



Workshop Report

Cooperation for Hybrid Peace and Order: Selfhood and Socio-Political order beyond Individualism and Collectivism

On Monday 18 November 2013, the Käte Hamburger Kolleg (KHK) / Centre for Global Cooperation Research convened a workshop with a select group of 20 internal and external participants. During the workshop, six presenters from a range of disciplinary backgrounds delivered their perspectives on, and engaged in discussion with other participant about, the topic of *Cooperation for Hybrid Peace and Order: Selfhood and Socio-Political order beyond Individualism and Collectivism*.



In his opening remarks, **Dr Morgan Brigg**, Senior Fellow, KHK /Centre for Global Cooperation Research/Senior Lecturer, School of Politics and International Studies, The University of Queensland, Australia, set the scene for the day's discussions.

Brigg reflected on the past decade of peacebuilding policy which has seen a striking turn to embrace 'the local'. Implementation challenges and normative critiques have led to this focus on the local gaining a lot of traction. It therefore appears that the future of peacebuilding is increasingly 'hybrid'. But this raises questions about how to go about this in practice and a range of associated ethico-political puzzles – it is these issues that were at the heart of the workshop discussion. Brigg observed that peacebuilding suggests the need to grapple with different understanding of the self and social order, and therefore involves cooperating across difference. This also involves dealing with regimes of neo-liberal governance, including human rights. Some of the challenges echo long-standing governance issues, including in colonial-era governance.

Brigg suggested that the peacebuilding field currently lacks strong conceptual and theoretical tools to address these challenges. In this void, there is a risk of people



resorting to 'what they know' about selfhood and difference. However, because so many of these understandings have been driven by liberal ideologies, there is an inherent bias in the way these things are framed. Brigg highlighted one popular distinction that is resonating in popular discourse: the 'individualism' versus 'collectivism' distinction. This distinction has been mapped onto different styles of conflict resolution including through influencing understandings of cultural difference, including differing importance attributed to relationships between people, the sharing of resources etc. Brigg suggested that this characterisation of difference is a tempting formulation because it mirrors 'folk' understandings. It is this distinction that was used in this workshop foil for thinking about questions of peacebuilding and the formulation of peace and order.

During Session 1, **Dr Steven Pierce**, Senior Fellow, KHK/Centre for Global Cooperation Research/ Senior Lecturer, University of Manchester, UK, provided a historical foundation for subsequent discussion by presenting on the topic: ***"Scandalous Subjects: Modernity, Tradition, Individuals, and Tribes in Colonial Northern Nigeria"***. Pierce explained that individualism-collectivism conceptualisations have deep roots in western traditions of social theorising established over a long period of time. Pierce gave a broad overview of the mapping of how different understanding of the self and social order emerged. Pierce described the different understandings of difference and sameness between European and non-European societies and the associated assumptions about what this implied for modes of governance by the Colonial authorities who were dealing with questions of how best to govern local societies. Pierce discussed these issues with particular reference to the practice of flogging by the British administration in Northern Nigeria which, at certain times, led to scandals that shook the empire. Pierce suggested that these controversies were symptomatic of and reveal tensions within the understandings that Europeans had about colonial subjects. Pierce's presentation strongly brought out the ways in which the individualism-collectivism distinction comes with political entailments that deserve far greater consideration than they currently receive in contemporary peacebuilding interventions.

In Session 2, **Dr Jessica Schmidt**, Postdoctoral Fellow, KHK/Centre for Global Cooperation Research, provided a theoretical analysis of the debates around intervention when she presented on her topic: ***"Peace of Mind? Hybridity, Choice, Responsibility"***. In her presentation, Schmidt focused on the notion of hybridity, suggesting that that in the endeavour to search for new ways of engaging with the 'other' – non-Western societies, the 'local on the ground' – it is first and foremost the rise of the notion of 'hybridity' and its underpinning rationality that need to be critically scrutinised before we can begin to evaluate the usefulness or appropriateness of distinguishing between individual and collective subjectivity for international intervention. To advance her critique, Schmidt demonstrated a contradiction, in the policy documents of leading international organisations, between a clear identification of the structural causes of violence and conflict, and an apparent disavowal of these issues in the policy responses, including through the notion of hybridity.



Schmidt went on to say that emphasising hybridity in academic and policy discourse results in an over-emphasis on interconnectedness and the demise of ideas of “autonomy” which precludes, for instance, a genuine assessment of the appropriateness of the involvement of interveners in conflict. In her critique of hybridity, Schmidt suggested that ‘as a descriptor of a real-world condition, thinking in terms of hybrid peace and development forestalls any possibility of a genuine recalibration, of a genuine “new beginning”’. The linking of selfhood to conflict, and hybridity to peacebuilding, she suggests has resulted in an increasingly widening gap between the acknowledged structural drivers of conflict, and the efforts to address conflict which focus on violence and inter-personal and socio-psychological aspects. The reasons for this gap require our continued attention to be able to adequately grapple with the ethical and political challenges posed by contemporary peacebuilding.

In Session 3, **Dr Morgan Brigg** presented on the topic: ***“Individualism-Collectivism Dimension: Ontological Missteps in the study of Selves and Society?”***. Brigg reflected on the cultural turn in the social sciences has increasingly asserted that ‘culture matters’, and that this has led to conceptualