perspective informed by attention to cultural processes of meaning-generation.

In hindsight, the entire period between 1991 and 2002 was branded as the Sierra Leone civil war. Such branding has a homogenising effect on our perception of the conflict, and detracts attention from the fact that attempts to end the war by a negotiated settlement have interrupted its course since 1996[14] (some observers also point out the RUF peace initiative of 1992 (e.g. Richards 1996) or Strasser's appeal to the UNSG to intervene with 'good offices' in 1994 (Gberie 2005: 90)). This received periodisation also 'consummates' (Bakhtin 1990a; Holquist 1990) the array of different accounts of war and puts a homogenising touch on their contributions in terms of 'validity' and 'truthfulness.' It has been remarked that official periodisations often represent top-down visions of political history, which may be irrelevant for people on the ground (e.g. Tickner 2005; cf. Jackson 2004: 71). While the 'official,' political violence may end, this does not necessarily herald the end of all violence which may be more immediate and proximate to the people (Nordstrom 2004; du Toit 2000; Coker 1997). But even leaving aside the violence that does not qualify as 'political' (and therefore 'relevant' to the issues of peace and war (cf. Ferme 1998)), the official start- and end-dates of war seldom reflect the outer margins of war-related dynamics, since contemporary conflicts seem to lack the definitive boundaries of the conventional 19th and 20th century wars (cf. Ellis 2004: 118-9). However, such periodisations may also be inaccurate in their indiscriminate branding of everything that happened between certain dates as 'war.'

For Sierra Leone, this branding obscures what many accounts (sometimes inadvertently) portray as the patchy, uneven character of the war, both on the spatial and temporal axis. Attempts to advance the rhetorical interpretation of the situation as 'war' have been undertaken by various actors (local and international) at various

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[14] The peace agreements, mostly dismissed as 'failed' in hindsight, create an impressive list: the 1996 Abidjan accords (between GoSL and RUF, started by NPRC's Julius Bio and continued by the elected president Kabbah); the 1997 Conakry agreement (between Koroma's AFRC junta and ECOWAS); the 'controversial' Lomé peace agreement (brokered by the UK and US and signed by President Kabbah and Corporal Sankoh); Abuja I and II Ceasefire Agreements (November 2000 and May 2001, respectively) (e.g. Malan et al. 2002).

points in the conflict; however, the popular acceptance of the rhetoric of war remained uneven. The perception of the war oscillated between distant and proximate, advancing in the face of the immediate experiences of violence and receding with its growing remoteness. In this sense, the perception of the war in the early stages as a marginal, 'purely "south-eastern affair"' (Gberie 2005: 77-8) is symptomatic of the significational pattern at play, as are the examples of sudden realisation of the proximity of war following, for example, the RUF onslaughts on Koidu (1992), Bo (1994) or Freetown itself (1997, 1999). Encroachment of the message of war was also more notable in connection with the 'enemy' control of the country's diamond fields.

Some features of Sierra Leone's overall significational space can be inferred already on the basis of this consideration (others, together with their effect on the dynamics of war and peace, will be discussed further in this chapter). The most prominent among these are the symbolic importance of the centres, the one-sided flow of representation (from centres to periphery) and the weakness of horizontal associational ties between the people that points to a fractured character of Sierra Leone as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) and limits the metonymical effects of violence on its 'audiences' (see Allen 1987).

Its effect on witnesses (as opposed to the perspectives of the victim or perpetrator) has become a recognised dimension in the analyses of violence (see e.g. Riches 1986b; Stewart and Strathern 2002). Witnesses may serve not only as interpreters of violence (a function that is 'unavailable' to its immediate victims (see Murer 2008a)) but also, owing to their shared identity with the victims (be it in terms of shared humanity, race, class, ethnicity etc.), as symbolic targets (cf. Allen 1987). Verbal and televised accounts of violence can enlarge the latter category to include broader communities bound to the victim by representational links. Thus, shared identity gives rise to an economy of violence in which individual bodies become 'metamorphosed into specimens' of a broader 'category' (Malkki 1995: 88, quoted in Donnan and Wilson 1999: 138).

For Sierra Leone, such patterns of collective identification linking the victims of war violence to the broader 'categories' of general public are by no means clear cut. A theme running through many first-hand and scholarly accounts (e.g. Gberie 2005; *PRIDE 2006*; Jackson 2004) is a variable pattern of association between the victims of violence and broader audiences: The people of Sierra Leone do not automatically associate themselves with the victims of violence and do not necessarily interpret such violence as committed against themselves or the whole country, despite the alleged intention of the perpetrators to communicate such 'messages' (see e.g. Richards (1996) for an interpretation of functionality of the RUF violence). Much more potent 'messages' are delivered by the experiences or even expectations of a direct attack: the random character of the RUF's 'hit and run' tactics in the rural areas − once its ambitions of territorial conquest were thwarted by a series of successful offensives (cf. RUF 1995) − often contributed to the exaggeration of its actual might, so that the rumours of RUF advances to an area had a disproportionate effect on its population (Gberie 2005: 92). However, even such rumour-mongering

did not always succeed in mobilising the population: the 'suddenness' of the RUF's advances features in many victims' accounts (e.g. Jackson 2004: 65).

The particularity of identity dynamics premised on such character of signification is reflected in the observations of vertical, rather than horizontal, societal cohesion (cf. Chabal and Daloz 1999), and alludes to the weakness of codes which bind Sierra Leonean people together as a single and unitary 'self,' manifest in the perception of the lack of 'patriotism' lamented by some Sierra Leoneans (cf. Jackson 2004; TRC 2004). This is not to say that Sierra Leone lacks any patterns of collective identification, but rather that the noted 'anomalies' in their functioning can serve as opening points in the cultural analysis of Sierra Leone as a broader significational field, and its links with the noted unevenness of 'war' (and 'peace'). Reversing the above argument, it can be said that 'Sierra Leone' does not represent a universal reference point for the inhabitants of the country, and that the national-level self-description is of limited validity. (The same, as will be shown below, can be said of its international representations.) Consequently, the war was not in many instances perceived as affecting the national level of identification, and instead 'happened' to other forms of unity, predominantly family and locality (which could be extrapolated to the regional level). Unlike the conflict in the neighbouring Liberia, Sierra Leone's war lacked a recognised 'ethnic dimension:' even ethnicity, however politicised in party struggles (see e.g. Kandeh 1992), did not provide a sufficiently cohesive 'glue' for collective representations of war in Sierra Leone.[15] At the same time, the difficulty of outlining a collective 'self' is closely connected to the impossibility of an effective delineation of the 'other' in the Sierra Leone conflict (cf. Barth 1969; see also Chapter 3), given the widespread practices of abduction and forced conscription into the RUF, as well as the RUF's tactics of infiltration of prospective targets (Gberie 2005).

The patchy character of the internal spread of the message of 'war' was reflected in its uneven perception from the outside, as well as the lateness and half-heartedness of international peace missions to Sierra Leone. Indeed, serious international involvement[16] – the brief 1998 UN observer mission (UNOMSIL) notwithstanding – only started after the capital city of Freetown came under attack in the 1999 siege by the rebel forces and the subsequent shelling by ECOMOG in an attempt to oust them (which brought about as many if not more civilian casualties) (Gberie 2005: 131; Malan et al. 2002). The UN deployed a successor mission with Chapter VII powers (UNAMSIL) in late 1999, but its state and strength reflected the continuing attitude of semi-neglect towards the conflict in Sierra Leone:

> The UN force arrived in dribs and drabs, and the available troop strength was too low to allow a widespread deployment. The lack of commitment by the RUF, the essentially peacekeeping nature of the mission, and the need to quickly fill the vacuum left by the

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[15] Interestingly, rather essentialist versions of ethnicity sometimes feature in self-identifications by Sierra Leoneans (e.g. S.B.'s 'I am not a white man. I am a Kuranko,' in response to Jackson's (2004: 180) queries of his behaviour).
[16] ECOMOG's involvement in the peace effort is often dismissed in literature as representing Nigeria's state interests rather than being a genuinely multilateral peacekeeping intervention (e.g. Mortimer 2000), although similar charges of state interest have been levelled against peacekeeping as such (e.g. Martín 2005).

withdrawal of a regional intervention force [ECOMOG] contributed immensely to the mission's predicament. Following the RUF's offensive against the peacekeepers in May 2000, the entire peace process reached an impasse. A bi polar situation persisted, with the RUF controlling the north and east of the country and the government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) or the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) controlling the west and south. (Malan et al. 2002)

The reaction of the international community to the war in Sierra Leone also highlighted the role of armed violence as the marker of a noteworthy conflict (Diez 2003), particularly when its targets were of international importance (symbolic as well as material, as illustrated by the shock of the international community at the siege of Freetown in 1999). The British military intervention (announced on 7 May 2000) in response to a mass hostage taking of UNAMSIL peacekeepers by the RUF in Makeni and Magburaka seems illustrative of the same logic (see e.g. Malan et al. 2002: Ch 3).

For liberal peacebuilding, violence has served as an ambivalent attribute of agency in conflict: although participation in violence de-legitimises local leadership (Duffield 2001), it also serves as a marker of serious intentions and political bearing, as demonstrated by negotiations with Somali warlords at the expense of less prominent local peace 'constituencies' (Duffey 2000; cf. Kaldor 1999). To the extent that the scholarly and policy communities perceive violence as the criterion of agency, the 'West' is complicit in legitimising the resort to violent means by any actors craving for international recognition – or for internal recognition via international resonance (cf. Smith 1997: 3; Duffey 2000). In the task of authorising the rhetorical validity of the message of 'war,' the West with its influence on the African state-level politics becomes the inevitable higher echelon of authority.

Given this tendency for international attention to follow violence, it is unsurprising that various parties to the Sierra Leone conflict used violence as a communication channel to spread the message that Sierra Leone was at war, beyond the state boundaries. The RUF's demands for access to satellite communications are well documented, and international hostage-taking seemed to fulfil the aspirations for international attention where internal violence failed (Richards 1996, Gberie 2005). In 1990-1991, BBC Africa Service broadcasts were the usual medium used by Charles Taylor and Foday Sankoh to communicate belligerent messages; including the broadcast which was used by Sahkoh to announce 'the beginning of his "people's struggle" against Momoh's venal regime' and, rhetorically, to 'conjure' the RUF into existence (Gberie 2005: 59). If it was not for the broadcast, the 'official' start of the war might have gone unnoticed among the multiple other occasions of attacks and lootings of Sierra Leone border villages by the Liberian rebel forces (ibid.: 58-9). The ruling NPRC junta also used the occasions of RUF violence to attract international attention (ibid.: 90). However, until the RUF became a threat to the dominant (internally and externally) self-description of 'Sierra Leone' (cf. Gberie 2005: 3, 87), the 'internationals' were more inclined to perceive the events in Sierra Leone according to Kaplan's 'new barbarism' logic (Richards 1996, 2005a).

The link between violence and the international attention also exposes the ambivalent role that Western involvement had historically played in Sierra Leone (and the wider West African region). Paul Richards characterises the conflict in Sierra Leone as 'moored, culturally, in the hybrid Atlantic world of international commerce in which, over many years, Europeans and Americans have played a prominent and often violent part' (1996: xvii). The work of Rosalind Shaw (2002) sheds light on the role of transatlantic slave trade in the shaping of social relations and power practices of the hinterland Sierra Leone that have continued relevance in the present. The long history of violent incursions and conquests, suffered by various Sierra Leone peoples as well as conducted by them (ibid., Ferme 2001), also helps to uncover the generally ambivalent attitude to violence in Sierra Leone and around (see Ellis 1999), where 'fear, contempt and admiration go hand in hand in the way people speak about those who are truly masters of the art of killing' (Bøås 2001: 718). Thus, the understanding of violence as a marker of agency is also shared within Sierra Leone (which was probably reinforced, rather than generated, by the practices of colonial rule) (Shaw 2002).

Ironically, it was also the heightened levels of violence around the start of 1999 that had brought about 'a frantic scramble among West African states, as well as Britain and the US, to broker a peace agreement' in Sierra Leone (Malan et al. 2002: Ch 2):

> The UN Special Representative initiated a series of diplomatic efforts aimed at opening up dialogue with the rebels. Negotiations between the Government and the rebels began in May 1999. With coaxing from the UK and US, a controversial peace agreement was signed by President Kabbah and Corporal Sankoh in Lomé, Togo, on 7 July 1999. The Lomé accord granted total amnesty to Foday Sankoh and members of the RUF, promised reintegration of the RUF into the Sierra Leonean army, assured the RUF several cabinet seats in the transitional government, left the RUF in control of the diamond mines and invited Sankoh to participate in UN-sponsored elections. (ibid.)

> Despite the obvious flaws in the Lomé agreement, the UN was obliged to back it with a peacekeeping mission. The Lomé signatories specifically requested the UN Security Council to urgently: "…amend the mandate of UNOMSIL to enable it to undertake the tasks provided for it in the present Agreement; [and] to authorise the deployment of a peace-keeping force in Sierra Leone." (ibid.)

Uneven as the spread of the message of 'war' had been throughout its course, so was the perception of 'peace' that had come after the 1999 Lomé agreement. The impact of the Lomé agreement, widely perceived as a vehicle of peace 'forced down on people,' drafted by 'high-level politicians and hand-picked people with western education who had no experience of the war' (*CR 2006*; cf. *PRIDE 2006*), was not uniformly convincing. Although for many, civilians and fighters alike, any peace was preferable to continued war (cf. Humphreys and Weinstein 2004), underneath the war fatigue there was also a noticeable clash of resentments. For many fighters, the war had not brought about the desired improvement of their situation. 'They fought for nothing, and that's what they got,' as captured in Douglas Farah's *Washington Post* article title (1.09.2001), and with respect to income and employment their situation remained similar to pre-war conditions (*PRIDE 2006*). But there is also a perception, especially acute among the numerous victims of the war, that the RUF had 'won' and that letting it reap the meagre rewards (such as re-integration packages), while the victims of their violence had nothing, was

symptomatic of continuing war (Jackson 2004: 71). The dilemma of whether 'peace' was coterminous with the destruction or accommodation of the RUF was evident not only in the internal differences of opinion – from 'ordinary people' to the ruling circles (e.g. between the president and some of the government ministers (Jackson 2004: 70)) – but also in the competing agendas of the interveners: while the UN was committed to support the peace agreement, the UK displayed preference for a force solution to the RUF problem (see Malan et al. 2002).

The templates of 'peace' and 'war:' Separate or interconnected?

The interventions produced a double-track impact: a discourse on the 'root causes' of war together with a series of measures intended to remove them, and a spectrum of measures designed to stop the war in its tracks. While the latter was meant to remove the consequences of the war, the former was designed to remove the conditions in which it could arise. For all the progressiveness of the 'root causes' thinking in conflict theory, it suffers from neglecting cultural factors (see Väyrynen 2001), and its adoption by the peacebuilding discourse substituted the earlier 'conflict management' paradigm with the management of peace. With the 'root causes' detached from the actual course of war (which is presumed to follow its own dynamics premised on the logic of escalation, military strategy, proximate causes etc.), the messiness of the conflict gets disentangled into manageable peacebuilding 'tasks,' such as DDR, the fight against corruption, improving governance, strengthening civil society etc. That something is missed by divorcing these two aspects of conflict is not acknowledged even by all critical scholars of conflict and peace.

The current interpretational battles surrounding the academic conceptualisations of violent conflict and its relation to peace can be placed into two broad categories. At one end of the spectrum, the tendency is to isolate war into a separate social and political phenomenon, which removes it from the horizon of peacetime governance practices and neatly designates it as the abnormal opposite of peace. At the other, continuities are emphasised to stress war and peace as alternative avenues in the pursuit of political and social objectives – avenues that spring from largely the same social and cultural terrain and involve the same sets of 'codes' and conventions. While the appeal of the first option is in its promise of excluding war from the repertoire of social and political action, it is vulnerable in that such a conception of 'peace' is, in fact, incapable of addressing war without a certain loss of self-identity (see Chapter 4). The second option, although being open to the charges of 'normalising' war, seems much better equipped to illuminate the pathways of socio-cultural legitimation of war and certain 'choices' made to precipitate a wholesale reversion to a cultural economy of conflict, as well as the social processes and cultural mechanisms behind the opposite movement towards peace (Richards 2005a; Jabri 1996).

An insight into the workings of signification offered in the theoretical framework allows for a removal of some of the paradoxes of conceptualising the transitions between peace and war. While attesting to the continuities postulated by Richards (2005a) and others, the mechanism of totalisation of partial meanings also contributes to our perception of 'war' and 'peace' as absolute and incontestable

realities. It is in this sense (that reconciles the gradual nature of change and the existence of continuities with the seemingly absolute character of 'peace' and 'war') that the notion of the switch of templates between 'peace' and 'war' is employed and explored here. The oscillation between 'peace' and 'war' as the broad interpretational schemes ('templates') in the case of Sierra Leone also alludes to their close interpenetration. The following discussion will attempt to illuminate the logic of switches as well as mergers between them.

The idea that the state of war is a distinct 'regime' in the functioning of societies has been entertained for some time; it is implied, for example, in a well-known quote from Hobbes: 'For Warre consisteth not in Battel onely, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the Will to contend by Battel is sufficiently known … All other time is Peace' (Hobbes 1985: 185-6). The state of war appears to warrant the types of practices and behaviours that are unthinkable in the time of peace (cf. *BHC SL 2006*), but therein also lies a paradox: performing these 'unthinkable' practices during peacetime has an effect of enunciating a switch to the template of war. As discussed in Chapter 3, meaning-generation possesses a power dimension manifest in its reality-making effects, and this power 'spills over' into the realm of political contest particularly visibly when the meanings articulated are those of peace and war (cf. Zulaika and Douglass 1996). Enunciations of war − or peace − may not be uncontested (this process effectively shares the nuances outlined by Wæver (1995) for the acceptance of speech acts aimed at securitisation), but even as such they are significant, especially in the context of cultures treating verbal expression as much less arbitrary than customary in the West (Shaw 2005; Jackson 2004: 72). In this sense, Taylor's pronouncement about Sierra Leone 'tasting' war, and the contemporary peace activists' public advocacy of non-violence (e.g. *SCG SL 2006*), despite carrying opposing messages, perform similar rhetorical functions. Relatedly, the RUF's control over the means of communication in areas held by them, so that the local inhabitants had no source of information about the course of the war other than what the RUF told them (Gberie 2005: 65), amounts to more than the conventional notion of propaganda. Whether or not the enunciation of 'war' is accepted can be gauged from the prevalent type of response: while the state of 'peace' leans towards a limited tolerance of violence and may involve mechanisms of symbolic retaliation or settlement (e.g. exchange of goods, women etc.), the state of war legitimises violent responses, giving rise to escalatory, rather than conciliatory dynamics. Thus, the lynching of rebel attackers by the civilian population of Bo in 1994 (Gberie 2005: 87-88) points to the encroachment of the template of war, while peace marches into rebel-controlled territories across the Mano River Bridge (*CR 2006*; *Accord* 9) − an attempt to communicate the readiness for a switch to a template of peace.

Some ethnographic studies, for Sierra Leone and elsewhere (e.g. Rackley 2000 for Sudan), elucidate the state of war as a distinct cultural register complete with survival strategies and resources on which people can draw in times of emergency. The historical use of bush farms as emergency settlements or places of refuge (Ferme 2001) was still salient during the recent war in Sierra Leone (see Jackson 2004: 66 − an unaccentuated reference in a story by an amputee). However, the strict separation into the templates of peace and war seems not so clear cut: the elements

on which the functioning of these templates relies are not mutually exclusive, but shared across largely the same cultural repertoire. The 'dictate' of one or another template is imposed rhetorically – not only through the reliance on discursive enunciation (Zulaika and Douglass 1996) but also in the sense discussed in Chapter 3 – through a tropological assertion of the self-description and subjugation of the dissenting evidence. This is an important consideration for peace processes, for it is not so much the cultural 'vocabulary' of practices that needs changing (since it is shared between the states of peace and war) but rather the modes of their articulation and associated interpretational schemes.

The fact that the message of 'war' has taken so long to root in the entirety of Sierra Leone attests to the viability of the template of peace; however, the mechanism of this viability needs investigating. Logically, such viability may come at a cost of rather high tolerance for violence charactering the state of 'peace.' Partly, this is applicable to Sierra Leone, where in some areas, the levels of 'peacetime' violence are almost unregulated in practice (e.g. domestic violence), although 'laws exist against such things' (*FAWE SL 2006a*). However, the historical patterns of interpenetration of violence and 'the everyday' in Sierra Leone (Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002) suggest another mechanism for this resilience. Despite its frequent occurrences, and the entrenchment of its memories in the physical landscape of the rural Sierra Leone (ibidem.), violence seldom lingered in the active register of the social repertoire, which is greatly assisted by the practice of social 'amnesia' (Shaw 2005). Regarding the recent war in Sierra Leone, this is reflected in the tension between the widespread perception of the restoration of normality, of having come to terms with one's experiences of violence after the war (see Jackson 2004: 67-9; *SCG SL 2006*; Rigby 2006: 48; *GGEM 2006*), and a concomitant awareness that the violence was not yet sufficiently distant to risk to 'even think about it' (Jackson 2004: 72; cf. Shaw 2005). Extensive ethnographic evidence suggests that the potential for quick social recovery in Sierra Leone hinges on the instrumental character of social forgetting, alongside its superficial character (Ferme 1998, 2001; Shaw 2002; Jackson 2004).

Despite being the time when 'normal' rules and practices are suspended, the state of war is not an unregulated territory: it has its own 'rules' and conventions, some of limited/local and some of general relevance; but as implied by the notion of the 'crimes of war' and associated frameworks of criminal prosecution, the admission of the possibility of violations of those norms is also a convention of sorts. Frequent references to the RUF atrocities as 'something beyond the pale' (Jackson 2004: 70; cf. HRW 2003) point to a violation of the accepted ideas about the kinds of practices warranted by a state of war; yet at the same time the state of 'war' was used rhetorically to legitimise the committed atrocities, both on the victims' and perpetrators' part, which served to readjust the conventions. A Human Rights Watch report cites a rebel's conviction that the atrocities were committed because of the war, and would stop at the time of peace, which is what the RUF wanted: 'They kept saying they were about to stop fighting – that they really want peace and that after peace comes, they won't do these things any more' (HRW 2003: 40). At the same time, women 'were advised by other female captives to tolerate the abuses, "as it was war"' (ibid.: 43). Yet, the encroachment of 'war' into the areas that were, in the

collective imagination, reserved for 'peacetime' uses and interactions, also had an effect whereby the template of war preserved its hold over the victims of violence, for whom the war was 'still not over' (Jackson 2004: 71). At the broader societal level, the refusal to talk about violence once it had stopped precipitates the exclusion of war from the current social reality, reinforcing the message of 'peace' (cf. Baker and May 2006, referring to Shaw 2004). The rhetorical nature of the templates of 'war' and 'peace' and their origin in the shared repertoire of cultural practices imply that while the encroachment of 'war' to the areas traditionally associated with peace intensifies the perception of the ubiquity of war and rapid dwindling of the domain of peacetime normalcy, the opposite is also possible, and the resources for 'peace' can be found amidst the dominant templates of war.

The temporal overlap of the templates of peace and war in Sierra Leone draws attention to the existence of parallel 'economies' to which the shared cultural repertoire contributed, strengthening the interpretational schemes of both/either peace or war. Thus, an important cultural resource such as 'forest knowledge' was used 'in … practical and symbolic ways' by both government and rebel forces (Richards 1996: xvi), as well as the local populations fleeing from the fighting; and its ambivalent role in sustaining the dominance of 'war' and 'peace' in the recent conflict reflected the historical patterns of forest use (cf. Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002). Diamonds were another resource notoriously put to ambivalent uses, having come to fuel the economy of war (e.g. Bourne 2001) just as they supported peacetime shadow cross-border and internal economies (Duffield 2001; Richards 1996). Observers also point out the shared social background of the supporters of almost every party to Sierra Leone's conflict (the RUF, NPRC, CDF, AFRC), and particularly the similar susceptibility to revolutionary rhetoric among the RUF and NPRC 'cadre' (see Abdullah 2004b: 4-5). Yet, the common concerns and shared social background between e.g. the RUF and CDF combatants produced very different types of behaviour during and after the war (*SCG SL 2006*; Humphreys and Weinstein 2004). The ultimate illustration of the reliance of templates not only on the common cultural repertoire but also shared social agency is the 'sobel' phenomenon (whereby 'soldiers' by day turned into rebels by night), which institutionalised the merger of the templates of peace and war in Sierra Leone. The subdivision of activities by many NGOs into pre- and post-settlement phases indirectly underwrites the continuities in the social agency and processes attributed to both the states of 'war' and 'peace,' as the recipients of aid (in each phase) are frequently the same communities and individuals.

The switch of templates: The 'antecedent conditions' and the character of violence

In parallel to the disentanglement of the Sierra Leone conflict into causes and consequences among the policy community, the scholarly research tends to treat the causes of conflict separately from the dynamics and shape of its day-to-day realities. Given the noted trend whereby the targets of violence, in the absence of viable political conventions, switch to the cultural sources of power (see Chapter 3; Crawford and Lipschutz 1997; Nordstrom 1994), the lack of attempts to examine the possible links between the causes of Sierra Leone's war and the character of violence that perpetuated it is particularly symptomatic of the general tendency to

neglect culture in the context of violent conflict. While my intentions are far from advancing a direct correlation, it seems inconceivable that the causes of conflict and its empirical reality would not share at least some cultural codes and interpretational structures which communicate to the victims and perpetrators alike that 'this is what it is all about' (cf. Ellis 2004: 123) – even if interpretational schemes are sometimes imposed in an afterthought, as in the explanations advanced for amputations that would arguably prevent people from voting in the 2006 elections that undermined the RUF agenda (Richards 1996; HRW 2003: 54; Jackson 2004); or Bøås' examples of the RUF rhetoric paraphrasing the existing social practices – e.g. 'Operation Pay Yourself' (2001).

That the analysis of the 'root causes' needs correlating with the particular violent forms of expression and performance is a matter of debate. In his recent book on Sierra Leone, Michael Jackson cites Allen Feldman's conviction regarding the impossibility of reducing violence 'to antecedent conditions, [since] … it always "detaches itself from initial contexts and becomes the condition of its own reproduction" (Jackson 2004: 216, quoting Feldman 1991: 20). The argument certainly has appeal to the extent that it implies acknowledging that 'changes in the conditions that produce violence do not necessarily end it' (Jackson 2005: 54), and that 'the wartime atmosphere of fear and peril …, as well as the escalating acts of vengeance that increasingly characterised the conflict were *self-generating phenomena* which largely eclipsed the grievances and ideologies that originally precipitated the armed rebellion' (ibid.: 59, emphasis in original). However, to follow this argument to the end would mean ignoring the meaning-making in which the local people engage in order to reconcile their violent experiences with the realities of everyday life, which could be expressed in terms of the 'antecedent conditions' returned to bear on their lives anew. The discursive linking of the character of violence and the 'root causes' occurs even despite the possible logical separateness, if only through a tropological (metonymical) association in time, rather than contested causal links.

Furthermore, analytically abandoning the character of violence to its own dynamics obscures the processes involved in both unleashing and terminating the mentioned 'conditions of its own reproduction,' and places violence in a social vacuum impenetrable by the logic of everyday sense-making. While it is often difficult to re-contextualise traumatic violent experiences (cf. Murer 2008a), and the narratives of heroic violence and the everyday may indeed occupy separate niches in the communal consciousness (Schröder and Schmidt 2001), the very existence of communal praxis that maintains the boundary between 'the everyday' and the 'violent' alludes to a degree of mutual illumination between the two (by way of conscious mutual exclusion through self-description (see Chapter 3)). Even more saliently, the violation of this boundary as a cultural possibility is premised upon the 'secondary' separation of the realms of (exceptional) violence and the everyday. While this is not to dispute that violence does indeed engender its own 'runaway' dynamics (or 'cultures of violence,' in now almost common parlance), its traumatising and shocking effects can only be perceived on the backdrop of 'normal' interpretational schemes. Both these aspects – the play of meanings governing the switch of templates from the 'antecedent conditions' to violence and back, and the

secondary interlinking of violence and root causes of conflict in the effort of 'sense-making' – are crucial in what Carolyn Nordstrom terms the 'undoing' of cultures of violence as a precondition for returning to peace (1994, 2004). In addition, focusing on violence in separation from the conditions of its 'production' bears the danger of treating war and violence as ahistorical, trans-local phenomena (Hoffman 2007: 645-6), thus feeding into the 'one-size-fits-all' approach to explaining conflict and building peace, which is clearly contrary to both Feldman's (1991) and Jackson's (2004) intellectual claims.

This discussion may invite charges that I am conflating the 'everyday' and antecedent conditions, as well as the heroic narratives of past violence and the kind of violence perceived as 'barbaric' and beyond the pale. However, these distinctions are superseded if one considers the context – the common cultural economy – which forms both the background for 'antecedent conditions' and the canvass for the relations and conditions defining the everyday, in which the 'seeds of conflict' (Jackson 2004) were sown and against which the violent performances and their effects come to be assessed. (This common cultural economy of Sierra Leone – its wider significational field – will be discussed in the next part of this chapter) As to conflating the two types of violence, this was also practiced by the parties to the Sierra Leone conflict. In parallel with Liberia's civil war (see Ellis 2004), combatants adopted the names and boasted the attire of known warriors of old, as well as popular Western movie characters such as Rambo (Richards 1996), or engaged in self-mythologising through the adoption of terrifying names and cross- (or, on some occasions, un-) dressing (Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002; Jackson 2004: 155-6). Appeals to the tradition legitimising certain forms of violence were also evident in the reliance of the CDF on the traditional authority of hunters. And although the ranks of 'hunters' have obviously expanded through mass involvement of new initiates (with suspicions that in some instances there remained only a nominal identification with a lost tradition (Förster 2006; Ferme 2001: 27), for combatants, their self-identification as hunters 'located their activities within a conceptual field of rights, responsibilities, and obligations that predate[d] the war' (Hoffman 2007: 646-7). It is unclear whether with respect to the legitimation of certain practices of violence (and counter-violence), the ethnic/tribal grounding constituted a 'marked' difference within the CDF. Although its sub-division into the Kono *donsos*, the Kuranko *tamaboros*, the Temne *gbetis* and *kapras*, the Mende *kamajoisia* etc. (Jackson 2004: 145; Hoffman 2007: 642; cf. Gberie 2005) alludes to distinct tribal/ethnic traditions, the accounts of violations committed by the CDF forces in the later phases of the war (which led to the controversial indictment of the CDF leader, Sam Hinga Norman, by the Special Court of Sierra Leone) sometimes link these with the loss of touch with the locality that provided the legitimising grounding and constraints upon the 'hunters' (Richards et al. 2004: 11; although see Hoffman 2007: 650-1).

The 'antecedent conditions'

If the Sierra Leone war of 1991-2002 can be shown to be a rhetorically totalised, homogenised image, so apparently can the peace that preceded it. There seems to be a stark contrast between the more habitual view of Sierra Leone's history as relatively untroubled by conflict and violence (e.g. Kelsall 2005: 366; *BHC SL*

2006)[17] and ethnographic accounts that, even prior to the outbreak of the civil war in 1991, drew attention to the ways in which violence was inscribed in the rural landscape (Ferme 2001) or the memories configuring the everyday (Shaw 2002). Such accounts alert one not only to the history of violence but also to the evasion (and resistance) that continue to exist as a possibility for the present, almost by way of an implicit 'expectation' of violence. Yet, despite the awareness of violence as being deeply ingrained in Sierra Leone's 'historical imagination,' both Ferme (2001) and Shaw (2002) describe their perception of the early phases of the war as shocking and sudden, unwarranted by the cultural patterns that the two ethnographers observed in, respectively, the Mende and Temne parts of Sierra Leone (see also Viktorova Milne, forthcoming).

References to a 'turbulent history' of Sierra Leone mostly concern the years of Stevens' dictatorship (1968-1986) and one-party rule (1978-1992) (e.g. *CGG 2006*; *PRIDE 2006*), occasionally extending to the entire post-independence (i.e. since 1961) era (e.g. *Caritas Makeni 2006*). Some accounts of the war (e.g. Bøås 2001; Gberie 2005) emphasise a gradual endorsement of violence in political practices throughout the post-independence era, which culminated during Stevens' rule; others pinpoint the growth of 'revolutionary' feelings among Stevens' opposition (Opala 1994; Rashid 2004). However, even compared to the frequency of violence in the post-colonial history of Sierra Leone, the violence unleashed by the RUF in 1991 was seen by many as unprecedented and 'unsanctioned' by the country's history and custom. The previous violent event that both local and international observers customarily refer to as the 'token' example of war in Sierra Leone was the nineteenth-century uprising against the penetration of the colonial rule to the rural protectorate 'hinterlands' (*BHC SL 2006*; *Thompson 2006*). However, in Ferme's account, the history of the opposition between the rural Sierra Leone and the 'state' extends well into the 20th century, which is marked by ritual enactments of the instances of local resistance (2001). A closer look at the cultural mediation of violence thus leads one to question the Sierra Leoneans' suppositions like 'violence was not in our culture' (*Thompson 2006*). But if one focuses on bordering as a cultural practice of identity production, it is the possibility of drawing violence into or excluding it from within the sense of a cultural self that is crucial − not its particular resolutions (the latter, of course, matter for gauging local power configurations).[18]

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[17] Although no one explicitly corroborated the view that post-colonial history of Sierra Leone was untroubled by violence, the assumption contained in my question (how do you explain the 'sudden' onset of war in 1991 given that it seemed to have little precedent in the post-independence period) was never questioned either. Whether this is down to indifference to how post-colonial history is understood by 'outsiders,' or simply a lack of desire to show initiative, of course, remains an unknown, although the 'totalising' effects of meaning-generation would help explain the extension of the image of 'peace' beyond the area of its immediate relevance. Curiously, Gberie notes that the pre-independence era, likewise, is often portrayed 'as one of near-idyllic peace and prosperity,' which 'was hardly the case' (2005: 20).

[18] As will be shown below, the possibility of excluding violence from the cultural sense of self is crucial for both communal and personal reconciliation and transition to the template of peace. In this light, the Libyan connection of the RUF insurgency (see e.g. Richards 1996) offers a useful device for externalising the violence as something 'alien' to Sierra Leone, despite the abundance of 'local' violent dynamics manifested in the war.

The discrepancy in the perceptions of the pre-1991 Sierra Leone on the spectrum from peaceful to violent testifies to the effects of approaching 'the empirical' with pre-defined ideas of what qualifies as violence. The academic literature is complicit in this by drawing a distinction between 'political' violence and other forms of violence which are dismissed as politically inconsequential. (There is thus an opening for a 'cultural' interpretation of these biases if we see the cultural as a broader sphere beyond and around the 'political,' which also supports Galtung's notion of 'cultural violence' illustrating the legitimation of discriminating attitudes or inaction (1990).) Nordstrom (2004) notes this selective noticing of violence when writing about the upsurge of domestic violence in post-conflict settings which frequently goes unnoticed; it is rarely problematised or connected with the violent experiences of the conflict (although see du Toit 2000). Ferme also points out how the visibility of physical war violence detracts attention from its symbolic and structural forms, 'to which Sierra Leoneans have been subjected on an ongoing basis' (1998: 574, 555-6) and which, in line with Jabri's observations regarding the discursive legitimation of violence (1996), pave way for real violence, death and destruction.

The selective noticing of violence is not, of course, restricted to external perspectives on Sierra Leone. One of my interviewees linked people's diminished ability 'to recognise' conflict to the consequent failure to apply conflict resolution mechanisms at the crucial moments before the war, which led to its outbreak (*CR 2006*). The lack of local mediation capacity is also pointed out as one of the continual threats in the Peace Consolidation Strategy – a joint GoSL and UN document (*UN 2006*). Various non-governmental organisations have taken up the challenge to train 'chiefs and community leaders in peace education,' including the 'traditional reconciliation methods' (*FAWE SL 2006b*). This path, however, reaffirms the local 'biases' with regard to what is considered as violence and what is regarded with tolerance and complicity; and this is not merely the matter of awareness or lack thereof. Rather, as the following quote illustrates, these 'biases' are part and parcel of local culture as 'common sense' (cf. Chabal and Daloz 2006; Geertz 1983):

> One parliamentarian who is also a paramount chief passed a law that women should report [domestic] violations. At first this produced a high turnout, including complaints about slapping by a husband and so on. The complaint procedure requires resolution, so godparents get called in, etc. … After a while there was a sharp decrease in complaints – women realised that if they report their men, they won't have a man in the house! (*FAWE SL 2006a*)

Is it possible, in this regard, to claim that some cultures may not have the requisite mechanisms to deal with (some types of) conflict, or does this just point to the limitations in non-violent options of 'peaceful' resolution that a culture has devised (violence being considered an established, if not necessarily preferred, alternative) (cf. Brigg 2005)? Or, in case a conflict is perceived as something that went 'out of hand,' does it take a path that is less culturally codified and thus prone to unpredictable turns, as it passes through the areas characterised by cultural 'scarcity' of praxis (as opposed to Bauman's concept of 'cultural density' (1999)), and as such, does it speak of arbitrary neglect of certain areas, containing clues regarding

local power imbalances? Or is such perceived scarcity of 'cultural' meanings an indicator of a different kind of praxis – of conscious muteness, concealment, and cultural 'myopia'? In order to address these issues in the later parts of the chapter, it is necessary first to consider the character of violence in the Sierra Leone civil war and its relationship with the dominant interpretational patterns in Sierra Leone's culture.

The character of violence

Many early accounts (most ostensibly, Kaplan (1994) and his plentiful audience among the policy-makers (see Richards 1996)) dismissed the character of violence in the Sierra Leone war as barbaric – although, ironically, for a lay observer, Kaplan's explanations in terms of environmental degradation and uncontrollable population pressures made more sense in view of the actual form that the violence took than many subsequent more thought-through and empirically supported explanations. However, even Kaplan drew some rudimentary connections to Sierra Leone's cultural context (his unforgivably static view of culture notwithstanding (cf. Ellis 2004: 117-8)), when referring to 'old, superstition-riddled, forms of violence' employed by the RUF (Richards 1996: xvi) – which is more than many subsequent accounts have accomplished.

Overall, attempts to explore the connections between the forms of violence and the cultural context in which it took place have been extremely scarce. Among the few academic studies exploring this issue are Paul Richards' (however contested – see Bangura 2004) explanation of the RUF violence as a symbolic re-appropriation of the country by the excluded youth whose violent tactics were 'supposed' to terrorise the population (1996: xvi; cf. Fithen and Richards 2005), and Morten Bøås' observation that some of the forms of violence employed by the RUF and AFRC echoed, if in reversal, the existing political practices and had 'counterparts in other cultural practices and mythology in Sierra Leone' (2001: 723). David Keen's descriptions of Stevens' era electoral violence committed by APC 'militants' against the opposition candidates and their supporters (2005: 18) are strikingly reminiscent of the practices which later, in the RUF's case, have shocked outsiders as particularly 'barbaric:' public humiliation in violation of the accepted social taboos, public torture and executions, removal of limbs and rape. These practices draw attention to what Chabal and Daloz (1999) describe as the untenability of electoral loss in patrimonial politics, since finding oneself in opposition results not only in destruction of one's political and social agency, owing to the inability to support one's patrimonial clients, but often of life itself – echoing Ellis' (1999) explanation of the 1989 killing of Liberia's Samuel Doe as a methodical and deliberate physical and spiritual destruction.

That connections between the seemingly wanton and chaotic acts of violence and the underpinning cultural context can be drawn is demonstrated by Stephen Ellis' work on Liberia, whose civil war had also been dubbed 'barbaric' (1999; 2004; Ellis and Ter Haar 2004). Ellis argues that many aspects of violent imagery and performances were much more 'legible' for people familiar with the local cultural context than warranted by customary allusions to the violent practices as 'bizarre.' The cultural patterns used to 'make sense' of violence in Liberia's civil war did not, as such,

disappear with the scaling down of violence; for that reason, understanding them would be indispensable if any viable peace plans were also to 'make sense' locally. Furthermore, according to Moran, violence constitutes an integral part of the Liberian indigenous tradition of 'voice, participation, and empowerment, otherwise known as "democratic values",' which makes violence ultimately compatible with the local peacetime democratic politics, contrary to the usual juxtaposition between the two in the West (2006: 6). Thus far, the violence of the Sierra Leone war has only sporadically been 'read' by outsiders (with the extent of 'inside' readings remaining largely unknown), although its cultural connections with a wider West African region may suggest certain directions of enquiry in the light of Liberia's case. Ferme points out that 'cultural idioms' of violence are shared across the victim-perpetrator divide in a number of African conflicts, just as the underlying broader 'conception[s] of the aesthetics and stylistics of power, the way it operates and expands' are common for 'officialdom and the people' (1998: 559, quoting Mbembe 1992: 9). The following seeks to identify some of these by contrasting the existing explanations of various aspects of the Sierra Leone conflict with the interpretation based on the cultural processes of signification.

While a widespread perception of the RUF violence (and to a lesser extent that of some other armed factions, e.g. SLA), both locally and internationally, was that it was often designed in an outright violation of cultural taboos, Ellis (2004; 1999) directs attention to how these perceived acts of 'anti-cultural' violence were themselves grounded in the same cultural context that they were ostensibly violating. The targeting of chiefs and elders in the Liberian civil war, for example – acts that were often perceived as assaulting the 'sacrosanct' societal norms and which many have taken to herald the passing of African communalism – was aimed to dispute their leadership not in its own right but rather to claim superiority based on the acquisition of assets associated with the status of elders (see Ellis 1999). Ellis notes that the things the young fighters desired – such as wealth and authority – were a hallmark of seniority in the Liberian society, and their 'prowess' in war, in the view of the youths, had imparted them with the seniority and adulthood necessary for control over such assets (ibid.).

In this light, the assaults upon the figures of traditional authority, such as chiefs, religious leaders and elders (Keen 2005: 60; Bellows and Miguel 2006: 5), in the Sierra Leone civil war perhaps also warrant explanations beyond the 'attacks on' culture (cf. Crawford and Lipschutz 1997). While such assaults definitely had a destabilising effect on societal norms and values, they also testified to the pervasiveness of certain cultural connotations of power and influence, and contested not so much the authority itself as the control of access to the perks of status. While drawing comparisons between Sierra Leone and Liberia may not be seen as academically over-adventurous (given the partly overlapping dynamics of the wars and cultural proximity of the two countries, especially in their Mande areas (Ferme 2001; Bøås 2001; Moran 2006)), parallels to this phenomenon can also be found in conflicts elsewhere. For instance, while the Khmer Rouge ostensibly 'destroyed' or banned many elements of the Cambodian culture, they also implicitly relied on its repertoire to cement the societal practices of their own regime, so that 'far from revolutionising Cambodian socio-politics, [the Khmer Rouge] actually engaged and

manipulated traditional forms of Khmer society to suit its own ideology' (Richmond and Franks 2006: 23-4; Ovensen 2005).

The remainder of this chapter covers various aspects of the dynamics of signification – the production and reproduction of the 'individual' meanings and the interpretational battles between the 'local' meanings and the ones introduced by the internationals, as well as among different versions of the 'local.' It also addresses the production of identity and actorness through various instances of boundary-drawing in the array of interactions between the local and international, conflict and peace, and so on.

II. Meanings and interpretational structures: The 'root causes' vs. patrimonial meaning-generation

The patchy character of the templates of peace and war can be taken as a symptom of a troubled state of the wider significational fields that usually stabilise the templates and associated interpretational patterns. In this sense, the conflict certainly does affect culture, exposing its arbitrariness and de-automatising its significational functions. This part of the chapter addresses such wider significational fields in the context of the conflict and peacebuilding in Sierra Leone. Of course, the templates of war/peace themselves function as stabilising significational fields, but in situations where their 'dictate' is ineffective, one has to look for the wider context in which they are anchored.[19] In the case of Sierra Leone's conflict, it appears that it is not the level at which the interpretational patterns perpetuate the messages of 'peace' or 'war' that is disrupted (partly because historically, the separation between them has emerged as thin and incomplete), but the level which isolates these very states as separate and distinct. This may account for the perceived intractability of many problems which are often presented as the 'root causes' of the Sierra Leone conflict (e.g. the lamentable state of governance, widespread poverty and underdevelopment), as well as the suspicion that a 'culture of violence' has not been entirely eradicated by a series of peacebuilding efforts. In addition, this also prompts an enquiry into how the template of 'peace,' instituted and sustained through an array of peacebuilding activities of mainly external provenance, dovetails with the understandings of peace embedded in the peacetime interpretational structures habitual to pre-war Sierra Leone. A consideration of this level of culture can shed a different light on the thorny issue of local ownership of peace and institutions of peacetime governance.

The 'root causes' of conflict
Despite its manifold range of actors and activities, liberal peacebuilding in Sierra Leone manifests a preoccupation with certain issue areas, such as human rights, political accountability and fight against corruption, governance and multi-party

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[19] This consideration reintroduces a certain type of 'parsimony' to cultural analysis, in that broader aspects of signification are called upon in situations where the narrower and more immediate levels of conventions fail to provide clues. In other conflicts, the dynamics of template switch may be very different from the ones in Sierra Leone, and levels at which meanings are stabilised and perpetuated may be identified differently.

democracy, civil society development etc. These elements of the discourse of liberal peace feature extensively in the offered explanations of the civil war as the causal factors structurally responsible for its outbreak. The rhetoric of 'causes' of conflict is curiously deterministic: despite the empirical evidence to the contrary (illustrated, for instance, by the structurally similar case of Ghana (*NAG 2006*; *WB 2006*)) and the theoretical efforts to dissociate 'structural conditions' of violence from their actual output (Riches 1986b), the alleged array of 'root causes' are treated as a certain recipe for violent conflict (cf. Duffield 2001). The impression is heightened by the determination of donors and their country-based partners to equate 'peacebuilding' with elimination of these 'root causes.' A cause and effect connection established in this way seems to underlie the appropriate course of policy: uncover the causes of conflict (normally using a concise inventory (cf. DfID 2002; UNDP 2003, 2004a; EC s.a.)), eliminate them through the application of the liberal 'know how' of good governance, and peace will ensue. Even the issue of reconciliation was presumed to submit to the same logic, although here the problematic aspect of causality concerned the alleged therapeutic effects of truth-telling: 'blowing' one's mind and clearing one's chest was presented in the posters of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SL TRC) as a precondition of peace descending upon Sierra Leone (Shaw 2005).

Despite the fact that its initial objectives were to do with reconciliation, the SL TRC effectively became the official forum colloquially entrusted with the task of enquiring into and reporting on the causes of war.[20] The four volume-report it produced (TRC 2004) was extensively relied upon by many peacebuilding agents outside and inside Sierra Leone in designing their interventions (e.g. *UN 2006*). Some observers have questioned the applicability of the causal connection between obtaining 'a clear picture of the past' and the facilitation of 'genuine healing and reconciliation' to Sierra Leone's traditions of social recovery (Shaw 2005). But the conclusions of the TRC that have come to guide the approaches of both local civil society and international actors demonstrate an even more striking rhetorical leap. Although the day-to-day work of the TRC largely relied on victim, witness and perpetrator first-hand accounts of violence (e.g. Kelsall 2005), its conclusions regarding the causes of conflict were framed in the habitual (to the educated and policy-wise observers) terms of leadership failure, corruption, lack of accountability and alienation of the state from its populace (TRC 2004). This rhetorical leap illustrates the tendency to exclude the character of war violence from the consideration of its causes even when explicitly addressing it.

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[20] The objectives listed in the Truth and Reconciliation Act of 2000 are summarised as follows: 'to create an impartial historical record of violations and abuses … , to address impunity, to respond to the needs of the victims, to promote healing and reconciliation and to prevent a repetition of the violations and abuses suffered' (Shaw 2005). The rhetoric of the TRC report itself (TRC 2004) is more confused, with less emphasis being placed on documenting abuses and a growing emphasis on enquiring into the causes of conflict and circumstances in which violations became possible. An impression of the balance of these tasks can be gleaned from a list of themes for enquiry that the Commission had identified 'early in its life:' the historical antecedents to the conflict; governance; military and political history of the conflict; the role of mineral resources and external actors; the fates of women, children and youths in the armed conflict; the relationship between the TRC and the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the 'national vision' for Sierra Leone (TRC 2004: Introduction).

The noted emphasis on causality seems an important basis of liberal peacebuilding as a 'problem-solving' practice; yet this causality is limited not only in that some aspects of the conflict were not considered worthy of notice, but also in that establishing the TRC as part of a broader discourse of liberal peace largely predetermined the terms of its enquiries as well as the findings. The aspired causality thus functions in a self-fulfilling capacity. Therefore it is unsurprising that the overall tone of TRC's conclusions resonated with the more general discursive frameworks in which conflict in the Global South, and Africa in particular, came to be addressed in the post-Cold War era (e.g. UN 1998; EC 1996; DfID 2001, 2004). On the other hand, presenting the conditions of pre-war Sierra Leone as the 'root causes' of conflict can be cast as a rhetorical *faux-pas*, given how unlikely they are to change dramatically in the post-war period. This can be seen as a move legitimising a return to violence, based on a mis-reading of 'causes' or, rather, on a preconceived approach to the enquiry into causes of conflict that is predetermined by the dominant discourse of peacebuilding.

Thus, in the bulk of policy-related interpretations of the conflict, its 'root causes' were divorced from the immediate violent performances and began to be articulated in terms of the illiberal 'diagnoses' that both legitimised the liberal pathway of conflict resolution and put the liberal peacebuilding actors firmly in the frame as helpers and abetters of positive transformation (cf. EC SL s.a.: 21). In view of the state of Sierra Leone prior to the onset of the war, many of these diagnoses appear indisputable: governance was indeed inefficient, welfare and social policies failing in both rural and urban areas (cf. Jackson 2004), corruption was rampant (exacerbated by a series of coups throughout the 1990s, with each promising reform only to fall into its forerunners' tracks), civic freedoms at a low ebb and the frustration of the impoverished and politically marginalised populace soaring high (e.g. ICG 2004). However, even a cursory examination of this logic with respect to Sierra Leone's case exposes some inconsistencies. Most worryingly from the perspective of liberal peacebuilding, the factors listed as the 'root causes' of the Sierra Leone conflict also remain in place post-war. Not only have they 'not been adequately addressed' (ibid.: 9, quoting ICTJ 2004; cf. *FoC 2006*), but admittedly, 'since the war, "all our resources have gone toward recreating the conditions that caused the conflict"' (ICG 2004: 8). This is echoed in the survey of the ex-combatants' assessment of the post-war situation: despite the general improvement, particularly in the areas of access to education and medical care (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004: 4, 42),

> [o]n two fronts, … ex-combatants are less upbeat. These two areas are critical, in part because they motivated so many to take up arms in the first place. With respect to employment opportunities, more than 50% of respondents think things are about the same or worse than before the war. Given that so many were promised jobs as an incentive to fight, a failure to deliver on this issue has potentially important consequences in the longer term. … A similar pattern is evident in how respondents thought about corruption. More than half believe things are about the same or worse than before the war. (ibid.: 42-3; cf. Baker and Roy 2006)

While this is casually interpreted as a failure of both the government's and the internationals' efforts to move the country beyond the explosive situation (e.g. IGC

2004; *FoC 2006*; BBC 2007a), if one considers frequent references to how Sierra Leoneans are 'easily satisfied' and happy with 'rice and palm oil' (*Thompson 2006*; *GGEM 2006*; *Caritas Makeni 2006*), perhaps the situation before the start of the war was not quite as explosive as it is made out. At the turn of the decade (1990), the freedom of expression was unprecedentedly high, and a return to multi-party democracy appeared in sight, since the President Momoh agreed, under the pressure of public opinion, to concede the APC's one-party 'dictatorship' (Gberie 2005: 37).

Perhaps more symptomatically, however, the inventory of the 'root causes' appears to have missed an important area. Locally, many remark on how the civil war in Sierra Leone was a product of an unhappy convergence of several factors, such as the structural factors pinpointed in the liberal 'diagnoses,' the fluid political situation in the neighbouring Liberia as well as the political entrepreneurship of Sankoh and Taylor. The '"greedy" Liberian influence' was seen by many as a crucial factor, since similar structural conditions existed elsewhere without triggering violent conflict (e.g. Ghana) (*WB 2006*; *NAG 2006*). On its own, the inadequate conduct of state affairs was not seen as likely to have triggered the template switch towards the state of war; however, the gradual encroachment of violence into the daily running of the state during Siaka Stevens' rule had a much greater effect in terms of legitimising violent responses to political inadequacies (e.g. Gberie 2005; Ero 2003: 235; Keen 2005: 16-17). In addition to channelling violence through the (essentially privatised) state institutions (such as the Internal Security Unit (ISU) infamously known in popular parlance as 'I Shoot You'),[21] Stevens also 'institutionalised' the reliance on private networks (of mostly drugged 'footloose' youths) for violent intimidation of political opponents and the electorate at large (Keen 2005: 11-19; cf. TRC 2004, Vol.2: Ch. 2). While the reliance on private networks, and elusive connections of those in power with the agency of violence are a typical feature of (neo)patrimonial African politics (Chabal 2005; cf. Ellis 2004), Stevens' practices introduced particular patterns that would later resurface in the RUF and AFRC tactics.

In line with Ellis' observation (2004) that local people usually traced the start of Liberia's civil war not to 1989, but up to two decades further back, some Sierra Leoneans also sought to pinpoint past events which had 'unleashed' the logic of war and corresponding interpretational schemes. Some observers cite the circumstances of Stevens' coming to power – amidst the legalistic objections of the SLPP's Albert Margai and the coup inspired by him in 1967 – as the first token instance of force being used to subordinate the electoral dynamics (e.g. Gberie 2005: 26-7; Hirsch 2001: 28-9). Others trace it to the N'dogbowusu[22] insurgency – the 'bush devil' war which erupted in Pujehun in 1982 in culmination of a series of violent incidents surrounding the electoral practices of Stevens' era (Keen 2005; *PRIDE 2006*). As

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[21] Reinterpretations of abbreviations form a regular feature of Sierra Leonean political culture, given that people were often powerless to affect the political situation in any other way. Jackson (2004: 203) cites a graffiti on the campus wall of the Fourah Bay College reinterpreting AFRC as 'Another F***ing Ruling Council,' and the popular criticism of the expenses of organising the 1980 OAU summit in Freetown as 'OAU today, IOU tomorrow' (ibid.: 128). The change of name did not help to dissociate the state 'security' institutions from depreciatory connotations: ISU's successor, the Special Security Division (SSD), was quickly rebranded as 'Siaka Stevens' Dogs' (Keen 2005: 17).
[22] Or Ndogboyosoi / Ndorgborwusui in different spellings (see. e.g. Keen 2005: 18, Gberie 2005: 66).

Hoffman (2007: 649) and Gberie (2005: 66-7) note, many Sierra Leoneans, including the Chief of Staff of the Sierra Leone Army during the NPRC rule, in fact regarded the early stages of the RUF rebellion as a continuation of N'dogbowusu. Although that particular view was also contested (ibid.), it is symptomatic of the tendency to interpret national-level events through the lens of more localised contexts (Hoffman 2007: 648-9; cf. Richards 1996: 91) – a trend which is reflected in the more general pathways of meaning-generation in Sierra Leone.

As Chabal and Daloz point out, many concepts that scholars of politics treat as universal categories of analysis (such as 'government' or 'public sphere') may have different meanings depending on the cultural context: for instance, the 'state' in Nigeria invokes a different array of referents and connotations compared to, say, Sweden (2006). Therefore, local meanings of the purportedly 'universal' concepts form an important dimension of culturally-informed political analysis (ibid.). This consideration is important not only for understanding the local variations in 'universal' categories, but also their potentially ambivalent implications for the advancement of peacebuilding objectives expressed through such concepts. For example, although it may be tempting to take the fact that local people welcome 'development' as vindicating the correctness of the dominant peacebuilding approaches, peacebuilding agents perhaps need to become more aware of how the implications of policies may be affected by their 'appropriation' and absorption into the local structures of meaning. Such 'variations' in the 'standard' meanings, after all, reflect the differences in normative appraisal of the purportedly neutral and 'technical' terms of liberal transitions. They also help unmask the pretences of universality of the benign effects of interventions, highlighting the diversity of their recipients and agents as well as the patterns of 'distribution' of their ambivalent impacts.

Anthropologist Michael Jackson notes how some concepts that have little real substance for the people of rural Sierra Leone – like 'development' – tend to become invested with near-magical potency and almost independent agency (2004: 168-9), which detaches them from the original political agendas and causal relationships and embeds them in local interpretational economies. The 'improved roads would bring development, for along these roads would come the benefits of the outside world,' was the reasoning of Jackson's rural respondents (ibid.: 168). Yet, habitual indicators of development, such as foreign investment, as well as its agents, are frequently treated with suspicion by the savvy locals: one of my respondents referred to a common knowledge of the fact that foreign mining companies, such as Sierra Rutile, mostly worked under cheap, 'exploration' licences while in reality they had been mining commercially 'for years' (*Caritas Makeni 2006*). Local NGO workers also exposed the practices of external donors sponsoring local 'development' projects as contributing to the erosion of local ownership and capacities: Because of a myriad of technical bureaucratic requirements for subcontracting, local companies cannot qualify for contracts, and the development funds trickle back to foreign firms and experts who leave after completing the work (*FoC 2006*; cf. *WB 2007a*). Reasonable nature of these objections to the practices of the liberal peacebuilding community, however, masks other underlying grounds for criticising the instances of international involvement in Sierra Leone, which are

more 'cultural' in character. For instance, the fast rotation of foreign 'experts' precludes their inclusion in the social networks of patronage which forms an important dimension of 'local ownership' (see below), both socially and with regard to the patterns of distribution of material benefits.

Similar dynamics affect, for instance, the concept of democracy. Being a strong rhetorical point of reference in local discourses, it cannot be claimed to be a recent 'introduction' by the liberal peacebuilding; in fact, the 'unsanctioned' (by the UN and most international community – see Malan et al. 2002) restoration of multi-party democracy in 1996 can be considered the first step in Sierra Leone's lengthy peace process. Many of my Sierra Leonean respondents asserted that they knew what democracy was all about and that they spoke from experience (despite the shaky record of the post-independence Sierra Leone in that respect). Democracy as a political ideal is in high regard even in the RUF manifesto, featuring prominently in its title 'Pathways to Democracy' (RUF 1995). However, this need not be taken as a sign of compatibility with the agenda of liberal peacebuilding. Sierra Leone's return to a multi-party democracy is sometimes cited as the only change that Kabbah's SLPP government(s) managed to effect in the past decade, while other indicators of 'good governance' remain almost non-existent (Baker and May 2006). As such, the existence of multiple political parties does not signal the disappearance of the 'old' political elite, merely contributing to its continual 'recycling' from one leading party to another (*Caritas Makeni 2006*; *Thompson 2006*), which many hold responsible for the mismanagement that had led to the war (Baker and May 2006). This system was described by an interviewee as being, realistically, a 'semi-one-party' state in which a change of party names did not reflect changes in policy or cadre (*CR 2006*). These remarks underscore Chabal and Daloz's (1999) observation that multi-party democracy is incompatible with the vertical character of ties of political affinity in Sub-Saharan Africa, since electoral loss heralds much greater problems for the parties and their supporters than merely a spell in parliamentary opposition.

Ironically, local variations in the standards of 'democracy' have not been lost on the peacebuilding community. According to Baker (2006), the pursuit of 'governance' as the top-priority of liberal peacebuilding interventions has largely sidelined democracy from the agenda, since competitiveness that it unleashes has sometimes become seen as endangering the fragile post-settlement peace (cf. Paris 2004). Although a focus on 'elections' has also been a long-standing point of critique of liberal peacebuilding (especially in the era when peaceful transition to second post-settlement elections was taken to be the sign of arrival of genuine peace), even that, according to Baker (2006), appears to be losing out to governance-dictated priorities of having functioning institutions in place (thus seemingly responding to Paris's insistence on 'institutionalisation before democratisation' (2004)). The dissatisfaction with democracy among the liberal peacebuilding community, Baker (2006) suggests, arouse in response to evidence that democratic electoral processes in the developing world often brought into power leaders with objectionable reputation (dictators, warlords, war criminals etc.) who were, furthermore, reluctant to stick to its rules in the event of electoral loss (such as Angola's Savimbi). But in view of the lasting local popularity of the idea of democracy (as well as its role in legitimising the interventions), Baker's insight regarding the need to review the

flawed indicators of 'democracy' in the context of peacebuilding interventions seems especially pertinent (2006; cf. Chabal and Daloz 2006). At the same time, the dependence of functioning 'democracy' on certain elements of political culture which are apparently in deficit in the bulk of Sub-Saharan Africa is also worthy of investigation.

Other hallmarks of the post-conflict liberal transformation, such as human rights or political accountability, bear greater association with the specifically war-to-peace transition in Sierra Leone (I will return to this issue later in the chapter), but democracy and development do not have such unequivocal role as 'peacetime' notions, and engender ambivalent connotations with regard to the above discussion of the change of templates between 'peace' and 'war.'

War and militarism

Similarities uncovered by comparisons of pre- and post-conflict situation in Sierra Leone bring out the question of what had served as the triggers toppling the interpretational dynamics towards the template of 'war.' Apart from the structural conditions of state decay (almost consensually believed to account for 'ripe' conditions for violent conflict), two factors are cited as instrumental in unleashing the interpretational economy of war – the legitimation of violent avenues for political action during Stevens' rule, and the conflict entrepreneurship of Taylor and Sankoh (Gberie 2005; *PRIDE 2006*). While the vocabulary of 'causes,' as shown above, engenders its own reality through a focus on particular meanings, the cited 'additional' causes can also be considered through the prism of meaning-generation. The articulation of meanings of war and militarism, both by conflict entrepreneurs and the wider public, is instrumental in understanding how the conditions in Sierra Leone became perceived as 'ripe' for conflict quite aside from the controversial issue of structural 'root causes,' and how the interpretational schemes legitimising violence were put in motion. It also illuminates the production of actorness through the medium of such interpretational dynamics, and the patterns of conceptualisations of particular personae (individual and collective) in conflict.

Many observers cite the 1992 NPRC coup as the strongest boost for the wide social currency of militarism in Sierra Leone (Shaw 2002; Opala 1994) – although that in itself did not play a role in fomenting the RUF rebellion which was, by then, already ongoing. For the RUF, originating as it did predominantly in the Liberian civil war (cf. Gberie 2005), that conflict had certainly provided a blueprint for a likewise 'conversion' of Sierra Leone to the template of war. But the same is true of the Sierra Leone government forces, which participated in the ECOMOG peacekeeping operation in Liberia in 1990, and the wider public opinion in Sierra Leone, which had taken this attempt to thwart Taylor's uprising in Liberia as a manifestation of Momoh's government's affinity with the overthrown regime of a 'soldier-turned-politician' Samuel Doe (ibid.: 57). Such extension of Sierra Leone's interpretational field to incorporate the dynamics of war in Liberia made it possible to interpret the developments in Sierra Leone itself as pertaining to 'war' even prior to April 1991, which came relatively 'painlessly' to the Freetown-based observers since most cross-border skirmishes were taking place in remote border localities. The 'official' start of the war as announced by Sankoh did not, in this respect, initially change

much: from where it 'mattered,' the RUF rebellion was still perceived as a distant threat. However, the circumstances of the official start of war highlighted the significance of military symbolism in the interpretational economies, for what made Momoh's government single out the attacks of 23 March 1991 on Sierra Leone border towns of Bomaru and Sienga as the start of the war with the RUF were, reportedly, several casualties among the Sierra Leone military (which was not the case in numerous earlier attacks) (Gberie 2005: 60). Ironically, this official endorsement of the template of war also exposed the lamentable state of Sierra Leone's army, which was unable to contain the 'regional' disquiet, thus paving way to the 1992 coup masterminded by a group of young army officers (e.g. Richards 1996).

The NPRC coup was popularly perceived as an adequate response to the requirements of the time: not only was it a long-awaited come-down on Momoh's government's corrupt practices (however short-lived that euphoria proved to be), but also on its ineptitude at dealing with the RUF insurgency. The NPRC's re-capture of Koidu (taken by rebel forces in October 1992) towards late December 1992-January 1993 instilled trust in military solutions and intensified revolutionary feelings among the Freetown youths who identified strongly with Strasser and his officers: military symbolism reigned in the spontaneous 're-decoration' of Freetown by the local youths in early 1993 (Opala 1994). 'Revolutionary' moods and symbolism have been a powerful undercurrent legitimising the 'force' solutions in response to the oppression of Stevens' rule, and as such, they formed a 'cultural repertoire' that was shared across the divide between the RUF and NPRC supporters and fomented in the 1977 and 1985 student uprisings in Sierra Leone (Ibrahim 2004: 4; Rashid 2004).

Although for many youths, associations with the military remained less than nominal, Shaw (2002) remarked that around 1992, the military became a source of unprecedented social power, which overlaid previously crucial societal power dynamics, upsetting the traditional balance of family relations and roles. Despite the declining popular support for NPRC towards the mid-1990s and pressures to democratise the style of government (which was seen as the rationale behind the quiet internal coup in which Strasser was replaced by Julius Bio), the return to electoral politics and 1996 elections, which brought SLPP's President Kabbah into office, did not dispel these associational dynamics between militarism and power. Furthermore, the initial years of the war resulted in the proliferation of actors exploiting this association, as well as the blurring of the agency of violence manifest in the 'sobel' phenomenon (Keen 2005; Jackson 2005: 55). The elected president Kabbah's attempt to sideline the Sierra Leone army, suspect of war violence and dubious connections with the RUF, by relying instead on the predominantly Nigerian ECOMOG forces, the CDF and the PMC Executive Outcomes, is reported as an important motive behind the subsequent alliance between Major Johnny Paul Koroma's AFRC, which came to oust Kabbah's government in 1997, and the RUF (Gberie 2005).[23]

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[23] Kabbah's attempt attests to a dilemma faced by the peacebuilding agents in the aftermath of most armed conflicts, which concerns the role and place of the military. While defunct armed forces have proved conflict-prone (bearing in mind the downfall of the APC regime in 1992 and the frustration of

If the interpretational currency of militarism contributed to the 'making' of actors who had taken up the orchestration of war, the reverse is also true: the articulation of meanings of war can be traced to certain conflict entrepreneurs. Among Sierra Leoneans, Charles Taylor is widely perceived as a conduit of meanings of war. The association is rhetorically traced to his address in an infamous BBC broadcast about how 'Sierra Leone would taste the bitterness of war'[24] and culminated in what my Sierra Leonean host referred to as the extreme feelings of apprehension and fear which gripped the country when Taylor was brought into Sierra Leone in 2006 for trial by the Special Court. (The fears of possible instabilities triggered by the presence of this personification of war – albeit phrased in more instrumental terms – were widely shared by the Court officials, who promptly transferred Taylor to await trial in the Hague.) In contrast, Foday Sankoh's masterminding of the RUF was cast (reportedly by himself) in the spirit of martyrdom, according to one of my respondents who, otherwise critical of the RUF, did not appear to dispute the interpretation:

> Sankoh said that being sufficiently old, he had decided to take lead of a group of people that wanted to redress injustices, end APC's one-party rule, nepotism and the impossibility to come to power peacefully – in other words, that he had assumed the role of a scapegoat. (Anonymous interviewee)

With respect to the noted association of power with militarism, it is interesting to note that many observers questioned Sankoh's leadership of the RUF precisely on the grounds of his doubtful credentials as a military figure. Gberie points out other psychological characteristics (like a somewhat grotesque sense of injustice and entitlement) that fuelled Sankoh's determination to upkeep the violent struggle. This duality is also noticeable in the rank-and-file fighters' accounts: while wielding arms and military power was reported as empowering, fighters also pointed out their contentment with the practices of redistribution in the RUF camps where everyone was welcome to the looted goods according to need (see e.g. Richards 1996; Bøås 2001: 716). Crucially, both these aspects – the agency of force and (potentially destructive) power on the one hand, and the source of life sustenance – come together in a patrimonial 'father-figure' (an image which permeates the RUF fighters' accounts of their attitude to 'Pappy' Sankoh) (see Richards 1996; Jackson 2005: 60).

The association of weaponry and violence with the potency to effect political influence perhaps explains the entrenchment of the template of war in Sierra Leone's society. Another factor explaining the preference many actors have felt for war as the organisational mode of the everyday has to do with forms of life-

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the military that led to AFRC coup in 1997), there is the reverse danger that well-trained and organised military may hijack the image of authority from the weak state institutions, thus harbouring a possibility of a return to military rule (e.g. Malan et al. 2002: Ch 8). At the same time, downplaying the role of the military may create a situation where it is not the prime bearer of the agency of organised violence, which is equally problematic (Ellis 2004). Although various DDR programmes are geared towards 'ordering' the domain of organised force, they have a patchy record in terms of achieving genuine social 'conversion' to the template of peace (cf. Hoffman 2007).

[24] See e.g. http://allafrica.com/stories/200804020534.html?page=2 (accessed August 2008).

sustenance specific to the economies of war. With an almost comical predictability, a succession of armed groups in control of diamond fields were caught at unawares, 'busy mining diamonds,' at the time of enemy strikes (examples include SLA/NPRC, ECOMOG) (see Gberie 2005). There are also clear indications that where civil defence interfered with the access to diamond fields, it was often sabotaged through collusion between rival forces such as the RUF and SLA (Keen 2005). However, what is seldom considered in connection with advancing 'greed' as a 'universal' motive for conflict (cf. Collier 2000), is that the 'greed' of Sierra Leone diamond-miners is also enveloped in local connotations and meanings as well as in the social networks and structures in which its pursuit takes place, and that it becomes a resource perpetuating these structures even as it may change some of their aspects. The chief danger lies not so much in the fact that illegal diamond-mining perpetuates the economies of war, but in that these economies of war are ultimately compatible with some aspects of the template of peace (cf. Keen 2005; Hoffman 2007; see also Bangura (2004) for critique of Richards' (1996) suggested avenues of pacification precisely on these grounds). As such, the image of diamond wealth as a lucrative and hassle-free pathway to success had a wide currency even before the war (Shaw 2002), and resonated well with 'fantasies of improving one's fortunes through supernatural means' as a way of countering the 'acute scarcity and entrenched inequalities' of Sierra Leonean society (Jackson 2005: 66). Yet, it seldom brought higher revenues than agriculture – at least to diggers themselves, who form the bottom of a client-patron chain stretching to licence-holders and traders at the upper end (e.g. Richards 1996). It is often argued that war-time mining, just as looting and extortion, brought its practitioners very few material gains: as Humphreys and Weinstein note in their survey of Sierra Leone ex-combatants, 'the interests of most fighters, particularly those in the RUF, remained focused on basic needs – access to security, food, and education – and not on … control of lucrative resources' (2004: 3). Despite persistent rumours of mind-boggling sums in the war instigators' off-shore bank accounts (Gberie 2005), rank-and-file RUF and SLA/AFRC fighters 'did not get any profit out of the war and ended up poorer than they were' (*GGEM 2006*). It appears that the war had not significantly altered the social connotations of diamond-mining: despite its lucrative image, diamond-mining fulfils the same role of the backdrop of social and financial opportunities as returning to the village and 'making a farm' (cf. Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002).

If the origins of the war were sought in the instances of legitimation of violence in the political practices of the past, then its continuing relevance is expressed through the notion of 'empowerment of mobilization' (Richards et al. 2004: 38). A study of child soldiers in Sierra Leone's conflict (Denov 2006b) elucidates the power and identity dynamics engendered by the war, and the sense of empowerment brought about by the socialisation into the 'cultures of violence' among the forcibly conscripted children of either sex. 'Excluded youth' features prominently in many explanations of both the Sierra Leone conflict and the volatility of the post-settlement situation in the country (Richards 1996; Bøås 2001). However, in order to consider its role in cementing the template of war, the mechanism of this 'exclusion' needs to be elucidated. This mechanism, as I demonstrate below, forms part of the

wider significational field which informs all other instances of meaning-generation discussed above.

The wider context of meaning-generation: Patrimonialism as a significational field

Having looked at significant areas of production of new and re-interpretation of the existing meanings in the Sierra Leone conflict, it seems necessary to turn to the broader interpretational fields responsible for the cultural ordering of Sierra Leonean society and polity – the wider cultural frameworks which stabilise 'individual' meanings and processes of meaning-generation but which can themselves display all signs of re-invention and instability (see Chapter 3). For Sierra Leone (alongside other societies in Sub-Saharan Africa (Chabal and Daloz 1999)), one such framework of utmost relevance seems to be (neo)patrimonialism. This section examines its role in the processes of generation and stabilisation of meanings, as well as the dynamics which affect this broader significational field itself.

Neopartimonialism, labelled so to distinguish it from pre-state forms of patrimonial relations (Chabal and Daloz 1999) and to emphasise the interpenetration of the essentially private patron-client networks with the 'official' legal-rational bureaucratic state structures (Erdmann and Engel 2007; Bøås 2001: 700), is often brought up in attempts to explain the peculiar character of African political culture (ibidem.; Richards 1996). It is also summarily blamed for the impossibility of isolating the public and private spheres of the African state, which tends to be viewed as under-bureaucratised and under-institutionalised (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Bøås 2001; Taylor 2006). Some studies allude to the wider, pre-political (strictly speaking) character of (neo)patrimonialism as one of the reasons for the blurred boundaries of 'the political' as such in the African context (Chabal and Daloz 1999). Despite such frequent references and the wide currency of the concept of (neo)patrimonialism in political analyses, they do not quite convey the degree to which the entire societal fabric of Sierra Leone is organised around client-patron relationships (see Hoffman (2007: 651) as a rare example). Mariane Ferme remarks that it is inconceivable for the people in Sierra Leone to see human relationships outside the norm of 'being *for* someone' (2001: 110, emphasis added; cf. Jackson 2004: 30-1, 37); even 'strangers,' as transpires from Jackson's experiences in Sierra Leone, are necessarily 'someone's': 'S. B. told me not to worry about this; he would take care of everything; I was *his stranger*, his brother, his friend' (2004: 202, emphasis added). A closer look thus reveals partimonialism as the broader cultural field from which not only 'the political,' but also 'the social,' springs (cf. Hudson 1997b; Chapter 3), and it constitutes precisely a case of Weberian 'webs of significance' that are spun to enable, and to reflect the patterns of, all social interactions in the Sierra Leonean society (see Chabal and Daloz 2006). Hence the earlier references to the culture of (neo)patrimonialism as the wider significational field which orders, and helps to stabilise, individual instances of meaning-generation. The remainder of this section will examine the characteristics of this 'culture' of neopatrimonialism and its effects on the meanings and interpretations which had become central for the conflict and peace in Sierra Leone.

Ordering the specific connections in 'patrimonial' meaning-generation is the centrality of the place, or locality, which, in turn, is related to the belief that the foundations of power are grounded in the invisible world (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Ellis 1999). The 'place' functions as a mediator between that realm, inhabited by spirits and ancestors, and the reality of the 'here and now,' with its corresponding human relations ordered, to a large extent, by the ties of kinship. Combined, the categories of place and kin produce a strong emphasis on one's origins (and only through their medium to the ethnic/tribal dimension of identity) (Chabal and Daloz 2006), which is linked to a place in the social hierarchy (Jackson 2004). Kinship is taken as providing legitimacy for claims to ownership of a place, be it political (see the following quote), or material: Shaw (2002) comments on the practice of assessing the legitimacy of claims to land on the basis of local ancestry (often forged and rewritten), with place names supposedly bearing witness to that.[25] The following extract from an SLPP politician S.B. Marah's pledge to his voters illustrates the patrimonial logic of legitimacy and belonging:

> '… I have heard people say that Kabala is not my constituency. … In fact, I don't belong to any one constituency. Everywhere is the same for me. All people are the same to me. If you interviewed people in this crowd you would find that one out of ten is a relative of mine. A brother, a sister, an aunt, an uncle, a grandchild, a cousin. Even among the Limba I have relatives. I am connected everywhere.' (Jackson 2004: 27)

While locality in neopatrimonialism serves as a source of legitimacy, it also compels obligation to one's community which, through its ties to the locality's invisible forces, preserves the checks on its political patron. Accountability in such a system has personalised, rather than abstract, character, which generates a different set of notions (compared to those used in the West) of what is legal, licit, legitimate, or criminal and 'corrupt' (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Koechlin 2006). References like the one made in a BBC news report (2007b) to 'the mentality and culture of corruption that are so deeply ingrained in Sierra Leonean society' still fail to see their wider social context: In patrimonial networks, loyalty and support are traded for access to resources and protection (cf. Jackson 2004: 47), and conspicuous consumption is a way for patrons to advertise their status and credibility, because their success and wealth is expected to trickle down to clients (Ellis 1999; cf. Bayart 1993: xvii).

This relationship is not altogether permissive for the patrons: the ambivalence of power and wealth in the Sierra Leonean culture is underscored by the pervasiveness of the idiom of 'eating' which reflects the perceived abuses of power (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Ellis 1999; Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002; Jackson 2004; Bayart 1993). This is particularly visible in the ambivalent connotations surrounding diamond-wealth, the imagery of the invisible city (the 'Place of Witches') and various terms of association between wealth and witchcraft (Shaw 2002: 201-223). The existence of

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[25] This is not so say that 'place' and 'kin' cannot be manipulated, but rather to underlie their centrality in the manipulations which do occur. My Sierra Leonean host once remarked that rural settlements often bear the names of their founders. However, in view of the practice of proliferation of settlements converted from bush farms (Ferme 2001), such patterns are bound to become confused. Hence the frequent occurrence of competing ownership claims: land disputes between individuals and border disputes between chiefdoms are among the commonest forms of conflict in Sierra Leone (*CR 2006*).

societal norms stipulating when and how much wealth is acceptable and when it becomes synonymous with the 'eating' of others reflects what Jackson calls the 'subtle reciprocities' in the relationship between patrons and clients (2004: 47; cf. Fanthorpe 1998), but it also alludes to the generally 'treacherous' character of power in Sierra Leone's patrimonialism. Patronage can, on occasions, take more out of the patrons than earn them in return (cf. Shaw 2002); the very subtlety and rhetorical articulation of the norms regulating the balance in the relations of patronage make patrons vulnerable to accusations of abuse. The noted ambivalence of power, its association with both opportunity and danger, has a very real sense for Sierra Leone's power figures, and their keenness to dissociate themselves from practices considered 'corrupt' in the eyes of the locals is understandable: 'you have never heard it said that S. B. Marah is corrupt. I don't eat people's money' (Jackson 2004: 27).

In parallel to Sierra Leone, Ellis (1999: Ch. 7) discusses the ambivalent attitudes towards wealth accumulation in Liberia. On the one hand, he notes a disillusionment with politics generally, because it seemingly dictates practices contrary to the ideas of genuine democratic representation, so that regardless of who is in power, the outcome is inegalitarian neopatrimonialism prone to under-development and embezzling of donor funds, of which very little trickles down to the needy. On the other hand, there is a cultural expectation for politicians to engage in such activities and to boast the gains of their term in the office in later years, to the extent that people who fail to 'misuse' their public position are ridiculed (Ellis 1999). Perhaps this can go some way towards explaining the dynamics of Sierra Leone's political elite, which, despite the impact of the war and greater openings for other democratically elected forces, seems to regurgitate and 'recycle' the same limited group of people (*Thompson 2006*).

A 'crisis' of patrimonialism?

The primacy of (neo)patrimonialism as the wider interpretational field over the habitual categories of political analysis such as the state, civil society and so on, is manifest in the absorption of all areas of life, including what some have come to interpret as a rebellion against it, into the interpretational economy of client-patron ties.

The origins of the RUF rebellion are sometimes traced to a 'crisis' of patrimonialism (Richards 1996; Bøås 2001; cf. Bangura 2004), stemming from the shrinking of the public sphere as a result of the controversial policies of structural adjustment initiated by Sierra Leone's government under the pressure of the IMF's and World Bank's loan conditionality. The declining opportunities for patrimonial redistribution of 'impersonal' public goods resulted in the shrinking of the patrimonial networks, producing, at the bottom of the social hierarchy, a volatile 'class' of people excluded from such networks altogether (e.g. Richards 1996). This 'excluded youth' is believed to have provided a fertile recruitment ground for the RUF as well as a number of other political entrepreneurs of the 1990s, from NPRC to the CDF and AFRC (Richards 1996; Poulton and Ayissi 2000). Regardless of the particulars of the motives for, and forms of, youth revolt – ranging from the revolutionary feelings surrounding the NPRC coup (Opala 1994) and pan-African

underpinnings of student protests (e.g. Bangura 2004) to the transatlantic imagery of the RUF (cf. Richards 1996; Jackson 2004) – its roots could be traced to the underprivileged situation of Sierra Leone's younger generation (cf. Humphreys and Weinstein 2004: 4). The decade of war, however, did little to dispel this social dynamic, since one 'lost generation' seems to have predetermined another – that of war victims in a broad sense (Clifford s.a.; Bøås 2001: 719).

Crucially, the expansion of the class of 'youth,' with this status attributed according to social standing rather than age alone (Richards et al. 2004), can itself be identified as a symptom of Sierra Leone's conflict: The decline in patrimonial redistribution, slowing down the rotation of status and accompanying assets, produced much larger numbers of relatively rightless 'youths' than the existing social infrastructure could sustain. The expansion of the class of 'youths' was greatly assisted by the addition of small-scale diamond-digging (around 1980 when de Beers abandoned the commercial mining of Sierra Leone's diamonds as unpromising (see Smillie et al. 2000)) to the traditional repertoire of 'marginal' occupations, such as urban under-employment (cf. Opala 1994) and seasonal agricultural work. The growing numbers of migrating 'youths' put the rural practices of integrating 'strangers' into the local social and production networks under severe strain, especially given that diamond-diggers seldom had 'plans to settle' (Richards 1996: 130, 129-33; Jackson 2004). On the other hand, awareness of the increased social volatility meant that settled strangers were left in a social 'limbo' for longer and struggled to leave the status of 'youths,' which contributed to their discontent with the patrimonial system, as well as to the fear of semi-autonomous strangers on the part of villagers (Richards et al. 2004). As a result of weakened ties with particular local communities, strangers often returned to the lifestyle of trying their luck in diamond pits (ibid.). In view of this social volatility, combined with the role-models derived from the exposure to Western media and films (ibid.; Jackson 2004), explanations of the RUF rebellion as being brought on by the tide of modernity constrained by the decline of patrimonialism (Richards 1996) appear almost inevitable; yet, they are flawed on many accounts.

In terms of social relations, patrimonialism, rooted in the organisation of production dictated by rice farming – i.e. short-term labour-intensive harvesting which requires mobilisation of the extended networks of dependants, or 'wealth-in-people' (Shaw 2002) – is portrayed as impinging upon modernisation, with its values embedded in the modern (urban) lifestyle and those that underpin the chances of success in the modern world – education, political and business opportunity etc. (Richards 1996; Fithen and Richards 2005). However, this tension is at best ambivalent. The sphere of 'modernity' is as entwined with the neopatrimonial networks in Sierra Leone as is rural life (cf. Erdmann and Engel 2007; Chabal 2005), and assets associated with modernity can be seen in an ambivalent light, both as crucial resources, access to which is mediated by patrimonial relations, and as a platform that can command the possibility of bypassing the dictate of these relations (which is especially manifest in the history of student protests (Rashid 2004)). The tension apparent in the self-images of the 'lowly' rural lifestyle versus 'enlightened' urbanism is also ambivalent. Although the freedom of detachment from the 'village' is usually commensurate with one's power position in the patrimonial system (many chiefs

choose to live in towns rather than in their rural chiefdoms), village still remains the place where, if one fails to achieve urban success, one can land back on one's feet – to go back to the country and 'make a farm' (cf. Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002). But as discussed above, village is not only the default place of powerlessness: it also forms the basis of the patrimonial networks whose origin in rural areas connects the 'big men' in town to their ancestral lands, kin and the 'invisible' forces specific to locality (see Chabal and Daloz 1999). Similar interconnections defying a simplistic dichotomy of 'town' vs. 'village' are exposed in references to the support base of the main Sierra Leone political parties – (mainly rural) areas of south and east for SLPP, and north for APC.

However, the widespread perception that the functioning of patrimonialism is organised around the top-down linkages along the oppositions between urban and rural, traditional and modern etc., betrays an important aspect of 'patrimonial' meaning-generation – namely, the possibility of arbitrary and temporary separation of the urban 'signifiers' from the rural 'signifieds' coded into this type of representation.[26] And it is in this context that I propose a re-reading of the RUF's controversial relationship with patrimonialism. Above, I have commented on the tenuous character of the interpretation of the RUF violence as an attack 'against culture;' here, I turn to the issue that allows for a further discussion of this point – namely, the role of initiation in cementing the RUF's solidarity in the Sierra Leone conflict.

The use of initiation and forms of commonality associated with 'forest sodalities' (or 'secret societies') (Richards et al. 2004) by the RUF is often seen as evidence of the RUF's hijacking of the patrimonial authority and diverting allegiances away from it (Richards 1996). While this may indeed be so, this issue is not explored systematically with reference to the broader context of social relations ordered by patrimonialism. My argument is two-pronged: firstly, the use of initiation by the RUF was perceived as affecting patrimonialism so strongly precisely because of the role that initiation and secret societies play in its own maintenance (and so the use of initiation by the RUF not only undermines, but also – indirectly – underwrites patrimonial values); and secondly, the initiation was used by the RUF to create the types of commonality ultimately compatible with the crucial features of patrimonialism, if not its specific version that had evolved in the Sierra Leonean society.

On the first point, while sodalities – most prominently, for Sierra Leone, Poro/Wunde (for men) and Sande/Bundu (for women) – supplement the vertical character of patrimonial relations with a horizontal aspect of social solidarity, these aspects are by no means antithetic. True, one's position in Poro or Sande may not be in a direct correspondence with the everyday patrimonial hierarchy, but the status and roles in the two are often interconnected: for instance, as Richards et al. note, '[c]ompound heads (*kulokoisia*) in Kamajei chiefdom (Moyamba District) are only recognized as such where they are members of Wunde' (2004: 9). Keen notes the

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[26] While the possibility of such separation is a recognised mechanism of representation (from de Saussure's semiology to post-structuralism), the degree to which this principle organises the social reality is a variable, whose value seems very high in Sierra Leone's case.

role of Poro in the power struggles around the onset of Stevens' rule, when its alleged intimidation of the 'strangers' that had moved into the southern and eastern diamond-digging areas served as a pretext for APC's crackdown on this stronghold of SLPP (2005: 17). The interconnectedness of sodalities with the patrimonial organisation of social relations is also manifest in the 'chiefly' connections of the CDF, which in the later stages of the war became an additional incentive for the RUF violence (e.g. Richards 1996: 181-2). Although the function of Poro or Sande initiation as admission into 'adult life,' with a corresponding conditioning in social 'literacy,' has a direct role in the maintenance of patrimonial order (e.g. Jackson 2004: 157), its relation to the internal organisation of sodalities is more complex. While some aspects of sodalities' internal hierarchy also reflect the patrimonial principles, such as respect for elders, others may be seen as harbouring far greater flexibility compared to the conventional image of patrimonialism – the ritual inversion of the passage of human life, and the 'dramatic negation of hierarchy and distinction' during initiations being a case in point (Jackson 2004: 157, 160). (This flexibility is embodied in the *mabɔle* – the female member of the Poro which functions as the third element disrupting the binary gender dichotomy (see Ferme 2001: 20).[27]) Arguably, the perceived clash between the relative 'permissiveness' of sodalities and the rigidity of patrimonialism can be put down to misinterpretation of the latter's inflexibility: on occasions, person's moral qualities can override the limitations of status (Jackson 2004: 47)[28] – although, as Jackson's example demonstrates, such superior moral qualities still tend to be significant in the context of patrimonial values (loyalty and self-sacrifice for the patron), and so are the rewards (elevation of the status of the lineage). However, flexibility as such does not undermine the viability of patrimonialism: as argued in Chapter 3, the potential of a wider repertoire of social possibilities than is apparent on the surface is part and parcel of any culture.

On the second point, while the use of initiation by the RUF 'to create its own distinctive social world of captive young people' (Richards et al. 2004: 9) can be seen as directed against the forms of commonality associated with patrimonialism (as demonstrated by violence aimed not only at traditional authority figures in rural Sierra Leone, but also traditional institutions, such as the conventions surrounding family life (e.g. Gberie 2005: 65; HRW 2004)), this is not the same as announcing its success in overthrowing the 'dictate' of patrimonialism.[29] True, the carnivalesque reversal of the habitual order of things often tended to continue beyond the initiation as such, producing the specific state of anti-order in which the 'excluded youths' of the RUF felt all-powerful (see Jackson 2005: 60-63). But to probe this issue further,

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[27] According to Ferme, *mabɔlesia* introduce to Poro the balancing feminine elements, such as the 'cooling capacities historically linked to female mediators in wartime', or splattering medicines over 'the "hot-hearted" Gobo – the Poro masquerade … at the end of male initiations' (2001: 78).

[28] Jackson refers to 'the myth of Saramba, … a warrior chief of great renown, whose jealous half-brothers decided to waylay and murder him.' Saramba is saved by his 'humble finaba, Musa Kule,' who, dressed in chief's clothes, 'rode the chief's horse … where the ambush had been laid' and so was killed in his place. 'In recognition of his sacrifice Saramba declared that from that day henceforth his descendants and Musa Kule's should be considered equals' (Jackson 2004: 47).

[29] Although this aspect is not illuminated by ethnographic studies of Sierra Leone which I have come across, studying cultural connotations of captivity and abduction in Sierra Leone may shed more light on the cultural grounding of the RUF 'conscription' practices.

one needs to look closer at the type of commonality established through such violent rites of initiation. On the one hand, there is evidence that the RUF attempted to put in place an altogether different type of horizontal commonality, governed by budding egalitarianism illustrated by free and equitable redistribution of looted goods (Richards 1996: 54, 59, 161) and rotation of roles in the command structure (Fithen and Richards 2005). On the other hand, this egalitarianism seems eminently compatible with the elements of patrimonial ties of loyalty and reverence established between the rank-and-file fighters and their superiors: Jackson cites, for instance, the practice of adoption of the abducted children by rebel leaders, 'who were regarded as fathers, and called Pappy or Pa' (2004: 159), while Richards (1996) points out that this reverence was metaphorically extended to the 'father' of the entire movement, Foday Sankoh, to whom RUF fighters also referred as 'Pa' (Jackson 2005: 60).

The reliance of the RUF's 'alternative' social organisation on certain aspects of patrimonial relations underlines the pervasiveness of patronage in Sierra Leonean culture, which appears to be the default way of resource distribution and organisation of loyalty (this is indirectly acknowledged by a remark in Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report that in the wake of the conflict, loyalties had 'became captive to different systems of patronage') (TRC 2004, Vol. 2, Ch. 2: 64). The tendency of initiation and the dynamics of sodalities to produce socially (read patrimonially) acceptable type of horizontal association is illustrated by the urban *odelay* societies, which started off as criminal gangs using initiation and ritual masquerades to bind its members together, and eventually evolved into a semblance of social clubs (Opala 1994). Whether the RUF's 'innovatory' cultural activism would have evolved into similarly 'acceptable' forms is difficult to speculate, especially given that the explosion in the violent repertoire in the later stages of the war (see e.g. Gberie 2005: 125-9) took place amidst the diminishing likelihood of any longer-term self-sustaining cultural economy.

As such, the RUF's controversial use of initiation did not succeed in discrediting the role of sodalities in reproducing the social relations of patrimonialism, since they were the principal resource for organising community defence from as early as 1994 (e.g. Jackson 2005: 54): 'by origin at least, *kamajo* militia units represented a revival of an older local patrimonial power, untrammelled by state interference' (Richards 1996: 182). According to Richards et al., community defence was organised

> first through invocation of Poro, and then (perhaps in recognition that many RUF captives were Poro members) through a new, syncretic association, based on the initiation practices of the Manding hunters' guilds. New secrets were created to bond CDF fighters and to guard against infiltration. (2004: 9)

Such 'frivolous' adaptation of the established forms of sodality was not, as such, specific to the war: as Mariane Ferme notes, the nature, or the pedigree, of the 'secret' that binds the sodality together is less important than the fact of secrecy itself (2001). In the light of the patrimonial symbolic economy of rural-urban dependency, the infamous targeting of rural communities by the RUF 'makes sense' as an attack against the roots of the system in which they felt denied an opening, and because of the patrimonial association of the CDF, local resistance corroborated, in

the eyes of the rebels, the locals' complicity with this system (cf. Jackson 2004: passim.).

The important role that the bush or forest play in initiations (as the space of otherness to which the initiates are exposed as a token of their impending adulthood (e.g. Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002; *GGEM 2006*)), as well as the prominence of the forest in the RUF's rhetoric and praxis (see e.g. Richards 1996; RUF 1995), raise another issue for consideration. Patrimonialism, in conjunction with forest sodalities, regulates access to the forest, not only through the ownership of land but, more importantly, through the symbolic knowledge of dangers and opportunities that it harbours (evil and friendly spirits, resources, wildlife etc.) (Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002). In this light, the RUF's tribute to the forest in their 1995 manifesto can be read not only as a reference to providing a 'safe haven' during the critical years of the rebellion, when the RUF pronounced itself almost defeated by the combined onslaught of early CDF, SLA and Executive Outcomes (RUF 1995). Crucially, in their extensive reliance on the forest for survival, the RUF also circumvented the 'traditional' pathways of access to forest knowledge, bypassing the symbolic trappings of patrimonial authority in this matter. Furthermore, the strategic use in combat to which the RUF had put their forest knowledge allowed them to become one of the forces of danger unaccounted for in the patrimonial forest 'wisdom,' and so defy the 'traditional' forest knowledge together with its corresponding social system.

Other aspects of the RUF violence that can be seen as 'compatible' with the patrimonial symbolic code are alluded to in numerous 'dramaturgical' explanations. Thus, Richards describes Sierra Leone's war as having 'a global range of symbolic and dramaturgical reference' (1996: xvii) – a characterisation echoed in Gberie's observation of the war as being 'marked by an utter craving for drama' (2005: 2). Such 'dramaturgical' explanations of violence appear less contrived if one considers the 'showy,' performance-oriented character of African public as well as, to a large extent, private life, with role-playing as the centrepiece of social conventions (Jackson 2004: 134-9). In contrast to the European enlightenment tradition that conditions us to seek the truth 'deep within the soul of the individual,' for Sierra Leoneans, the quest for self-knowledge is superseded by a drive 'to find a place in the world' that would bring honour to one's lineage (Jackson 2004: 88, 137). The 'place in the world' is acted out through social performances befitting it; so in a variety of settings, from family to politics, certain role models corresponding to power hierarchies are played out, with youngsters meeting the public castigations of the 'big men' with displays of meekness, while in private, satirising 'them behind their backs, opposing power with cunning' (ibid.: 136-7).

The 'crisis of patrimonialism' reconsidered

To reconsider Richards's (1996) interpretation, perhaps the underlying logic of the conflict can be described not as a rebellion of modernity against the obsolete trappings of patrimonialism, but as a revolt against what was perceived as the restricted access to modernity via (and not necessarily despite) patrimonialism – a controversial attempt to renegotiate patrimonialism, which had relied on patrimonial cultural codes in order to ostensibly undermine its very foundations. This, in itself, is

not unprecedented (cf. Ovensen 2005; Richmond and Franks 2006); indeed, bearing in mind the dynamics of meaning-generation (see Chapter 3), it can be safely argued that patrimonialism which the RUF sought to oppose had evolved over, and incorporates, a series of previous radical contestations (cf. Edkins 1999: 4-5). In a milder form, such renegotiation of patrimonialism is apparent in that fighters on all sides were able to build their own networks of supporters based on resources accumulated through, or simply turned relevant by, the war (see Hoffman 2007: 655). Despite the decline in the state-level patrimonial system of redistribution, with which the notion of 'crisis' of patrimonialism is associated, the status of patrimonialism as the default way of organising social relations and a matrix for everyday sense-making has not been diminished during the war, and remains central to organising local affairs in its aftermath (ibid.: 653).

Despite the pervasiveness of patrimonialism as a cultural 'code system,' there is also evidence that its significational matrix had, on occasions, been 'misread' by the RUF.[30] For the original RUF cadre, being effectively left out of the interwoven webs of relationships 'of patronage or clientship' (Ferme 2001: 106) contributed to a possibility of such 'misreading.' (This 'opaqueness' of the actual logic of patrimonial relations works both ways, since people falling outside the patronage system, such as single women or unintegrated 'strangers,' appear undefinable in its context (ibid.: 110)). In his analysis of Sierra Leone's conflict, Richards (1996) advances an instrumental interpretation of the RUF violence, although he is forced to conclude that in many instances its effects were grossly miscalculated, resulting in the widespread terrorising of the RUF's professed beneficiaries. Such 'miscalculations' noted by Richards (and his numerous critics) could be seen as stemming from the misreading of representational structures: the failure of the RUF to hammer home the 'message' of war in its early years can be attributed to its untenable reading of the representational connections between the victims of violence and 'the rest.' Because of the RUF's projection of stronger representational links between clients and patrons than there is cause to suggest, the associations that would open the larger 'body' of Sierra Leone to the repercussions of individual acts of violence in many cases did not hold – in stark contrast, for example, to the representational dynamics which accounted for the massive impact of the 'left' terrorism in the 1970s Europe (Allen 1987). As noted above, patrimonialism makes full use of the possibility of 'one-sided' representation, in which the 'upward' movement can be arbitrarily disavowed, and the ties of horizontal identification have limited scope. While this might have been clear to the 'clients' of patrimonial networks, most RUF members, arguably, comprised the 'surplus' that could not be accommodated into the shrinking patrimonial structures (Richards 1996: 35-6), and this deprivation from patrimonial 'belonging' may have made them overestimate its practical value. While this point remains a speculation, there is little doubt that the RUF attacks 'on patrimonialism' certainly highlighted the symbolic value of patrimonial networks.

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[30] Literature on practices emphasises the possibility of 'right' and 'wrong' uses of practices as an important aspect of practice theory (see Schatzki et al. 2001). In contrast, the more habitual analytical framework of discourse analysis seems to lack this distinction: on the one hand, discourse is considered uniformly 'wrong' as a 'lie' (cf. de Certeau 1984: 67; Neumann 2002: 632-3); on the other, discursive agents are not usually interrogated on their mastery in deploying its powers.

Amidst the evidence of 'misreading,' there are also elements of the RUF tactics that suggest some awareness of the one-sidedness of representation. The case in point is RUF's craving for international attention. In Richards' view (as already noted), this is down to the conflict being 'moored, culturally, in the hybrid Atlantic world of international commerce' and partaking in 'the media flows and cultural hybridizations that make up globalized modernity' (1996: xvii). A focus on patrimonial-style meaning-generation, on the other hand, would suggest that the patrimonial logic (to which the RUF has been shown to submit despite challenging it) presents the West as the ultimate patron (cf. Jackson 2005: 66-7). The 'local' patrons did not only control access to goods of local significance; they also limited the access 'further up' and 'outwards.' From this perspective, the RUF violence could be construed as a way of attracting the West's attention (cf. Sankoh's statements about how the RUF took hostages 'for their own protection in a chaotic country' (Richards 1996: 16)) in an ambivalent reference to its pacifying power and past violent presence in the region (ibid.: xvii).

With respect to the RUF's 'misreading' of patrimonialism, Richards' corrections of his initial thesis (see the 1998 Postscript to his 1996 book) – from the RUF as a movement of 'organic intellectuals' to that of youths governed by a 'primary school' logic (advancing a simplistic picture of the world that submits to arithmetic calculations) – is illuminating, and finds certain parallels in Ferme's characterisation of the hollowing out of hunters' knowledge as the CDF ranks expanded to incorporate a generation of younger people with a grudge against the RUF. The high visibility of 'magic objects, clothes and rituals,' noted in many observers' reports, Ferme argues, 'points to their superficiality, in a context where the combatants' youthfulness argues against their having deep interpretive powers' (2001: 27). Ironically, the diminishing need for 'deep interpretive powers' is underscored by the dominant peacebuilding approach, which provides ready frameworks for interpretations which largely predetermine the outcomes of interpretive processes. And while youthfulness (of status, if not always age) was a feature of most factions in the conflict (cf. Jackson 2005: 57), it now also defines a large proportion of peacebuilding agents within Sierra Leone,[31] which suggests the continuing circumvention – and renegotiation – of the traditional patrimonial restrictions of access to power, in which the 'social' age played a crucial role (cf. Ellis 1999, Jackson 2005: 42).

As Jenny Edkins notes in her discussion of 'the political,' that which at first sight appears an unquestioned continuity can be seen, at a closer look, to proceed by a series of interruptions arising at points where the imperative of making 'impossible' choices, not 'guaranteed by law, technology, or custom,' unleashes ultimate unpredictability, until a decision made erases the very memory of it, so that retrospectively, the law appears 'merely to have been followed' (1999: 4-5, referring to Derrida 1992). The continuity between patrimonialism and the instances of its contestation appear to be of a similar kind – indeed, because culture does not form a rigid corpus of rules, but can rather be conceptualised as a 'matrix of possible

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[31] Of my interviewees from the local peacebuilding NGOs, the majority were in their late twenties to mid-thirties.

permutations' (Bauman 1999: xxix, see also Chapter 3), every instance of day-to-day cultural activity reaffirms the elusive cultural 'whole' just as it appears to question its very role in defining the available choices. While ever-present as the backdrop of daily meaning-making, patrimonialism is also highly elusive as a 'guide' to interpretation: its influence can rather be detected retrospectively, as yet another instance of meaning-generation appears to reaffirm its validity. Yet predicting the course that interpretive activity would take within this wider interpretational field is an ungrateful business, just as trying to sketch out the direction of transformation of patrimonialism itself. Instead, the following part of this chapter will concentrate on analysing the instances of interaction between the interpretational field of patrimonialism and other interpretational schemes introduced by peacebuilding, as they affect the production of meanings, actors, and Sierra Leone itself.

III. The making of Sierra Leone: Peacetime representational struggles

This part of the chapter addresses the representational dynamics at play in 'the making of Sierra Leone' as the subject and object of peaceful transformation. The mechanisms of bordering and identification, discussed in the theoretical framework, are instrumental in illuminating the dynamics of actorness in the interactions between the local and the international. The significational context, or 'culture' of Sierra Leone, as outlined in the previous parts, serves as the basis for enquiries into the particularities of representational dynamics engendered by the international peacebuilding interventions, and their interactions and clashes with the local visions of needs and objectives of conflict transformation. In other words, this part of the chapter illuminates questions like: 'What happens in the interaction between the internationals and locals?'; 'How is the local 'made,' both in its 'indigenous' and 'international' interfaces?'; 'Which representational dynamics are put in place in the interaction of liberal peacebuilding with the 'local,' and how this reflects in the different levels and bases of identity in Sierra Leone?' This section also elucidates further the workings of meaning-generation in the Sierra Leonean context, since the generation of 'new' meanings around peacebuilding is particularly visible; and engages with the expressive aspect of Sierra Leonean culture by looking at what avenues of expression of meanings are accepted and 'work,' and which are disabled by the dominant cultural orientation, much to the detriment of the conventional liberal peacebuilding approaches.

Peacebuilding and 'local' culture
Frequently, discussions of peacebuilding rely on a juxtaposition of 'peacebuilding from above' and 'peacebuilding from below,' with the corresponding connotations of external orchestration of institutionalised peace opposed to 'indigenous' bottom-up peace initiatives (e.g. Ledearch 1997; Cawthra and Luckham 2003; Chopra and Hohe 2004). Tempting though it may be to use this juxtaposition as a normative basis for division into 'culturally-sensitive' and compatible avenues for pacification in Sierra Leone versus the culturally unsound and introduced agendas of liberal peace, such a move would be suspect both on empirical and analytical grounds.

In Sierra Leone, it is difficult to tell 'peacebuilding from above' from 'peacebuilding from below': in a sense, the 'local' nature of peacebuilding actors is 'compromised' through any involvement in organised peacebuilding and association with liberal peacebuilding discourse, which normally form the precondition of visibility of peace initiatives to the 'liberal' public eye. Thus it is easier to pinpoint ways in which the bulk of peacebuilding initiatives in Sierra Leone do not satisfy the criteria of a genuinely 'bottom-up' process than those in which they do. At the same time, local agency can only emerge as 'local' on the backdrop of other scales of reference, particularly the international, which neatly 'slots' it into a pre-conceived structure of interaction rehearsed through the encounters between the liberal peace and its 'local' counterparts elsewhere. While the precise identity of the interlocutors as well as the terms of their interaction are only fixed in, and through, the situation of encounter (see Chapter 3), it is also incontestable that the image of the 'other' frequently predates actual encounters and serves to colour their course (see e.g. Jahn 2003: 34, referring to Inayatullah and Blaney 1996). This is noticeable in the reception of the internationals as potential patrons by the local peacebuilding activists in Sierra Leone, as well as in the liberal peacebuilding actors' moulding of local agency into predictable and manageable formats.

Such 'production' of the local through its exposure to the international is, of course, by no means exclusive to the present phase of post-conflict peacebuilding. The centuries of what, in the situation of contested boundaries and multiple (and mutable) unities, could tenuously be referred to as 'external' involvement in Sierra Leone, have served to fashion the different guises of its 'localness' over time (e.g. Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002; Jackson 2004). In a similar vein, current 'local' actors are not a pre-existing given, but have emerged through a series of different encounters – whether with the 'other' of war and violence unleashed by the RUF, or the other of 'strategic complexes of liberal peace' (Duffield 2001: 13, 44-74), as a result of financial and social opportunity structures created by international interventions (Helander 2005). However, bearing in mind Lotman's idea (1992, see also Chapter 3) that the cultural 'outside' can be perceived as either lacking organisation or organised in different, incompatible ways, it is unsurprising that many elements of 'local' organisation falling outside the recognition by agents of liberal peace scrutinising the local terrain for possible partners or subcontractors tend to remain invisible. An example of 'lack of organisation' perception can be seen in the admission of the staff conducting 'needs assessment' in rural Sierra Leone that 'civil society was very weak, there were no organisations, so it was difficult to talk to people on the ground because it was unclear whose opinions were representative' (*UN 2006*). References to 'harmful' cultural practices frequently invoked across the political and academic spectrum exemplify a perception of different, incompatible organisation. Equally, it would be naive to expect Sierra Leoneans to share the view of liberal peacebuilding with its practitioners, without refashioning its elements and discourses in accord with local understandings of need, legitimacy and propriety, which highlight and transform some of its aspects while rendering others invisible – or irrelevant – to the local eye. It is in this framework of interactions between different self-other constellations enabling partial mutual 'legibility' and reinterpretation, rather than simply 'selves' and 'others' (cf. Holquist 1990), that the

emergence of new types of actors and corresponding sources of power in Sierra Leonean society needs to be assessed.

By the same token, the very privileging of the 'local' scale of peacebuilding needs to be questioned with reference to the context of academic and policy-related discourses. In this regard, the use of the concept of the 'local' as a criterion of a genuinely sensitive engagement on the interveners' part dovetails with the sustained expectation of its analytical – and ethical – value in scholarly literature, exemplified by Toulmin's 'local and timely' knowledge (1992, 2001) and Chabal and Daloz's insistence on focusing on 'what "makes sense"' locally in the study of politics (2006: 30). 'Local,' in this context, refers not 'to the smallest relevant geographical or territorial unit but, much more important, to the socially most significant context' (ibid.: 124). Thus, delimiting the local scale becomes an issue of 'understanding how people define themselves in relation to the various communities with which they interact within the circles of identity that matter to them' (ibid.: 125). No longer an abstract or 'a geographic construct,' 'localness' becomes defined by the 'proximity and directness of impact' (Kent 2005: 35), uncovered through 'the study of meaning, of what makes sense to the people concerned' (Chabal and Daloz 2006: 60).

Although the present study largely shares the sentiment behind this understanding, it also enables to foreshadow the dangers of hijacking the category of the 'local' by the discourse of liberal peace as a means of legitimising interventions without any radical revision of their substance: the appropriation of meanings is, as discussed in Chapter 3, a widespread power practice informing any cultural activity of meaning-making. Even as an analytical category, the 'local' is open to this avenue of manipulation, for short of descending to the individual level, any attempts at delimiting the socially significant contexts will involve a degree of violence to the inherent diversity on the ground. (Thus, ironically, it is possible to detect 'our' categories at work even in identifying the specifically 'voiceless,' 'powerless' groups in rural Sierra Leone, such as 'nursing mothers' (e.g. Richards et al. 2004), while local ideas of power and powerlessness may be less rigidly connected to gender or family role than expected.[32]) Thus, rather than approaching the 'local' as a category which vindicates some forms of intervention and peacebuilding while condemning others, this section attempts to outline the proliferation of various 'locals' in the interaction between different formats, levels and scales of engagement with the conflict and peace in Sierra Leone.

'Local culture(s)' and cultural change

It may be argued that since peacebuilding aims to address collective structures (state institutions, political norms etc.), the terms of relationship between the intersubjective level of human relations, representations etc., and the subjective, is none of its concern. However, within the liberal peace itself, this relationship is

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[32] The taken-for-granted character of gender relations is illustrated by Richards et al.'s (2004) example of a development project in Kabala in support of women-entrepreneurs: 'Women, it was assumed, would be more likely to use their income to support their families, but some women began to behave like men, reportedly abandoning children and divorcing husbands in favor of younger boyfriends' (Richards et al. 2004: 28).

sufficiently articulated: certain personal norms and beliefs are seen as being compatible (or incompatible) with the wider institutional structures at the collective level and are seen as their legitimation (for instance, individual liberty and democracy have become coupled in this way). In addition, the individualist ethos of liberalism fits poorly with the group-level of articulation of interests and identities, which turns the bulk of social processes in collectivist-oriented societies politically irrelevant for liberal peacebuilding. But because the liberal peace is presumed to be outside culture – a 'technical' optimisation of 'good governance,' not a genuinely 'political' matter open to contestation and debate regarding its effects on recipient societies vis-à-vis illiberal alternatives – neither the features of personal norms vs. collective institutions, nor the structures of mutual legitimation between them, are seen in cultural terms. The situation in 'recipient' societies, however, is viewed differently. The term 'culture' often designates collective-level structures and practices (e.g. 'culture of corruption' or 'impunity'), and it is sometimes acknowledged that these practices are reproduced through individual participation and acceptance of them; yet these are viewed as 'deviations' which are somehow distinct from 'local culture' proper. Thus, it is presumed that collective structures can be altered, and deviant 'harmful' cultural practices (such as those implicated in perpetuating gender inequality) weeded out without interfering with this 'genuine' local culture. Although differentiating between 'beneficial' vs. 'harmful' aspects of culture may be less damaging than a wholesale condemnation of local culture on the grounds that it legitimises 'harmful' practices, both these possibilities demonstrate a striking lack of reflection on what links collective structures of culture and their articulation and (re-)production at the individual level.

The leap from the (inter-)individual level to that of the collective, intersubjective structures is always tropological (see Chapter 3), and the question of how the correspondence between political and societal structures on the one hand, and individual norms, beliefs, or values, on the other, is conceptualised or imagined, becomes an issue of meaning-generation (and, thus, cultural 'practice'). Recognising that the individual-level articulation ultimately holds the key as to whether the collective structures are perceived as legitimate, empowering, accessible, compatible, and so on (Murer 2008b), it also has to be remembered that any culture is by definition (at least Bauman's (1999) or Douglas' (2004)) ambivalent with regard to its enabling and constraining effects on individual freedom and creativity. Also, as discussed in Chapter 3, the cultural repertoire actualised in societal practices does not cover the entire potential of a given culture: depending on one's position with regard to the dominant cultural self-description, different variations on, and changes in, the current practices are seen as more or less compatible with the established cultural codes. Furthermore, far from automatic acceptance of the tenets of their culture, people actively reflect on their cultural experiences and norms, being able to (re-)assess their cultural 'baggage' in creative ways (Just 1991; Viktorova Milne, forthcoming). This is not to say that collective structures readily present themselves to deliberate transformation, since in reassessing the structures of meaning, people partake in meaning-generation which these structures help to sustain (cf. Critchley 1992), which makes only some of their aspects accessible to observation and reassessment at any given time. Yet the futility of attempts to jump 'outside' culture does not make cultural self-awareness and -analysis altogether

unfruitful, and its additional value may lie in demonstrating the possibility of 'partial' solutions to peacebuilding dilemmas as opposed to radical, wholesale transformation – an insight which may be applicable to the transformation of peacebuilding agendas as well as its expectations of reform in recipient societies. This would, by necessity, rely on an acknowledgement of liberal peacebuilding as culture, and on a consideration of its naturalised biases which, as argued in Chapter 3, make up the 'stuff' of culture (see Chapter 4 for an analysis of 'culture of liberal peacebuilding'). That, in turn, would postulate the problematic of liberal peacebuilding's impact on the culture(s) of Sierra Leone as one of cultural encounter – a situation of 'explosion' of perspectives from which to illuminate the trappings of both one's own and another's culture (cf. Bakhtin 1975: 80-81, 455).

The experiences of war can also provide a supplementary perspective on culture, as violent conflict sometimes has the effect of accentuating cultural practices which may have been perceived as 'neutral' and 'invisible' before (e.g. Nordstrom 1994, Duffield 2001); indeed, conflict transforms the very state of peace into a marked cultural register. Henry notes that 'violence, warfare, fear, and terror are ... social phenomena in that the social rationalities that previously structured peoples' lives may now become magnified, questioned, or altered' (2006: 380, referring to Mbembe and Roitman 1995). Crisis situations in general 'expose ... the inner workings of a society and illuminate the basic values and assumptions which inform its actions' (Waller 1988: 74, quoted in Rackley 2000). Sometimes the practices of everyday life become re-assessed as elements (and symbols) of 'peacetime' and re-enacted with a view to such symbolism (see Nordstrom 1994 for examples), although this also makes them vulnerable to the agents of war violence who, by explicitly targeting these associations, re-inscribe the opposing interpretational dynamics into the sites and symbols of peace (ibid.; Crawford and Lipschutz 1997). At other points, conflict exposes the wealth of coping strategies devised under similar conditions in the past (e.g. Ferme 2001), or actualises 'latent forms of knowledge, ones preserved and perpetuated through the institutions of identity to which … [people] belong, though perhaps not manifest in quotidian life' (Rackley 2000). While it is arguable, in the light of the above discussion, whether the conflict in Sierra Leone was 'destructive' of culture,[33] it certainly explicated the social meanings and roles of certain cultural practices at the same time as it exposed them as vulnerable and arbitrary. In this sense, the conflict, while profoundly shaking the habitual world of the cultural 'common sense,' also offered possibilities for cultural introspection and revision of the cultural baggage which is usually taken for granted.

The making of Sierra Leone: Levels and scales of identification

The 'international' involvement in Sierra Leone works to produce local agency on a variety of levels and scales. Although, as will be shown below, institutional formats play an important part in framing the processes of identification in Sierra Leone, the very preference for some levels of identification communicated by liberal

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[33] The debate on whether the articulated state of cultural practices is uncharacteristic for their 'normal' functioning is by no means easily resolved: while the element of de-institutionalisation involved in re-assessing the purposes, functions and effects of a practice may be considered necessary for its informed use, such surge of awareness can also correspond with a sense of unavailability of the habitual function (see Schatzki et al. 2001).

peacebuilding structures the understanding of such processes in terms of, for example, 'national' reconciliation and revival. Although the 'local' scale serves as an important reference point in peacebuilding discourses, they also place this 'local' within the framework of accepted Westphalian hierarchies, subordinating both micro- and macro-regional dynamics to a state-centred blueprint of 'national' institutional formats. For instance, while the value of 'localness' and internal diversity within Sierra Leone is recognised in INGOs' preferences for local mission staff (*Thompson 2006*) and covering the entire country with a network of local offices, the resulting networks also serve as a tool to bind the 'nation' together, and de-centralisation of power, although high on the donor agendas, is carefully channelled into the avenues 'proper' to a functioning national polity (such as the resuscitated district councils which are presumed to balance the patrimonial powers of chiefdom structure (*UN 2006*)).

The differences between the local meanings and connotations of 'the state' and their liberal peace counterparts lead to a curious situation where promotion of 'liberal' formats of governance also helps to further certain 'undesired' features of neopatrimonial cultural economy just as it attempts to combat others. It has been noted that the state in the African context has an ambivalent nature: on the one hand, it is rarely perceived as a genuine conduit of the interests of the populace and is presented by critics as a mere façade of patrimonial politics as well as its instrument (through the patron-client networks of access to public office and state benefits) (e.g. Bøås 2001: 700). On the other, the state certainly channels external legitimacy (for donors, foreign government and IOs), which nonetheless can effectively get subordinated to the selfsame patrimonial dynamics (e.g. when access to donor funds is provided in return for political support). Furthermore, it is also recognised by liberal peacebuilding actors themselves (e.g. *UNDP 2007*) that the exclusive nature of African state politics (cf. Chabal and Daloz 1999) often leaves both political opposition and societal actors without sufficient access to political decision-making, and therefore the reliance of the peacebuilding community on governments endorses the fiction of their representativeness (*WB 2006*; *UN 2006*). A 'strong' state, thus, bears internal political risks; yet a weak state is considered an international threat due to its vulnerability to transnational crime and terrorist networks.

As a solution to this perceived dilemma, the government is strengthened through such 'fabrication' of legitimacy while at the same time, attempts are made to improve governance practices through the back door – for instance, by insisting on an increased role for parliamentary opposition, or participation of NGOs and civil society actors in policy consultations (*UN PBC 2007*; *UNDP 2007*). Curiously, this leads to some – albeit indirect – engagement with cultural assumptions about the nature of power. According to my UN PBC interviewee, the example of Burundi demonstrates that the involvement of expatriates – the 'enlightened' people 'troubled by abuses and lack of the rule of law' in Burundian politics – has brought about an attempt to change 'the view of power as absolute, since they can see what would happen to them if they were to lose power one day' (*UN PBC 2007*). This indicates an attempt to rethink the 'common sense' idea of power in view of a changing context of patrimonial African politics. However, at the time of the

interview (March 2007) there were no indications that a similar reassessment was taking place in Sierra Leone (*UN PBC 2007*).

Strengthening the state of Sierra Leone also raises the issue of the character of its sovereignty, which invokes connotations of artificialness captured in Jackson's study of African 'quasi-states' (1990). Given the Schmittean overtones[34] of the rhetoric of exception which envelopes both scholarly and policy-related discussions of Africa (see Ferme 1998: 557-8), the externalisation of sovereignty by means of highlighting the exceptionality of Africa's intractable political and development problems points to a continuation of the fictional character of Sierra Leone's 'sovereign equality' (Reno 2000: 303). Unsurprisingly, this fiction of sovereignty is also external in its orientation, with access to the avenues of international 'actorness' becoming a powerful resource in internal political struggles – something highlighted by the RUF's craving for international attention for vindication of the seriousness of its rebellion. The reliance of political recognition on external, rather than internal (bottom-up, social contract-based) sources of legitimacy can only serve to highlight the perception of Sierra Leone's state power as being 'anti-people' (Poulton and Ayissi 2000: 101).

In this regard, the continuities which enable to interpret the given case study as that of 'Sierra Leone' also need to be questioned, on the grounds that this underwrites the state-centric practice of identifying political – and, it could be argued, cultural (cf. Bourdieu 1977) – entities. In the context of such an approach, any smaller-scale cultural diversity (and especially of the kind that also transgresses political boundaries) is perceived as potentially explosive (cf. Chapter 2, on ethnicity). It is assumed that any boundaries of identity should, by default, either gravitate towards the political boundaries of the state (through nation-building), or, if that is impossible, seek to mould the state boundaries according to the resilient ethnic ones (via secessionism, irredentism or other pathways to self-determination). However, there is little in the present case study to support these assumptions.

With regard to Sub-Saharan Africa, Chabal and Daloz point out that the division of the continent according to 'ethnicity' has been remarkably flawed: ethnic identity very seldom constituted a locally significant basis of communal identification. Instead, kin and locality provided the most prominent expression of identity-production (1999: 58; 2006: 112-5). In West Africa, many societal practices (such as secret societies) are shared across what is considered 'ethnic' and national boundaries, and in many cases even multiple linguistic barriers are not impenetrable, given the mutual intelligibility, for instance, of many languages of the Mane group (see Richards 1996: 68-9; Bangura 2004; Jackson 2004; Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002). Furthermore, boundaries based on kin and locality are not exclusive, since the migration flows triggered by regional conquests and the slave trade resulted in elaborate practices of 'assimilation' of newcomers. Nor are these boundaries uncompromisingly 'inclusive,' since the ambivalence of such assimilations is upheld by a variety of internal divisions within the society and even family (such as the

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[34] Cf. this extract from Schmitt: 'Sovereign is he who decides on the exception. ... the exception is to be understood to refer to a general concept in the theory of the state, and not merely to a construct applied to any emergency decree or state of siege' (1985 [1922]: 5).

perception of wives as the potential 'fifth column' (cf. Shaw 2002), or power inequalities of the family structure captured in the idiom of 'plundering cousins' (Ferme 2001)). At the local (village and chiefdom) level, mixed ethnic origins often go hand-in-hand with the unquestioned recognition of local belonging and authenticity of the claims to local land and lineage, of people whose ancestors were known to have arrived from outside (e.g. Fanthorpe 1998). Both people, and certain practices, could be identified as, for example, Limba, or Temne, not by virtue of their origin within the 'ethnic' community, but through their adoption – as Shaw has demonstrated for Temne divination techniques (2002) and Fanthorpe for Biriwa Konteh chiefly lineage (1998).

These considerations add another dimension to the furthering of the 'nation' as a reference point in the liberal peace approach to reconciliation. The emphasis on 'national'-scale reconciliation, discernible as an underlying motive behind the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Shaw 2005), may be presented as something that ensures the success of the 'technical fix' of creating a viable state which, through taking good care of its citizens, will automatically guard against a relapse into violence in the future. Yet, this surreptitious furthering of one level of commonality may be detrimental to others, which have featured far more prominently both in the violent phase of the conflict and in subsequent reconciliation. Various studies have pointed out reconciliation in Sierra Leone happening on a much smaller scale – village, community, and family (Shaw 2005; Jackson 2004; Clifford s.a.; cf. Honwana 2005), with healing rituals restoring commonality at those levels where it was perceived to be violated during the war. While the 'nation' remains an abstract point of reference for many, especially rural, Sierra Leoneans, kin and locality offer more tangible forms of commonality, so that local-scale reconciliation practices not only reconnect the person to his/her immediate social network, but also invoke the connotations of the power of the place, with its 'endemic' supernatural forces, such as spirits and ancestors (cf. Chabal and Daloz 1999). (Baker and May, for instance, cite a practice of asking God and the ancestors to give the child a 'cool heart' (2006: 231) as part of the healing rituals oriented at child combatants.)

However, for numerous people 'uprooted' by the conflict, the national scale of reconciliation may prove surprisingly relevant. This concerns the ex-combatants who would not return to their home areas for fear of prosecution or shame, young abductees who cannot remember where they came from, and illegitimate children of rebel commanders whom their mothers abandoned because of their 'origin' in the conflict (*FAWE SL 2006a*). The 'national' as the reference point for identification may be more relevant for those people who find themselves outside the traditional community-level circles of identity. Yet this may not be an unproblematic solution: as pointed out in Ursula Beimann's documentary *Performing the Border*, national-level identification, which 'rescues' those experiencing identity crisis in the US-Mexican borderlands, comes with a price. By changing the terms of personal responsibility and affiliation, it also shifts the normative connections to local people and communities, resulting, in extreme cases, in the revision of accepted taboos, which Beimann links to the proliferation of serial killers in border areas. For Sierra Leoneans uprooted by the war, the promotion of the national level as the one with

which not only themselves, but also war-like activities and sentiments should be legitimately associated (in a perfectly acceptable spirit of patriotism), also serves to devalue the role of community-based identification, both as the object of past war crimes (i.e. something important to other fellow countrymen and -women) and as a source of social belonging and cultural grounding (i.e. something potentially beneficial to themselves). In addition, consolidation of the 'national' level of identification is not uncontroversial in view of Sierra Leone's political past. Although the conflict did not per se exacerbate the ethnic divides, the return to 'peacetime politics' with APC and SLPP as the main political forces reinstated ethnically-based party politics,[35] introducing an ethnic dimension to the radical exclusionary dynamics which characterise the electoral loss in patrimonialism (see above; Chabal and Daloz 1999; cf. Ferme 1998: 556-7; Kandeh 1992).

Some features of this case study do highlight the national and ethnic scales of identity – not because these dividing lines are located in the intrinsically 'right' places, but because they are reproduced in practices that develop around (and owing to) any instance of boundary-drawing. Thus, the conflict was mainly contained within the state borders of Sierra Leone (spillovers of refugees and armed factions between Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea notwithstanding); and there were some instances of polarisation of Sierra Leonean politics along the Temne (north) and Mende (south and east) lines (see Kandeh 1992). In addition, the state formed the ultimate stake in the conflict for many parties (as evident in the succession of coups as well as the RUF rhetoric), and it also served as a reference point in the discussions of the causes of conflict and the required solutions (to do with (mis-) government at the state level). But many other conflict dynamics depart from this dual state/ ethnicity scheme (whether that alludes to state weakness as a diagnosis for the conflict in the first place, or helps explain the reasons for the said weakness, is a matter of another debate). Many of the conflict dynamics (both 'positive' and 'negative') were regional, and although the elites in the capital city of Freetown were criticised for not treating the RUF insurgency as a matter of national priority, the occasions were the conflict appeared to engulf the imagined space of the entire state (e.g. due to RUF-inspired rumour-mongering) were also perceived as very troubling. Another way in which the conflict fell short of the expected divides is exposed by a consideration of the functional orientation of Sierra Leone's borderlands towards Liberia rather than Sierra Leone itself, for reasons of better developed infrastructure and shorter travel times to Monrovia compared even with Bo (not to mention Freetown) (see e.g. Richards 1996).

Ethnographic studies of different peoples and parts of Sierra Leone confirm the 'local' dimension of politics – in terms of relevance to the people concerned (Chabal and Daloz 2006: 124-5) – as falling far below the national scale privileged in the peacebuilding interventions.[36] Chiefdom-level politics remains, for many, the upper

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[35] The 'ethnic' connotations of the main political parties are underscored even by the appeals to overcome such links: see the Cocorioko Forum exchange 'My People From The North And Freetown, Come To The SLPP' at http://www.hwforums.com/2179/messages/96117.html, http://www.hwforums.com/2179/messages/96074.html, etc., accessed 12 February 2009.
[36] This is not, as could be implied, due to the explicit focus of ethnographies on the communal, sub-state level of identification, since the inclusion of local communities in wider frames of reference, as

limit of political relevance (cf. Fanthorpe 1998, 2005), despite the Freetown connections of many families or the local connections of national-level politicians (Jackson 2004). In Hoffman's words, 'chiefdom politics serves as the rubric for understanding even national events,' and the 'narratives of national healing, accountability, or intervention are always subject to more localized reinterpretation' (2007: 648). While this contributes to the preservation of vertical ties with the capital, a sense of horizontal unity with the rest of the localities in Sierra Leone cannot be presumed to follow automatically. Localised interpretational frames are predominantly historical in orientation (Fanthorpe 1998), linking contemporary events to the symbols of the 'past' (Ferme 1998), bolstering local- rather than national-level continuities in the process. Writing in 1998, Fanthorpe remarks how even contemporary politics in Limba Biriwa country remained 'orientated towards powerful pre-colonial personalities and their putative relationships.' In view of these interpretational strategies, 'national' politics in Sierra Leone can be harnessed to promote diachronic, but not necessarily synchronic continuity.

It also has to be remembered that the recent trend towards national unification in the policies of outside actors has to contend with the effects of very much the opposite tendencies fostered throughout the duration of colonial involvement in Sierra Leone (Fanthorpe 1998, Keen 2005: 9-12). The British colonial government, with its reliance on the inflated power of chiefs (ibid.), channelled much of the internal conflict potential into the internal struggles between rival ruling houses competing for chieftaincy, exacerbating a 'generalist' conflict culture (cf. Ross 1993, 1998) in many hinterland chiefdoms, with the internal divides serving as a much more powerful factor in conflict than any common 'external' threats. This generalist conflict culture was further reaffirmed during the APC one-party rule, when chiefdom-level power struggles for electoral representation often 'reproduced pre-existing factional opposition between ruling families' (Ferme 1998: 566). The emphasis on the national level of identification, therefore, may not produce a renewed sense of a Sierra Leonean 'self' in opposition to external otherness, but merely heighten the scope of the internal divisive potential of a generalist conflict culture.

Institutional governance formats and local meanings

While the existence of universal norms and rights (such as human rights) is itself frequently disputed (e.g. by state parties at the UN viewing them as a 'Northern' imposition and a surreptitious attempt to disempower differently-minded actors (e.g. *UN PBC 2007*), as well as by critical scholars arguing against their sweeping application), the practice of coupling the regard for such norms with certain institutional formats, which the West perceives as purely 'instrumental' and neutral but which may not be viewed as such from a local perspective, is perhaps even more controversial (see e.g. Shaw 2005). In a similar vein, apparently neutral, technical institutional formats of state governance and its 'habitual' mechanisms of control over the population may be enveloped in meanings which make them anything but 'neutral' in the eyes of Sierra Leoneans.

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well as the local connotations and currency of Sierra Leone-wide political and cultural symbolism, form an important aspect of ethnographic studies (see e.g. Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002).

Institutional formats

It has become almost customary nowadays to expose the mechanisms of colonial governance as disciplining the local populations, and to welcome the evidence of local resistance and subversion of colonial 'governmentalities.' In the light of near universal acceptance of the critique of colonialism, the reluctance to problematise the biases carried by liberal peacebuilding and associated institutional formats is especially notable. Yet evidence of both is abundant throughout the history of Sierra Leone, from the 'Hut Tax War' of 1898 in response to the strengthening of the British colonial control over the hinterland 'Protectorate' (Keen 2005), to the manipulation of communications, particularly the railway, as a means of state presence and control (Ferme 2001), to the rural ambivalent attitudes towards the state in the post-independence era (Ferme 1998). The relationship of rural Sierra Leone with the formats and instruments of state governance has never been untroubled:

> Rural Sierra Leoneans have historically experienced violence in connection with the purportedly technical, ordinary procedures of state integration and control (taxes, elections, the census, and so on), and hence continue to see these domains as highly contentious sources of social disruption and inequity. This experience has been strengthened by the post-independence politics of single-party rule, and by the punitive and apparently arbitrary economy of development. (Ferme 1998: 574)

In this context, 'neutral' instruments of administration also developed ominous connotations:

> Given the ambiguity of the state's use of numbers – sometimes to benefit, other times to benefit *from* its citizens – many rural Sierra Leoneans saw counting and defining as contentious issues. To them, these were not technical procedures for neutrally recording statistical information to be used by a bureaucratic apparatus, but rather political acts aimed at exposing and controlling people, in ways that inevitably led to violence. (Ferme 2008: 565, emphasis in original)

The connection with violence is particularly salient in the dynamics of electoral politics – not simply because of the excesses of Stevens' era (see Keen 2005: 18), but as embedded in the very notion of open competition with clear winners and losers, as opposed to the fiction of consensus established through more traditional rural decision-making formats (Ferme 1998: 556-7). '[T]he reduction of complex political relations to a matter of votes' neither resolved the underlying conflicts nor helped to keep them in check: in fact, 'the vote outcome marked less the end of strategic manoeuvering for political office, than its continuation through other events' (ibid.: 565). Yet, '[t]he vote count established winners and losers, a relationship expressed through the idiom of consumption (winners 'ate' losers ...), which turned losing the ballot from 'an inevitable element of power-sharing in the democratic process' into a sign of 'fundamental physical and social weaknesses' (ibid.: 565-6, 570). It is unsurprising, in this light, that the peace process in Sierra Leone began with the staging of elections, as the RUF's electoral loss would have signalled the destruction of the political and social agency of the movement. This could also shed light on the seemingly disproportionate violent response to the elections by the RUF: many observers have noted the correspondence of the first

wave of mass amputations with the 1996 election period (e.g. Sierra Leone Web 1999; Butcher 2002).

However, unambiguous division into 'winners' and 'losers' fits uneasily with the predominant cultural orientation of Sierra Leone towards consensus, however fictional, borne out of recognition of overlapping networks of kin and patronage (cf. Ferme 1998). The primacy of social networks in determining people's (often many-pronged) allegiances lead some to conclude that there are no 'independent voters,' 'no independent electorate' in Sierra Leone (*WB 2006*). To hijack Mary Kaldor's terminology, in Sierra Leone's cultural context the 'politics of interest' cannot be pursued in isolation from the 'politics of identity' (1999). The 'violence of numbers' is thus met by 'countervailing strategies of appropriation, which limit the violent effects of imported ideals of liberal democratic politics' (Ferme 1998: 574). These include 'strategically manipulating public and covert politics, and ... subverting the significance – and the very outcome – of elections' (ibid.: 575). The skilful manipulation of the spheres of public and private negotiations also forms part of the traditional rural decision-making formats, such as the Mende practice of 'hanging heads' (ibid.: 566, 571). Awareness of the potentially devastating effects of the 'winner takes all' mentality of patrimonial politics often resulted in subversion of the open electoral procedures by such local formats of consensus-building: locally, as Ferme observes with reference to Wunde chiefdom, 'efforts were made to have candidates run unopposed' (1998: 566). Although consensus-building clearly appeals to the idea of genuinely '"African" political forms' (ibid.: 567), its 'autocratic potential' is exemplified by the 1978 referendum which *de jure* established the APC one-party rule (ibid.; Ferme 1999). Furthermore, the corresponding 'logic of power was seen as one of dissimulation,' and '[i]ndividual success in politics was predicated on the management of ambiguity' (Ferme 1998: 569). Ambiguity and non-finality of decisions, as a consequence of contradictory messages issued in a variety of private and public settings, make it difficult to view the consensus-building mechanisms as morally 'superior' compared to the exclusionary competitiveness unleashed by electoral politics, since both are implicated in the 'invisible,' structural violence of the everyday (Ferme 1998, 1999). Rather, the point is to emphasise the interpenetration of the respective logics, with dissimulation penetrating the electoral politics, while the language of 'winning' and 'losing' encroached on ostensibly apolitical spheres, such as local courts (Ferme 1998; cf. Erdmann and Engel 2007).

By and large, ambiguity remains an important feature of various institutional and legal arrangements in post-war Sierra Leone. Many observers point out the lack of clarity plaguing power division at the local level between the chiefs and the recreated local councils. As pointed out by one interviewee,

> Under the Chiefdom Administrative Act the chiefs were in control of development projects and all tax proceeds. Now the ... legislation bestows the same powers onto local councils! ... The chiefs still collect taxes, but the local councils are expected to implement all development projects with the maximum 40% of tax revenue that reaches them. The situation is unlikely to change just now since the ruling party needs the chiefs' votes in the 2007 election. (*NAG 2006*; cf. *UN 2006*)

A similar ambiguity obtains in the legal sphere, where legal dualism – a co-existence of two radically different systems of law, with civil law applied in Freetown and the Western Area, and a host of regional variations upon the 'customary law' elsewhere – perceptibly limits any 'enlightening' effects of interventions. Customary law, in particular, resists any systematic transformation owing to its largely unarticulated nature, but has attracted a lot of negative publicity, exposed as discriminatory towards women and leaving too much to the discretion of undemocratic 'traditional authorities' – a point on which local and international observers invariably converge (e.g. Alterman et al. s.a.; *UN 2006*; GGEM 2006; *Thompson 2006*). Yet, about 80% of court cases are still adjudicated by traditional courts (*UN 2006*), where local 'consensus' premised on the existing power imbalances makes the outcomes of law suits largely predictable. In many more cases, smaller-scale 'consensus-building' is utilised to settle matters without even appealing to courts (cf. Ferme 1998, 1999; Alterman et al. s.a.).

Customary societal institutions have recently received an increased scholarly attention, especially in the context of studies of 'hybrid' political forms (e.g. Boege 2006; Boege et al. 2008) which emerge on the interface between the liberal peace (or the liberal international order, more generally) and the 'traditional' political forms and frameworks. In many cases, 'customary' practices become equated with 'local culture,' which is perhaps understandable give the comparatively 'alien' character of practices and institutions introduced by liberal peacebuilding in the 'local' eyes. However, this issue is far more complex. Hasty associations of the 'customary' with 'local culture' often ignore the possibility of contestation carried by the legacy of many 'customary' formats. Often these represent either institutionalised domination of some local power centre or interest, or earlier introductions, sometimes as remote from the 'indigenous' culture as the liberal peace itself, perhaps reflecting the outsiders' vision of the 'local culture' rather than a genuinely local view (as in the case of colonial power structures extended into the hinterland). Of course, many customary institutions have become part of local culture by way of their accommodation within local praxis and common sense, as well as, on occasions, through their subversion and/or introduction of 'indigenous' local elements to the proceedings. Yet they gravitate towards 'traditional' rather than 'indigenous' register of local practices (see MacGinty 2008). In and of itself, the designation of practices as 'customary' says little about their cultural authenticity, relegating the debate instead towards the dynamics of cultural appropriation and contestation in each empirical case, with those in Sierra Leone's context enabling particular ambiguity in their reading. Because of the limited scope of this research, I have tried to steer clear of many contentious 'customary' practices, limiting the enquiry to those which are most crucial in the interface between the 'local' and the liberal peace.

Policy rhetoric and 'economy'

In addition to the habitual institutional formats of liberal democracy, the very language in which the technical recommendations of liberal peacebuilding are expressed faces challenges from local interpretational structures. Sierra Leonean peacebuilding activists remark that the legalistic and formal policy language of peacebuilding documents, for instance in the field of human rights, makes it

'impossible for a lay person to relate to, and needs to be translated into familiar terms and images, told with the help of traditional stories (e.g. "why is elephant the bully?")' (*SCG SL 2006*; cf. Merry 2003: 59). Although the same interviewee notes that notwithstanding this 'clash at the level of language,' people can still relate to the idea of human rights (*SCG SL 2006*), other typical areas of concern on the agendas of liberal peace have not been so fortunate. For instance, tasks which, in peacebuilders' view, refer simply to devising technical and institutional solutions (as in the case of 'facilitating information sharing'), may encroach onto culturally 'charged' areas: in patrimonial culture, information and knowledge are intimately related to power, which, in turn, structures the channels of communication and the hierarchy of social ties (Shaw 2002: 171; more on this below). It could be argued that there is little room (and want?) in the Sierra Leonean society for impersonal information sharing; but given the efforts of many local NGOs (such as NAG) to publicise different aspects of Sierra Leoneans' rights and responsibilities as citizens, it would be interesting to see whether that is changing the perception of relative power in this rather direct cultural correlation of power with knowledge.

In a similar vein, it is easy to see how other routine terms of policy recommendations, such as to 'increase transparency' of the local courts system, or to 'depoliticise' the law in order to improve local dispute resolution capacity (see e.g. Alterman et al. s.a.), fail to take into account the reception of such 'impersonal' and 'technical' measures by rural Sierra Leoneans. In view of Ferme's research (1998), increasing transparency would unsettle the established methods of combining open public proceedings with clandestine negotiations dealing with highly sensitive matters (cf. Shaw 2000), and furthermore, would still leave unaccounted the conflict resolution mechanisms in the explicitly 'secret' sphere, such as Poro or Sande, which some authors consider a valuable resource for peacebuilding (e.g. Richards et al. 2004; but see Shaw 2005 for a more sceptical view). On the other hand, any attempts to 'de-politicise' law would themselves be viewed as unquestionably political, given the attitudinal ambiguities surrounding other bureaucratic procedures in the public realm (Ferme 1998).

Although generally, the approach of wholesale restructuring of recipient societies (Duffield 2001) is discernible in the internationals' condemnation of patrimonialism and corruption in Sierra Leone (e.g. *WB 2006*), and (half-hearted) attempts are made at refashioning the established practices,[37] on occasions, peacebuilding agents appear to make amends to the patrimonial logic and are not averse to exploiting its regulatory potential. For instance, it is recognised in a study of Sierra Leone's legal framework, *The Law People See* (Alterman et al. s.a.), that appeals to issues of local relevance can be used as aids in enforcing the judgements of various dispute resolution bodies and mechanisms, from chiefs to profession- or gender-specific 'councils' of heads, elders etc. They also note that the 'tensions emerging from the civil war past also play into pressures of enforcement.' In particular,

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[37] As, for example, with the orchestrated establishment of the Anti-Corruption Commission – which, in defiance of its stated objectives, is not independent of GoSL (NAG 2006).

the shame of ex-combatant status and tensions between ex-combatants and returnees can be used to impose pressure to comply. Simply mentioning the time of the war is scandalous, and nobody wants his or her name tied to it. (Alterman et al. s.a.: 31)

On other occasions, however, there is more evidence of a 'culture clash' than mutual accommodation between liberal peacebuilding and the patrimonial logic of meaning-generation – something that will be explored further in relation to a particular type of actor on the peacebuilding scene in Sierra Leone: the NGOs.

'Local' peacebuilding agency and the liberal peace: NGOs in Sierra Leone's peace process

As an interface between the liberal peace, which habitually relies on civil society organisations to further its objectives, and the 'local' dimension of Sierra Leone's peace process, Sierra Leonean NGOs form a natural focus of enquiry for this part of the chapter. They also form a suitably contested issue, which gives rise to multiple – both local and otherwise – assessments and interpretations, thus offering prime material for an analysis of meaning-generation. With NGOs, the typical points of critique are more or less straightforward: the agendas of local NGOs are formed by the 'supply' factor of the international donor organisations rather than the local 'demand,' whether the NGO is working in tandem with an international NGO (as its local partner) or is simply dependent on the outside donors for funding (e.g. *UN PBC 2007*; *Thompson 2006*; Helander 2005). According to an interviewee associated with the UN Peacebuilding Commission, NGOs as a type of actor are very much a 'Northern' phenomenon, with international North-based NGOs often standing behind their local partners in the developing countries (*UN PBC 2007*). They are also, despite widely acknowledged normative agendas, an essentially 'unaccountable' type of actor (see Brown 2005), although their degree of freedom in fashioning objectives and priorities is, to an extent, limited by their own sources of funding, some of which comes from government budgets. However, dismissing NGOs as an 'illegitimate' type of actor plays into the hands of 'conservative' forces behind more national interest-driven agendas, which would hamper the ability of peacebuilding actors to consider the whole spectrum of local needs and capacities which may not square with various 'national' priorities (*UN PBC 2007*).

To this extent, the NGOs channel some of the same problematic issues which characterise the internationals' efforts in peacebuilding, such as being driven by 'vogues' in development policy rather than a needs-based approach tailored to particular conditions on the ground (Duffield 2001). Debates and dialogue that do take place among the international peacebuilding actors are mostly geared towards other such actors, rather than being directed outside the 'professional' peacebuilding circles. This is not to diminish the contentious nature of this dialogue, which is premised on the diversity and varying status of peacebuilding actors (evident, for instance, in the debates on whether NGOs should be granted a role in the UN bodies, or a consultative status with governments in post-conflict situations (*UN PBC 2007*; *UNDP 2007*); but rather to emphasise that this contention 'within' the camp of peacebuilders leaves little space for possible contributions from the 'outside' (e.g. critically-minded academics or local actors who are not 'organised' into civil society groups according to the accepted international standards (cf. Richards et al. 2004)).

In order to be 'heard,' it seems, the critics of the liberal peace need to make themselves understandable in its own 'language' (Shaw 2005; Helander 2005; Kent 2005). One implication of this, as discussed above, is that actors which do not wield (or refuse to engage in) the peacebuilding 'speak' tend to remain invisible to the internationals who are attuned to particular types of societal organisation, and view only particular initiatives as worth supporting (Richards et al. 2004; Llamazares and Levy 2003; cf. Nega 2006; MacGinty 2007). Another implication, mentioned in Chapter 4, is that this also makes liberal peacebuilding extremely vulnerable to manipulation by actors who are sufficiently proficient in its language and have mastered its interpretational schemes. Examples range from 'misuse' of peacebuilding on a grand scale – as with Kosovo's success in effectively crafting its independence under the veneer of international peacebuilding – to the local-level cases, such as NGO 'middlemen' who 'cheat' both the donors and their local recipients (e.g. Richards et al. 2004). Both these implications, as will be shown below, can be discerned in the case of Sierra Leone.

Local NGOs: Between cultures?

Shaw (2005) notes how in regard to certain issues very topical for peacebuilding (such as reconciliation, and methods of operation of SL TRC), the actions and preferences of NGOs were in stark contrast with the opinions of many Sierra Leoneans. While many acknowledge the role of local NGOs in fostering peace throughout the second half of the duration of the conflict, in actively mediating 'between the rebels and the government' (*CGG 2006*) and going into areas where 'UNAMSIL personnel were afraid to go' to secure disarmament and re-integration of former combatants (*PRIDE 2006*), the track record of NGOs in the peace process remains mixed. Sometimes, bureaucratic practices of aid agencies during the war served to compromise the security of those in their care rather than enhance it, as refugee camps often became sitting targets for warring parties who were after food supplies and other resources (Ferme 1998: 562). In addition, despite the similar terms of engagement grasped in the concept of 'peacebuilding consensus' (e.g. Richmond and Franks 2006),

> there is not enough [actual] coordination between NGOs, and in some sense it is an almost impossible task, since priorities and objectives are formulated slightly differently and are based on different backgrounds, so that everyone ends up doing their own thing that does not, and cannot, build upon work by others. Even when a coordinating body [SLANGO] was created it did not seem to achieve much. As an example of badly coordinated NGO effort, after the war a number of NGOs decided to work with amputees, and instead of coordinating activities or consulting with people as to what it was they needed, they simply 'descended' on them. (*Thompson 2006*)

As evident from Jackson's field impressions (2004), this 'descending' had not achieved much, as people were still living in amputee camps, without any definite prospects for the future, information about their plight or any impression that they were cared for, save for the erratic and arbitrary distribution of food packages. Partly, this patchy success rate accounts for the mistrust of NGOs and the negative views of their role among many 'ordinary' Sierra Leoneans (*Thompson 2006*), but other reasons could be given as well. Paul Richards and his co-authors describe the environment of 'opportunism' created by liberal peacebuilding for all sorts of local

actors willing to call themselves NGOs, which were subcontracted by international actors, on that basis, to carry out various projects, such as DDR (Richards et al. 2004). While in some cases this seemed to work as intended by the Western donors, many of the local 'NGOs' perceived the situation as an opportunity for enrichment (by under-delivering the materials and instruments for skills training, under-paying their ex-combatant trainees etc.). Intimidating the disgruntled trainees into compliance by the threat of withdrawing any support, these so-called local NGOs also hijacked the initiative from ostensibly less organised and capacious (i.e. less skilled in project-writing) local people, often misrepresenting the requirements and conditions of the donors in a way that suited the self-appointed NGOs (ibid.; *PRIDE 2006*). When confronted with this problem, the internationals remark that once the civil society is strong and functioning, such bad 'business practices' will be weeded out through self-censorship and -discipline of the civil society organisations (*NP 2007a*). Yet in Sierra Leone's case, this may be doubtful given that such behaviour is ultimately compatible with certain cultural norms, and, moreover, finds counterparts in the practices of the internationals, whichs add external legitimation (see below).

Given the prominence of certain themes in the liberal peace approach to the conflict in Sierra Leone (as discussed in the 'Root causes' section), it is unsurprising that these also penetrate the discourse of local NGOs. The continued parallel existence of locally-motivated interpretational schemes leads to frequent situations where these mix in the rhetoric of local NGO activists, who are seemingly oblivious to contradictions between the two. In a stark illustration of this trend, my interviewee from P.R.I.D.E. Salone offered two different explanations for the conflict within the same interview. While elaborating in some detail on the historical circumstances which led to the 'realisation that war was coming,' when asked to describe the activities of his organisation, he went on to state that many local NGOs were founded by educated, 'enlightened' people – students, in the case of P.R.I.D.E. – who, in the course of their work, 'came to understand that human rights violations were a root cause of war' (*PRIDE 2006*). The narratives of other NGO activists (e.g. *CR 2006*; *CGG 2006*) also meandered between explanations and rationalisations cast in local terms and those framed in the terminology of liberal peace, with the latter usually bearing little detail tying it to local contexts.

Such variable terms of understanding the conflict and its causes should not be dismissed as 'artificial' or 'inconsistent.' Rather, they highlight the processual character of arriving at certain meanings that thereafter gain stability through repetition within a community versed in the respective interpretational schemes. In this respect, Sierra Leone NGOs form a distinct cultural community 'validating' one another's recourses to the language of liberal peace. As noted by Bauman (1979: 180-95), because the meanings are not 'out there' to be discovered, one's knowledge of self proceeds via very much the same tracks as the understanding of the other (cf. Schutz 1967); therefore, 'local' people do not have a default advantage in accessing the 'root causes' of 'their' conflict. The liberal peace language of norms and rights provides one of the frames of reference in which interpretational dynamics can unfold – just as the established interpretational schemes of local relevance provide another. Which of them prevails as a guide to political practice is not only a question

of internal consistency and persuasiveness of these frames of reference, but also of their currency and accessibility in the local context and the extent of the international influences directed at it. In view of the imbalance in resources that these competing frames of reference can call upon, the power connotations of one or another 'language' also play a role in the preferences of local agents.[38]

A local (NGO) perspective on the liberal peace

Despite a sense of convergence in the agency of local NGOs and international peacebuilding actors, in many respects, local NGOs preserve a separate perspective on their activities. This also makes them ideally placed to see fault with the practices of their international 'benefactors:' indeed, the harshest critique of the internationals' approaches to peacebuilding that I encountered (outside the academe) comes from Sierra Leonean peacebuilding organisations. As expressed by an interviewee from a local NGO Forum of Conscience, 'the internationals can be criticised on many accounts:'

> … with donors, the imposition of very strict rules undermines the projects. For instance, they'll give you money for a cell phone, but not for a radio or a computer which may be more necessary for the project. In the rural areas, same thing – e.g. they'll put pumps in villages without asking the locals what it is that they need most (like a marketplace or a cool room to store perishable goods), which often leads to worsening of conditions instead of improvement (as with women losing their only 'gossip time'). This is the problem of 'imported remedies.' Another problem is that the aid is very localised and it tends to go to those who are more accessible and on the account of that better off, than others in more distant inaccessible parts that have nothing and never receive any aid. (*FoC 2006*)

Critics within the liberal peacebuilding community also note that excessive bureaucratisation of local development projects channels local efforts away from the substantive work, focusing instead on training local community representatives in fulfilling the intricate requirements of accountancy and reporting (*WB 2007a*). Often, this leads to a perception that the internationals are as adept at channelling funds out of peacebuilding activities as the trickster 'NGOs' described by Richards et al. (2004). For instance, while demanding high standards of transparency from local aid recipients,

> the donors themselves are not always transparent ... More generally a problem with donors is that enforcing conditionality in every detail leads to lack of local ownership – for example, in infrastructure reconstruction. As a result, 50% of funds go back to their source: because of strict formal requirements local people and firms cannot subcontract, and instead subcontracting foreigners siphons the money away from local communities, leading at the same time to inferior results (substandard materials etc.). Same thing happens with 'expert' salaries. (*NAG 2006*)

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[38] The nature of NGOs as a new source of power is evident in the route opened by the appointment of Zainab Bangura, the former head of NGO Campaign for Good Governance, to the post of Foreign Minister in the President Koroma's government in 2007 (see BBC 2007b). The association of NGOs with power invokes its ambivalent connotations in the Sierra Leone society: on the one hand, NGOs provide an alternative route (compared to the traditional neopatrimonial party-politics) to real power (manifest in the access to resources and control over the channels of redistribution); but on the other, this may subordinate NGOs to the wider patterns of power dynamics and thus make them not all that different from other forms of political association in Sierra Leone.

At the same time, the principles of operation introduced by international NGOs also elicit positive responses. Demonstrating impressive achievements without resorting to 'corruption or impunity' (*Caritas Makeni 2006*) 'has changed people's expectations' of the government: 'people have become more conscious of their needs and rights, and politicians are also beginning to understand that' (*UN 2006*). But outstripping the government in the provision of vital services also has a downside, given that the presence of INGOs is temporary, and once they leave, the government simply cannot keep up with the set standards and expectations (*Thompson 2006*; see also ICG 2004). In this regard, raising the capacity of the government to provide services to the population would be a better investment (*Thompson 2006*) – albeit this would run the noted risk of artificially inflating the government's internal legitimacy.

A local/local culture clash?

The awareness of challenges specific to Sierra Leone (at large, or its particular areas) also contributes to a separate agency of Sierra Leonean NGOs in their dealings with 'local' beneficiaries, which may invite interesting considerations of what a meeting between the 'local' and the 'local liberal' entails for Sierra Leone's cultural dynamics. Evidence of a 'culture clash' is detectable in the lack of immediate response among the people that local NGO activists tried to 'sensitise' to particular issues:

> Peacebuilding is not easy in Sierra Leone, as it is difficult to get people together. (*FAWE SL 2006a*)

> As regards local reception of awareness-raising and sensitisation campaigns, initially the response was zero. People just weren't interested. (*NAG 2006*)

Although explanations offered for this was that people were somewhat inert on account of being 'fed up with the "system" and considered it all a waste of time,' or were conditioned by the 'history of marginalisation and "muteness" vis-à-vis the central power' (*NAG 2006*), ethnographic studies of Sierra Leone refer to community self-reliance as a pervasive cultural feature (see Shaw 2005) (which was perhaps indeed assisted by the decades of political practice (cf. Fanthorpe 1998)). One can also attribute the lack of initial response to the alien terms in which the NGO's agendas were phrased: while this was not explicitly stated by the interviewees, the suspicion is corroborated by the recognition that activities of local NGOs had to be extensively adapted to local preferences and conditions. Thus, one local NGO representative described how they had 'studied the local ways of operating and built on that' in their encouragement of female rural entrepreneurs (*GGEM 2006*). Communal reconciliation practitioners also made use of established dispute resolution techniques:

> Some NGOs implemented local traditions of peacemaking, especially in the provinces, as that's where most of the war took place. Traditional methods vary from one locality to another. E.g. the Mende use cleansing ceremonies that involve a native doctor, washing, prayers, incantations, open confession and forgiveness (embrace) by all symbolic connections of the person (family, former friends). Other traditional approaches involve a court hearing where one's crimes are highlighted and one asks forgiveness which the chief

grants. Some NGOs found out about these 'indigenous' ways of reconciliation and used them ... You used to hear about them on the radio. (*FAWE SL 2006b*)

Interestingly, the reliance of local NGOs on established socio-cultural methods of reconciliation need not imply advanced cultural awareness; in the conditions of competitiveness and resource scarcity of the donor market-place, for local actors such 'local knowledge' fulfils a niche of 'know-how' that does not cost oneself almost anything but becomes a resource in the eyes of the Western funders who are happy to add support to context-sensitive home-grown solutions to their donor credentials. The way things were done, before exposure to the globalised peacebuilding environment (and before the war), seem not to have been perceived as particular 'methods;' but suddenly became such once they were understood as deliberate and, to some extent, arbitrary. Default and unquestioned (and unarticulated) 'ways of operating' (de Certeau 1984), once illuminated from 'another's' perspective (cf. Bakhtin 1975: 427) – be it war or peacebuilding – became the stuff of identity: something that could define 'local' actors and initiatives. Still, becoming a recognised 'method' did not bring about full articulation to the point where these techniques could be, for instance, systematically taught to the Westerns observers and peace activists, or even described in full; as stated by one interviewee with reference to reconciliation of families torn apart by the war, '[t]here were no what one might call particular techniques of doing it' (*FAWE SL 2006b*). Such unarticulated state of local 'ways of operating' dovetails with Ferme's claims regarding the centrality of ambiguity in the way things are done (or not done) in Sierra Leone.

The external view of the local

While the perspective of local NGOs both endorses, and preserves a check on, the discourses and practices of liberal peace, the perspective of international peacebuilding agents is rarely distinguished by a matching critical awareness of local dynamics. Given that most liberal peacebuilding actors are only able to see on the ground what the language of liberal peace enables them to see, they are very restricted in the choice of peacebuilding partners in Sierra Leone. The purpose-grown local NGO industry provides a natural local counterpart, but little else in the Sierra Leone society matches the habitual criteria of 'civil society organisations.' As pointed out by Rosalind Shaw,

> for the international community, the local voice or the voice of civil society is increasingly assumed to mean that of local NGOs. However good the local NGOs are ... this presumption effectively marginalizes and excludes the majority who do not speak the international language of NGOs, human rights, and humanitarian assistance. (Shaw 2005; cf. *Thompson 2006*)

The majority of rural Sierra Leone falls into precisely this category, as discovered by people carrying out 'local needs assessment' on behalf of the UN and other international bodies (*UN 2006*). Unable to identify 'civil society organisations' that would match their expectations, the assessors welcomed any semblance of organisation in society: as noted by Richards et al. (2004; cf. *UN 2006*), self-appointed un(der)representative 'Village Development Committees' (VDCs) were the main point of contact for many internationals attempting to work in the rural

areas. The resulting picture of local needs was skewed according to the interests of the more powerful, exposing the unsatisfactory nature of the internationals' expectations modelled on the forms of civil society organisations elsewhere. As noted by an UNDP interviewee, it is difficult for outsiders generally to 'read' power relations at the local level: people who appear equally poor may occupy very different positions in the local hierarchy, and the poorest often cannot afford the time or resources necessary for 'participatory' governance preached by some strands of liberal peacebuilding (*UNDP 2007*). By way of recognising such challenges, many International NGOs increasingly opt for appointing local country directors to run their representations in Sierra Leone: 'many have gone through having foreign ones who did not understand the context of the country thoroughly enough, and made mistakes as a result' (*Thompson 2006*). This also helps avoid the basic clash of 'organisational cultures' between Sierra Leoneans, who 'are perceived as very laid back,' and their more business-like international counterparts (ibid.).

A valid point sometimes brought to bear on the eschatological tone of peacebuilding critique is that because of globalisation, the process of penetration of the 'local' by the Western influences and norms, including the language of liberal peace, is underway whether peacebuilding officially takes place or not (*Large 2007*; cf. cultural 'interpenetration' and 'amalgamation' arguments in Chapters 2 and 3). As noted by a lecturer of the Fourah Bay College I spoke to,

> Many students complain that the intervention [by UNAMSIL and other peacebuilding actors] has eroded Sierra Leonean culture. But it seems that this would have been the case anyway since the people are eager to accept, for instance, American influences on their way of life. In addition, the war had had the same effect. (*Thompson 2006*)

Learning to speak the 'language' of peacebuilding is therefore comparable to the cultural 'learning' characteristic of the colonial times, when 'local' people learned how to interact with the representatives of colonial powers, assumed new public social roles and acquired related skills, in many cases still preserving their 'old' cultural practices in the private sphere (*Large 2007*). Given the immense resilience of the local cultures (ibid.), we should not perhaps bemoan the penetration and 'compromising' of the local by the globalised peacebuilding 'speak' on the account of its detrimental impact on local cultures, since the process (as usual) is two-way: peacebuilding (as was pointed out earlier) is not immune to 'subversion' by the local actors proficient in its language. However, the situation where local culture is banished into the private sphere does not strike one as an ideal solution, since a lack of its wider acceptance invites a 'power contest' between governmentalities of the dominant regime of liberal peace, and local 'resistances,' which are likely to be played out as a cultural struggle for recognition. Perhaps other modes of their co-existence, freer from connotations of subordination and resistance, such as the development of 'hybrid' forms of statehood and organisation of the public sphere (as described by Boege (2006) for Bougainville) are worth investigating. In addition, as Eriksen noted with respect to preservation of minority languages, 'perhaps paradoxically, cultural minorities may have to assimilate culturally in important respects in order to present their case effectively and thereby retain their minority identity' (1992: 313). It appears that a similar trade-off is required for preservation

of the local culture(s) if the message is to be made understandable to the agents of liberal peace.

Conflict regulation and reconciliation in (view of) Sierra Leone's culture

As discussed in Chapter 3, there are grounds to doubt the applicability of 'ethnopraxes' (Avruch et al. 1991) to conflict resolution on a wider scale because of their inherent small-scale, 'in-group' orientation (i.e. in many cases internal coherence is increased through opposition to a common 'other' which should, in the designs of peacebuilders, comprise part of the wider cultural 'self'). However, two factors make this reservation less limiting for Sierra Leone. 'Generalist' conflict cultures, according to Ross (1993, 1998), differentiate little between internal and external others, precisely because the internal divisions are so significant. Conflict resolution practices devised for addressing internal disputes in generalist conflict cultures (and given the strength of internal divides, most Sierra Leone ethnic groups would fall into this category (cf. Ferme 2001, Shaw 2002)), would, therefore, stand a much better chance in dealing with 'external' others. Another factor has to do with the character of dispute resolution mechanisms and overall patterns of intra-communal communication. Ferme notes that the 'ambiguous practices and discourses' which guide the interpretational strategies employed by Sierra Leoneans have developed 'in the absence of ideals of transparency in the exercise of political and social agency in "normal" times' (2001: 6, 7). The use of reconciliation techniques is not, for this reason, associated with any 'privileged' sites or conditions; delimitation of a social and political 'self' has always proceeded in the conditions of high heterogeneity that certainly characterises the post-war situation in Sierra Leone.

Ambivalent possibilities of downplaying or highlighting otherness are coded into the very family structure, given its historic uses for accommodating the otherness of invaders through, for example, the taking of wives. Women in many parts of Sierra Leone still preserve the connotations of potential 'enemy agents' owing to the 'historical connection between women's mobility' and their mediation of the 'outside' (Shaw 2002: 169, 194). The war often highlighted these connotations, as 'many families saw their daughters as a source of torture during the war, since abducted girls were drugged and set against their own families and communities' (*FAWE SL 2006a*).[39] The ambivalence in the perception of women also extends to one of their traditional roles as peace-makers. While cross-dressing traditionally marked the end of staged 'warfare' of Wunde/Poro initiations, where the procession of initiates was led by men cross-dressed as women in elaborate head attires, known as '*kamakɔwɔesia* (lit., extraordinary, marvellous eagles)', in the function of 'peacemakers,' Ferme notes that

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[39] While this is also true of abducted boys (cf. Humphreys and Weinstein 2004: 39-40), they feature more prominently in many moving stories of family re-unions and forgiveness I heard in Sierra Leone (e.g. *Caritas Makeni 2006*). For families of abducted girls, it seemed particularly hard to accept back daughters with children born during the war and conceived in (often) forced relationships with their abductors (*FAWE SL 2006b*).

During a 1985 Wunde initiation in Taiama, *kamakɔwɔesia* were also referred to as spies, who unnoticed like birds in the sky – or apparently harmless women – supply the intelligence crucial to warfare. (Ferme 1998: 560).

These connotations of treachery and danger are also highlighted by the practice of cross-dressing to which fighters of most factions occasionally resorted during the war (Ferme 1998, cf. Ellis 1999). The inherent links of family structure with the system of domestic slavery (which persisted for many decades even after slavery was officially abolished) and patterns of dependency reflect the 'history of violence … embedded in the very language of intimacy and domestic relations' (Ferme 2001: 18). Thus, mediation of relations of otherness, and intimate vicinity of the 'unknown,' are coded into the very constitution of 'selves' in Sierra Leone, so that 'secrecy and suspicion' form an inalienable part 'of everyday Sierra Leonean life' (Jackson 2004: 192; Shaw 2000).

With this in mind, Sierra Leone's established practices of conflict resolution and reconciliation are not necessarily ill-adapted to the post-civil war conditions, and have been used in Sierra Leone to great effect (*FAWE SL 2006a*, *2006b*; *Caritas Makeni 2006*; see also Honwana (2005) on adaptation of existing rituals and cleansing ceremonies to the needs of reconciliation in Angola and Mozambique). Whether they prove effective for building large-scale social cohesion is more doubtful, given that their application nonetheless leaves in place many ambiguities and ambivalences that can, on occasions, (re-)fuel conflict (cf. Ferme 1998: 559-70). The resort to deliberate 'tactics of ambiguity and deferral,' in place of clear assigning of blame, is a device traditionally employed in resolution of local disputes in rural Sierra Leone (ibid.: 573). The inconclusiveness of such resolutions, sometimes resulting 'in the indefinite adjournment of hearings,' implies that '[f]uture disputes between the same parties might then bring back to light these previous offenses' (ibid.). What unites the local court setting and the domain of Sierra Leonean politics, in this respect, is that 'the accumulation of past, everyday wrongs – and their re-presentation in other contexts – ... [can trigger] the danger of renewed disputes and violence' (ibid.). The constitutive relationship between the 'hermeneutics of suspicion – valuing a whole range of cultural skills aimed at producing and interpreting deferred meanings,' and the violent history in which it took shape (Ferme 2001: 7; cf. Shaw 2000), works both ways: solutions reached in the context of such deferred interpretation can be reversible, or subject to later re-interpretations, especially since '[t]he potential for conflict already exists in Mende ideas about truth as a site for contestation and public debate, in which rhetorical skills are critical' (Ferme 2001: 7). This is premised on the inherent polysemy of cultural codes, whose 'open character makes them fundamentally appropriable for a variety of purposes,' in relating the symbols of the past to the current public events in Sierra Leone (Ferme 1999: 161).

The importance of rhetorical performance for the prevailing of one or another version of 'truth' is echoed in anthropologies of other Sierra Leone peoples, e.g. Temne (Shaw 2002) or Kuranko (Jackson 2004). This links with the above discussion of non-finality of social forgetting of violence despite the widespread currency of the meanings of forgiveness and reconciliation among Sierra Leoneans (see above). Social performances may help 'rewrite' the terms of social relations,

'dramatizing' them as they 'should ideally obtain' (Jackson 2004: 137), but the hermeneutics of concealment renders the underlying reality ultimately 'unknowable' (cf. Ferme 2001; Jackson 2004). Echoing this, observers note the importance of rituals for reconciliation over the 'discursive' narration in SL TRC, which on many occasions has very tenuous connections with the truth (Kelsall 2005; cf. Shaw 2005; *Caritas Makeni 2006*; Fetherston and Nordstrom 1995). This is hardly surprising in the cultural economy of patrimonialism, in which the superiors' authority resides in their prerogative of knowing 'more about those in a junior position than the latter know about them' (Shaw 2002: 171).[40] In this respect, even women's visiting of diviners of their own (rather than their men's) choice is a form of counter-power practice (Shaw 2002). Consequently, the power that the knowledge of one's secrets bestows on others (ibid.: 171; cf. Ferme 2001) makes truth-telling – the standard method of truth and reconciliation commissions – untenable in Sierra Leone's cultural context (Shaw 2005; cf. Keslall 2005).

The acknowledgement of this performative orientation of Sierra Leonean culture adds an important dimension to the understanding of patrimonialism as a significational field. Hoffman (2007) notes that titles adopted by fighters on all sides, such as 'commanders,' 'adjutants,' or 'generals,' never reflected any strict military hierarchy, but rather referred to the practice of apportioning 'rewards' for successful performance, e.g., procuring ammunition or other essential military supplies, which served to demonstrate the fighters' inclusion in patrimonial networks and simultaneously improved their connectedness. On other occasions, such titles were adopted as an 'advance,' allowing their bearers to capitalise on their patrimonial connotations and build up patronage networks of their own (ibid.). Hoffmans' examples of role-playing premised on, and reinforcing, patrimonial social relations pinpoint the orientation of signification to the (transient and practical) social plane and not the 'higher' level of abstract Platonic 'ideas,' which were for a long time presumed – and still appear to be, despite Derrida's critique of logocentrism (1976, 1978) – to govern meaning-generation in Western European philosophy (cf. Jackson 2004).[41] Contrary to the rhetoric of the 'crisis' of patrimonialism (Richards 1996), it can be shown that the war, far from undermining patrimonialism as the default significational matrix, served to reinforce its specific mode of meaning-generation, with its reliance on role-playing, performance, and rhetoric. What has been presented, in the bulk of policy and scholarly literature, as violent excesses of the wartime, with conspicuous destruction and sheer 'undoing' of life (e.g. Bøås 2001; Gberie 2005; HRW 2003), can equally be traced to pre-war interpretational schemes – the idioms of consumption, and association of performance failures with both social and physical weakness and destruction (Ferme 1998). On the background of such continuities, the rhetorical force of designating certain periods as 'war' or 'peace' (with the concomitant introduction of ruptures into this underlying continuity) becomes especially notable.

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[40] Jackson (2005: 67) notes the association of knowledge with wealth, which for Sierra Leone completes the cycle of association of power with knowledge and of wealth (-in-people) with power (status).

[41] On the succession of patterns of signification characterising European culture, see Foucault (2002b).

The differences between the interpretational regime of patrimonialism, and that underlying the default approach of liberal peacebuilding (as well as a significant share of Western academia), point to a certain 'culture clash' evident in our conventional dismissal of patrimonial politics as corrupt, with its reliance on personalised ties as vastly inferior, on the grounds of both mores and efficiency, to the impersonal and transparent bureaucratic institutions of Western political culture. The obvious ethical failings of a regime implicated in the violence of the 11-year long war (as well as structural, and on occasions overt, violence of the preceding and following years), are reinforced by the 'objectionable' qualities of its interpretational economy, evident in what appears, to an outsider, as a shallow 'tokenness' of roles, titles, and commitments, whose 'soundness' is premised not on their correlation with an immutable realm of higher truth, but on their momentary relevance on the social plane and embeddedness in the current social situation. However, the very 'matter-of-factness' of such ready judgements points to their origin in a Western culture as 'common sense' (cf. Geertz 1973, Chabal and Daloz 2006), which can be taken as an invitation to question the cultural groundings of the default approach of peacebuilding and most conflict analysis, which sees itself as being outside, or 'above,' culture (Richmond 2009b). The array of accepted remedies for the conflict – liberal reforms, disarmament, national reconciliation, etc. – also belie the understanding of conflict as an arbitrary 'add-on' to the otherwise peaceful 'norm' of social and political relations, which can just as arbitrarily be 'removed' from the equation – and not something embedded in these relations and playing a role in their reproduction. The approach of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, according to Hoffman, exemplifies precisely such an understanding of the military dimension of the conflict: by presenting the CDF and other armed factions as organisations possessing a clear chain of command, peace-making is equated with disarmament and 'beheading' of the military hierarchy – a task much more feasible and graspable in the terms of a cause-and-effect rationality, compared to any course of action that might be commended by recognising the problem, instead, as one of militarisation of the existing patrimonial social networks, with potential implications for conflict in a wider African context (Hoffman 2007). At the same time, the regulatory potential of patrimonialism for conflict is hugely underestimated. Fanthorpe, for one, notes that the success of rulers in this part of Africa was measured by 'their skill in diplomacy and jurisprudence as well as in warfare' (1998) – a notion which resonates with Ferme's observations regarding the entwinement of public and private spheres, with their corresponding techniques of public performance and tactful concealment, in negotiation of disputes (1998, 1999).

Conclusions

Although this chapter, in accord with the language used here for cultural analysis, attempted to 'make sense' of the war in Sierra Leone, the ambition has been less one of explaining – or 'reasoning' – the war (cf. Nordstrom 1995) than of exploring how violence and violent experiences got inscribed in, and conveyed through, the cultural repertoire of meanings and strategies of meaning-generation in Sierra Leonean culture and its encounter with the Western peacebuilding and academic discourses. The argument advanced was that 'peace' or 'war' are by no means self-explanatory categories, but cultural templates totalised through putting in place and maintaining

certain interpretational schemes. Nonetheless, they are not mutually exclusive states (or types of activity affixed to separate agency), since the interpretational patterns characterising either template are grounded in wider significational fields, which in Sierra Leone's case could be referred to as patrimonialism. Embeddedness of the meanings of war, as well as those put forth by internal and external agents of peace, in the patrimonial interpretational economy colours the encounters between 'local culture,' as perceived from a variety of perspectives, and the 'liberal peace.' Local meanings of many concepts advanced by the liberal peace, such as 'democracy' or 'development,' also appear to make aspects of the liberal peace part and parcel of the local socio-political dynamics – an effect that has been magnified by the exposure of Sierra Leone to the international presence since the late 1990s. As a result, the question of local 'preference' for the liberal peace vs. something else appears superseded by the need to negotiate different terms of interaction and mutual recognition between the liberal peace and local culture(s). A better understanding of the deep-seated cultural framing of liberal peace in the patrimonial interpretational economy will also shed light on the durability of the perceived 'root causes' of the Sierra Leonean conflict, redirecting the current preoccupation with the token criteria of liberal governance towards reframing the developmental objectives of peacebuilding not as 'preconditions' for peace, but in terms which would not make the achievement of peace contingent upon overcoming the pervasive features of (neo-)patrimonial polity and culture.

As evident from the presented discussion of patrimonial significational structures underlying very different social and political strategies of actors as diverse as the RUF, NRPC, as well as pre- and post-war governments in Sierra Leone, a shared cultural repertoire or even the use of similar rhetorical 'scripts' do not guarantee identical 'output.' Yet it is this output which is at stake in the post-war political transformation in Sierra Leone. In accord with a conception of culture developed in this study, a degree of change in how things are done – whether in politics, or society at large – can be 'orchestrated' without making people part with the established cultural assumptions and principles that bolster current practices. However, this also needs to be done with consideration for how such changes might be articulated, for it is in the rhetorical articulation and redrawing of cultural boundaries (external and internal) that changes get noted, axiologically evaluated, and where their status in the society gets 'fixed.' The recognition of the power of rhetoric, in turn, presupposes attention to both the local conglomerates of actors (something to which peacebuilders' 'manuals' are becoming increasingly attuned to) and the local expressions of power and power relations – the attributes and connotations of power (something which rarely enters the awareness of peacebuilding practitioners and even researchers). Scrutinising the practices and patterns of distribution of power in the local context can offer useful clues as to how the effects of peace interventions are likely to be received by the local societies and which alternative patterns of societal organisation are likelier to take root – although the potentially variable character of local conditions may require serious ethnographic work. (While 'local' does not necessarily have to imply analysis at the smallest possible scale, identifying what, in each case, represents 'the socially most significant context' (Chabal and Daloz 2006: 124) requires substantial 'local knowledge.') And while the evidence of cultural variation on both synchronic and

diachronic scale, as well as in terms of activation of latent cultural registers, points to unhelpfulness of the notion of cultural determinism, the scope for cultural change at any given moment remains a tricky variable.

The difficulty of a cultural study of 'peace' stems from its largely unarticulated state. It presents the observers with no easily graspable 'whole' – just multiple and varied tasks of managing the diverse aspects of everyday life on different levels, from family to the state. The anomaly of peacebuilding consists in that it tries to replicate and recreate the conditions of normalcy in a way that relies on articulating, isolating a set of practices that support 'peace.' 'War' also turns peace into a marked state; the increased visibility of cultural practices in the face of conflict (e.g. Nordstrom 1994; Duffield 2001) may be an effect of articulation of the taken-for-granted ways of operating in changed conditions which expose these practices as a deliberate and, in a sense, arbitrary means to an end. Reconciliation, as it is practiced in Sierra Leone, heralds a return to normalcy (rather than catharsis encoded in the TRC message of 'blowing minds' (Shaw 2005)), downplaying the exposure of peace as a marked state and de-articulating it, in order to enable people's return to their everyday pursuits. In this regard, the rhetorical association of peace with the concepts introduced by liberal peacebuilding (such as good governance, accountability, transparency, development etc.) truly takes peace out of the hands of Sierra Leoneans, questioning their achievement of 'putting the war behind them' and 'postponing' the arrival of 'true' peace until the fulfilment of these – often nebulous, in the context of local vocabularies – perks of liberal democratic governance. While many local people share the fascination with opportunities brought by the international aid and development (cf. Kapoor 2008: 15; Storey 2000: 42), I would argue that these should not be discursively linked with 'peace' and 'reconciliation,' which have better chances of stabilising the template of peace if left to the care of local cultural dynamics. This way, the issues of democratisation and development can be presented as political options and not matters of sustaining the 'bare life' of subject populations, which strips away their political agency (cf. Agamben 1998; Duffield 2007). Without the pressure of the 'interpretational authority' of the agents of liberal peace, local understandings of purportedly universal concepts (such as democracy) will have a greater chance to develop. While this does not guard against error (e.g. 'mis-interpretation' of ideas such as 'the rule of law'), neither does mechanistic implementation of liberal governance designs presented as 'the last word.' The acknowledgement of the manifold problems besetting established democracies and liberal economies could bring mutual benefits through open, even-handed debate and dialogue.

6. Conclusion

> '… ninety-nine out of a hundred ideas they come up with are totally useless.'
>
> 'Why doesn't anyone lock them away safely, then? They don't sound much use to *me*,' said Brutha.
>
> 'Because the hundredth idea,' said Om, 'is generally a humdinger.'
>
> 'What?'
>
> 'Look up at the highest tower on the rock.'
>
> Brutha looked up. At the top of the tower, secured by metal bands, was a big disk that glittered in the morning light.
>
> 'What is it?' he whispered.
>
> 'The reason why Omnia hasn't got much of a fleet any more,' said Om. 'That's why it's always worth having a few philosophers around the place. One moment it's all Is Truth Beauty and Is Beauty Truth, and Does a Falling Tree in the Forest Make a Sound if There's No one There to Hear It, and then just when you think they're going to start dribbling one of 'em says, Incidentally, putting a thirty-foot parabolic reflector on a high place to shoot the rays of the sun at an enemy's ships would be a very interesting demonstration of optical principles,' he added.
>
> – Terry Pratchett, *Small Gods*

In this thesis, I have explored the perceived gap in the dominant approach to peacebuilding with respect to the issue of culture, probing the reasons behind it and investigating the possibilities and implications of reintroducing a cultural dimension to conflict analysis and peacebuilding. Engaging with the issue of culture has lead me to realise its challenging nature not only for the approaches to conflict and peacebuilding (in theory and practice), but also for the wider academic practice and methodology, particularly with respect to the problematic of knowledge situated and embedded within the very parameters under investigation. Reintroducing 'culture' to the policies and practices of liberal peacebuilding became, accordingly, less a matter of straightforward discussion of policy reform and more an exercise in repositioning the issues of conflict and peacebuilding within the cultural problematic of meaning-production and generation of knowledge – cultural 'world-making' which, through 'ordering' our perception of the world, creates particular senses of reality (Bauman 1999; d'Andrade 1984) and 'common sense' (Geertz 1983) within which human agents operate and upon which they act, thus modifying and re-producing their culture(s). In this sense, culture provides a broader context within which the issues of violent conflict and peace are framed, although their cultural constitution is often bracketed out precisely because of its 'commonsense' nature. It does, however, become more apparent in situations of encounter between different cultural conceptions of conflict and peace, as well as on the interfaces between the cultural registers of 'peace' and 'war' and corresponding sets of cultural norms and practices.

This concluding chapter revisits some of the more pertinent issues which arose from conducting an embedded cultural enquiry into liberal peacebuilding and its relationship with its 'local' recipients. Rather than repeating the arguments developed and conclusions reached in the previous chapters at great length, however, the idea for the concluding chapter is to relate the findings back to the overall context of this study, and explore its possible wider theoretical and practical implications. The remainder of this chapter is divided into three sections, broadly following the subject-matters of the three substantive chapters of the thesis (3, 4, and 5).

The theoretical approach of embedded cultural enquiry

Approached from the perspective of meaning-generation, culture emerges as a framework of meaningfulness operating simultaneously at a variety of levels and scales. Making culture itself a subject of an informed reflection on the meanings to which it gives rise and their world-making effects removes any possibility of a stable 'hierarchy' of conceptual relations in cultural analysis. Instead, it exposes culture itself as partaking in all the instabilities of meaning-generation for which it serves as a framework, including the tenet of arbitrary (and ultimately 'disavowable') connections between 'culture' as a signifier and its signified of complex processes of meaning-generation. One potential corollary of this for culture – quite in line with the general principles of significational dynamics explored in this work – is the hollowing out of its conceptual depth, which, as Chapter 2 has shown, is often noticeable in academic and policy treatments of culture. Another corollary is that culture is never *fully* available for analysis or reflection, since some of its significational mechanisms remain engaged in enabling their very possibility. As a result, the separation into the 'object' and 'instruments' of analysis is never quite superseded despite the awareness of cultural embeddedness of research and the researcher: it merely becomes less stable and more openly arbitrary, embracing its inconclusiveness instead of bracketing it out, as is the wont in the bulk of social research. The impossibility of superseding this fundamental methodological divide could, perhaps, explain the relatively conventional design of this study, despite its deeply anarchical methodological premises. It also strikingly reaffirms Lotman's idea regarding the reliance of meaning-generation on irreducible duality (as a minimum) of the media or principles of organisation – the mechanism explored above in connection with the trope (see Chapter 3; Lotman 1990: 36-37) that also bears on the organisation of cultural totalities of meaningfulness from within which we approach their elements. Embedded cultural enquiry, therefore, reflects in its methodology the proximity of culture to its (potentially de-constitutive) 'other,' which allows it creatively to exploit the irreconcilable methodological differences implicated in the need for 'certain knowledge' without, however, achieving this certainty itself.

The conceptual 'anarchy' unleashed by approaching culture from the perspective of meaning-generation also serves to explain why invoking 'culture' becomes a ready subject to interpretational battles, uncertainties and multiple possibilities of delimitation, and why any institutionalised references to 'culture' – as would, for example, be the case if it were to become a habitual term of peacebuilding discourse

– engage in the production of 'culture' as a particular, fixed set of meanings and practices. Although a serious engagement with culture reveals it as a concept whose ultimate value lies in its openness to indeterminacy and awareness of power implications of any form of 'totalisation' involved in the stabilisation of meanings, the concept carries no guarantee of resisting the tendency towards totalisation of its own meaning or referents. In this sense, culture remains a double-edged analytical (and political) tool, especially since the insight it provides into the power practices involved in the production of meanings can too readily provide an apology for (ab)using its mechanisms in political practice.

Yet, conceptualisation of culture as meaning-generation offers more than analytical and ethical pitfalls: one of its advantages consists in uncovering the links between the processes and phenomena that are not traditionally considered as connected – by virtue of their shared constitution through the processes of cultural meaning-making. Ironically, one manifestation of such commonality consists precisely in the effects of cultural mechanisms of bordering and delimitation responsible for the very possibility of isolating phenomena as distinct and separate. In this sense, 'culture' provides a conceptual and analytical tool that can be adjusted both to the scale and nature of the investigated phenomena, whether they concern the problematic of identity and difference, organisation of the social and political, clashes and reconciliation of views and interests, power practices and resistance, the means and forms of waging conflict and visions and understandings of peace, and so on. And although certain key elements in the functioning of cultural meaning-generation could be considered, to use Lotman's term, 'invariant' (e.g. 1990), the multiplicity of ways in which these are realised and negotiated quickly dissipates their 'formulaic' potential, pointing, instead to the need for an informed contextual study to yield cultural 'data.' Contrary to the usual ambition of limiting and structuring the relevant field of enquiry, the theoretical vocabulary of embedded cultural enquiry aims at creating openings for an unscripted, inductive engagement with the empirical material. Hence the different ways of conceptual framing of the analysis of culture of liberal peacebuilding attempted in Chapter 4, and its interaction with the 'local' culture in the case of conflict and peacebuilding in Sierra Leone (Chapter 5).

The liberal peace – and beyond?

The discussed implications of considering culture from the perspective of meaning-generation profoundly affect the prospects of reintroducing the cultural problematic to the peacebuilding agenda. The difficulties are especially apparent in view of the dominant 'culture' of liberal peacebuilding, which effectively blinds it to the possibility of any conceptualisations of conflict and peace other than its own, and to any form of inclusion of culture other than what fits within its narrow parameters. In addition to the world-making effects of the culture of liberal peacebuilding which 'others' the very possibility of difference (thus incidentally depriving itself of the tools necessary for discerning it), the incompatibility that precludes its fruitful engagement with the cultural problematic can be cast in epistemological terms. Since a deep and informed engagement with culture involves a realisation of one's embedded position with regard to the issues under scrutiny and leads to the questioning of the terms of production of knowledge, it appears to sit more comfortably within the camp of critical and post-structural theory, and presents

certain challenges for the rationalist paradigm of knowledge and action underpinning liberal peacebuilding. These challenges are exacerbated by the tendency of liberal peacebuilding to totalise rationality into a mythological certainty, which obscures its fundamentally limited character and marginalises other kinds of knowledge. In this respect, the noted epistemological preferences of the liberal peace are part and parcel of its culture, as they play a defining role in its 'monological' significational dynamics. The stability of the monologue of the liberal peace relies on a number of tropological conflations (such as the merging of peace and war and the unequivocal association of liberal peacebuilding with 'peace' whatever the means of achieving it), but it is premised, first and foremost, on the inadmissibility of a different subject position, which would expose the partiality and situatedness of the liberal approach to peacebuilding. The monological culture of the liberal peace relies, in other words, on the impossibility of viewing itself as a culture, which, in turn, makes culture unavailable for it interpretational lens.

The sentiment behind advocating a culture-sensitive peacebuilding appears to be the appreciation of the intrinsic value and human relevance of the cultures which liberal peacebuilding encounters on its way. The issue of cultural change occurring as a result of such encounters gives rise to ethical controversies of imposing one's culture on others, or inadvertently destroying unfamiliar cultural values. This issue is linked to the problem of power to effect such change (however conscientiously), so that the very possession and exercise of such power can be seen as inherently problematic and, ultimately, ethically unsupportable. Curiously, recognising the liberal peace as a culture also draws it into the ambit of this critical argument, and exposes power as a crucial factor in cultural change once the question is posed as one of a choice between changing the culture of liberal peacebuilding – or contending with the change that its operation inevitably effects in local cultures, which would preserve the cultural integrity of liberal peacebuilding in its current, monological form. Ironically, the controversy hinges on the refusal of the liberal peace to view itself as a cultural perspective, and unravels once such recognition has taken place – since the change necessary for conceding the perspective of militant cultural universalism will thereby have happened. Meanwhile, the need and pathways for such change may be advocated away from the recognisably cultural terms – as attempted below.

As noted in Chapter 4, the monological stability of the liberal peace is not entirely immune to possibilities of dialogical 'unclosure' with a view to alternative conceptions of peace and different terms of inclusion of culture. One of the most vulnerable links in the chain of its monological self-perpetuation is the reliance of liberal peacebuilding on a problem-solving ethos (often in defiance of evidence which exposes it as an unfruitful tool for resolving what liberal peacebuilding itself identifies as problems). Demonstrating that a 'problem-solving' approach is problematic even within the confines of liberal peace's own take on rationality could, perhaps, lead to exposure of the extent to which this rationality is sustained ideologically and mythologically, rather than 'rationally,' given the scope of dynamics which cannot be subordinated to its dictate. Additional impetus for a revision of its problem-solving premises can be sought in the recognition of 'crisis'

of liberalism which permeates current academic (Millennium 2009 conference)[42] and policy language (Chandler 2009). Admitting the circumscribed nature of rationality could take liberal peacebuilding towards the acknowledgement of other forms of knowledge, thus preparing the ground for a similar unclosure with regard to liberal peacebuilding's subject position and the admission of other actors and perspectives. Recognising the possibility of subject positions outside its monological totality would re-equip the liberal peace with instruments for the appreciation of difference – both the constitutive difference of its identity and that 'wholly other' which very rarely enjoys recognition in 'digestive' hegemonic discourses (cf. Critchley 1992). This, in turn, would create an opening for other kinds of knowledge unshackled by the problem-solving rationality, and alternative methods, such as serious contextual research into, among other things, the culture of liberal peacebuilding itself.

For the liberal peace, the ultimate benefit of an open engagement with cultural problematic would consist in re-discovering itself as a limited, circumscribed political project. Admission of a certain set of interests behind it, of a particular cultural grounding of its values, and the specific historical origin of its policies would have a double effect of limiting its reach (thus exposing the existence of vast uncharted – from its current monological perspective – terrains beyond) and focusing that which is specific – and special – about the liberal conception of peace, re-energising the qualities currently submerged in its monologue, such as the 'aspirational' nature of the liberal sentiment (cf. Chandler 2009; Appadurai 2004). De-ideologisation of the liberal peace along these lines would entail a possibility of re-introducing the discussion topics currently ruled out by its ideological stance (cf. Wuthnow et al. 1984: 226). Repositioning the liberal peacebuilding project as something driven by a culturally-specific sense of the politically 'appropriate' would enable to place its underlying interests in the spotlight of any dialogue with its professed beneficiaries rather than bracketing them out. In view of the inevitability of irreconcilable paradoxes within any culture (stemming from the duality of the principles of organisation underlying the very possibility of meaning (Lotman 1990)), the discovery of inconsistencies within the culture of liberal peacebuilding does not imply its automatic unravelling. Rather, it would place these paradoxical moments into the spotlight of reflection, allowing the practitioners and supporters of the liberal peace to reaffirm the fundamentals of its culture in full awareness of their arbitrariness. This, I believe, could lead the liberal peace towards the appreciation of, and respect for, the ultimately indefensible foundations of other cultures – recalling Connolly's idea of 'deep respect' based on the acknowledgement of 'the dignity of those who embrace different sources of respect' (1991: xxvi).

At the present moment, a dialogical unclosure of liberal peacebuilding remains largely hypothetical, especially because the reality-making effects of its cultural constitution are not widely recognised even by its critics. Ultimately, the recognition of the monological nature of the culture of liberal peacebuilding offers a key to understanding the extremely limited impact which the appeals for greater openness of the liberal peace paradigm, or its critique on 'principled' grounds, have been able

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[42] http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/millenn/annual%20conference.htm, accessed 3 October 2009.

to achieve. For liberal peacebuilding, lacking the depth necessary to gauge the extent of difference has served as a device for subjugating dissidence by way of incorporating those elements superficially compatible with the liberal peace into its framework, while remaining oblivious to others. According to this logic, for the critique of liberal peacebuilding to have effect, it needs to be 'legible' and 'digestible' within the terms of its monological culture, so as to gain an opportunity to unsettle its mythological stability from within, by opening up the currently latent cultural horizons that are less dependent on a monological self-description. Still, the extent of internal difference which a monological culture can ignore remains a powerful unknown, especially in view of the ease with which the recommendations that in their essence should profoundly shake the current peacebuilding practice can be hollowed out and superficially employed in its service. There seem to be endless possibilities in which talking 'at' or 'against' the liberal peace can be turned into talking 'with' and 'for' it.

Devising such devious clouts for the critique is further complicated by the task of finding the appropriate targets for its application in a liberal peacebuilding enterprise, carried on by many and yet perceptibly guided by no one. Here, once again, the obliviousness of the liberal peace towards difference can serve as both an aid and a hindrance. Numerous peacebuilding actors whose difference from the liberal peace is obscured by their apparently uniform subscription to the arguably incontrovertible principles of 'good governance,' 'development,' 'human rights' and so on (cf. Kapoor 2008: 15; Storey 2000: 42), could perhaps be encouraged to exploit that difference, by emphasising, for example, the extent of their disagreement regarding the means of achieving those shared ends. Even if they are still perceived as vehicles of the liberal 'meta-peace' (MacGinty 2008), returning debate and disagreement to the core of the liberal peace would be a definite step towards its dialogical unclosure. The agency of the internal 'others' of liberal peace is crucial in that they have a potential to combine greater receptiveness towards critique with the opportunities to pursue alternative forms of peacebuilding in practice (cf. *Large 2007*). On occasions, this involves exploring 'hybrid' governance solutions in areas with strong local governance traditions – however 'undemocratic' or 'illiberal' (e.g. Boege 2006; Boege et al. 2008). On others, this may take the form of investing in people to increase their ability to cope with the aftermath of conflicts while bypassing any institutional setups (e.g. MacGinty 2007; cf. Jackson 2004: 37, 41). However, while any association with liberal peace is viewed as potentially susceptible to conflation with its 'monologue,' there are also means of achieving the objectives of peace and development away from this association, as illustrated by Appadurai's (2004) example of Slum/Shackdwellers International.

Peacebuilding and the 'local'

The frequent failures of critique to fit within the cultural horizons of the liberal peace are of course replicated in the interaction of liberal peacebuilding with its recipients, where the possibility of capitalising upon the latent cultural possibilities could be crucial for the success of peacebuilding. Instead, the preconceived terms of enquiry into the reasons for violent conflict direct liberal peacebuilding down the avenues reaffirming and vindicating its policy language and recipes, while the rigidity of its monological vocabulary presents a formidable barrier for popularising

its ideas among the 'subject' populations. This creates multiple and not always mutually intelligible frames of reference for 'peace,' which is at odds with the popular (even within the liberal peacebuilding discourse) concept of local ownership of the peace process and its outcomes. In effect, the local visions and understandings of peace are overshadowed by the liberal ones which, through the habitual equation of peace with a set of liberal governance solutions (such as good governance, development, respect for human rights, accountability and the rule of law) often discredit local efforts at peace-making on the grounds of their remoteness from these criteria of a genuinely liberal 'peace.'

At the same time, the inability of the liberal peace to frame the conflictive issues in any other terms than those of liberal peacebuilding rhetoric leaves the bulk of conflictive dynamics beyond the grasp of liberal transitions. One of the most contentious issues in this regard is the shared cultural repertoire, imagery, and agency behind the violent and non-violent means of waging and resolving conflicts. The deep interpenetration of violent and non-violent practices is visible in the ambivalent uses to which the mobilisation of social networks can be put, including transnational shadow economies which often provide a key to sustaining local war efforts at the same time as generating a sense of stability out of the apparent destabilisation of violent conflict. For liberal peacebuilding, this presents enormous difficulties, since in its haste to 'stop violence' it is oblivious to the complex relations which obtain between the recurrent practices and interpretational schemes on the one hand, and the sense of reality and 'commonsense' that they generate for the local people, on the other. Compared to the shaky realities of stability grown out of conflict, the rhetoric of liberal peacebuilding often lacks grounding in direct experience and its cultural framing, and so becomes grafted onto the available cultural repertoire, which serves to modify and occasionally subvert the intended meanings. Contrary to the liberal view of economics as the ultimate realisation of timeless rationalism, the realities created out of day-to-day economic interactions in the conflict zones betray its profoundly cultural dimension. In comparison, the cultural character of local politics and power relations appears positively self-evident.

Ironically, the failings of the liberal peace on the front of cultural receptiveness do not necessarily jeopardise the prospect of enduring peace in Sierra Leone. To claim such causal connection would be tantamount to reaffirming the liberal peace as the only possible framework and departure point for peace. Sierra Leone's complex cultural dynamics which escape the field of vision of the liberal peace are not necessarily violence-prone; rather, they include ambivalent cultural agency and processes, where the spaces for violent contestation intermingle with the spaces for peaceful political activism. As though in defiance of the deficit of 'politics' in the liberal governance framework, these cultural dynamics become a site of 'the political' away from the liberal peace, as well as a site where the relationships between the elements of the liberal peace and the largely 'illiberal' local economic and political realities are negotiated. Because of the localised pattern of such negotiations and the 'fragmented' character of local agency, it is difficult to pinpoint the predominant direction in which the contradictions between them are resolved. However, the cultural past of Sierra Leone is replete with examples where

subordination went hand in hand with subversion and modification of the introduced agendas (e.g. Shaw 2002), although often at the cost of internalising the resultant controversies and conflicts, which in turn made the violence all the more 'proximate' as a cultural option (see Chapter 5). In this sense, the 'absorption' of the culturally insensitive liberal peace into Sierra Leone's (neo-)patrimonial cultural economy does increase the latter's indeterminacy, taxing further its ability to negotiate internal contradictions. On the other hand, the very rhetorical visibility of 'peace' in the discourse of liberal peacebuilding in Sierra Leone may contribute to the cementing of the cultural template of peace, providing a 'performance' that unexpectedly slots into the dominant cultural understandings. However, the relatively 'painless' introduction of the liberal peace in Sierra Leone (at least from the former's perspective) should not be read as an encouragement of continued cultural ignorance: in other instances, the direction of unexpected cultural 'synergy' may be less favourable.

Interpreting the processes and phenomena as 'cultural' does not imply their timeless relevance, immutability or even durability in time – 'culture', as shown in this research, comprises a vast array of interpretational practices and devices which range over a variety of time scales. While attention to culture reveals its entwinement with problematic power practices and its role in legitimising disparities in social, political and economic opportunity (as is the case, for example, with Sierra Leone's inheritance laws presumably grounded in the traditional ideas regarding the place of women in rural society), a careful consideration of culture can also unveil those 'latent' visions of social change and ideas of societal organisation which may be demonstrably absent from the actualised cultural repertoire, yet widely compatible with the overall cultural patterns of meaning-making, practice and mentality. Possible directions and potential for cultural change comprise a largely untapped peacebuilding resource (with the exception of its use in reconciliation – e.g. Honwana 2005), but its use requires serious study of local cultures, not least because the transformative potential of culture is often constrained by the actualised patterns of cultural praxis. Violent conflict serves as a powerful factor in unsettling the cultural certainties and unleashing cultural creativity and change, but it is also a force which directs the transformation towards devising cultural coping strategies and 'cultures of violence.' In order to countervail the emergence of such conflictive cultural equilibriums, 'peacebuilding' as an activity needs to engage with people's cultural creativity at what, for them, is the most relevant social scale (family, locality, region, nation etc.) (cf. Chabal and Daloz 2006). Provided that adequate efforts are made at cultural understanding of the 'local,' the cultural 'otherness' of the peacebuilding agents need not be an obstacle to a fruitful engagement in peacebuilding, since for local people, the encounters with the externality of the peacebuilding 'other' can prompt a creative re-articulation of narratives of their cultural 'self' towards greater a inclusiveness with respect to the conflictive 'others' (cf. Buckley-Zistel 2006; Viktorova Milne, forthcoming).

Although no peacebuilding approach can be ultimately free from the charges of bias towards some cultural visions of peace over others, different approaches are not equivalent in terms of what they 'do' to their subjects (cf. Mouffe 1993: 14-5; Connolly 1991: ix), especially in view of the centrality of cultural mechanisms of

meaning-making and boundary-drawing for the valorisation of one or another peacebuilding design or governance solution as benign, authentic, just, representative and so on. The instances of deploring the increased sense of responsibility that has grown out the burgeoning cultural awareness (Kent 2005), however, betray the continuing hegemonic self-positioning of organised peacebuilding 'gone cultural.' The difficulties of peacebuilding agents in making decisions regarding which cultural vision of peace to support when faced with 'too much' local knowledge may be superseded by a realisation that such decisions do not necessarily have to be theirs to make. In view of their increased cultural awareness, the role of external peacebuilding agents may be more fruitfully fulfilled by exploring the possibilities, advantages and pitfalls of different directions of cultural contestation and re-negotiation of possible peace and governance designs together with the local actors. Ironically, shedding the pretence of a 'non-perspective' (Häkli 1996) of the objective and timeless 'know-how' of the liberal peace would impart peacebuilding agents with a unique perspective that could prove immensely valuable to local actors in addressing the complex tasks of post-violence recovery.

A dialogical unclosure of the liberal peace would perhaps be most visible in forfeiting the ambition of finality of any solutions concerning the design of peaceful coexistence – the finality that is premised on the assumption of universality and timelessness of rational knowledge and that fits so poorly with the ongoing character of social and political life. Given the complexity of cultural processes of meaning-making, it may not be possible to tell in advance which form of peace carries the best potential for inclusiveness or equitability, or to cover at once the whole spectrum of decisions that need making. However, it is important that the established political possibilities of renegotiation matched those contained in cultural dynamics: ultimately, if 'the political' is what violent conflict in the Global South is about (Edkins 1999: 10), then it is vital that it is preserved in any movement towards, or imagination of, peace. Recognition of the partial, temporary nature of solutions and political forms they engender heightens the appreciation of the historical, time-bound nature of politics. In practical peacebuilding terms, this may imply dispensing with the present hierarchies of the relevant scales and loci of politics and governance (such as the default prioritisation of the state), and directing peacebuilding efforts towards culturally most relevant political contexts (in Sierra Leone's case, chiefdom politics and below (Fanthorpe 1998; Ferme 1998)). The 'local' grounding of peace does not preclude it broader relevance: on the contrary, the local in this sense may be the most appropriate scale from which to examine both current and alternative conceptualisations of polity and the international, as well as the forms of power, order, regulation and control that these may necessitate. Such renegotiation of the relationship between the local and the international would not be treating a theoretically virgin terrain, given the wealth of existing debates on cosmopolitanism, citizenship, sovereignty, human security, democracy of the 'international' and many other related issues (e.g. Linklater 2007; Tadjbakhsh 2007; Doyle 2000; Denov 2006a).

Apart from their links to culturally relevant contexts, the 'localness' of solutions depends on the willingness and ability of concrete communities to uphold them – in

contrast to the current practice of top-down solutions which necessitate extensive (and expensive) 'capacity-building' measures to increase the local people's competences in dealing with the formats of collective action unfamiliar to them. De-uniformalisation of liberal peace would have to involve a revision of bases and criteria for allocating support to local initiatives, which are currently often stymied by bureaucratic obstacles. (Although this may leave donor funds vulnerable to misuse, its possibility, as shown in Chapter 5, is not by any means eliminated in the current system of bureaucratic accountability.) In short, although the recognition of cultural processes and effects of meaning-production involves heightened awareness of power invested in one or another culturally-grounded vision of peace and possibility of its 'abuse,' it does not preclude trusting the local people in (post-) conflict zones to formulate their own visions of peace and find political forms for their expression. The recognition of inevitability of hegemonic 'closures' in the endless process of cultural meaning-generation (cf. Laclau 2000) implies, in its reverse, a valuable possibility of sometimes taking the 'other' at face value (Jackson 2004: 88).

The lack of uniformity of political solutions would also enrich both policy and academic conceptions of knowledge, involving a greater appreciation of the unique, unrehearsed, and (from the perspective of rational regularity and control) ultimately unruly. This could be instrumental not only for imagining alternative formats of peace, but also in understanding the dynamics of conflict which currently defy rationalisation, being apparently directed against its very possibility. The admission of alternative pathways to knowledge such as art, the everyday, the 'carnivalesque' and so on could also heighten our appreciation of 'unscripted' ethics and praxis (Richmond 2007b; 2009a: 574, referring to Bauman 1993) and inspire a reconsideration of the possibilities implied in the human condition, broadening the very conceptions of cultural and the human. And although these things may appear 'pointless' from the currently dominant perspective of liberal peace and its underlying conception of knowledge, their framework may not be the most fruitful one from which to judge the ultimate utility of seemingly 'undirected' cultural explorations.

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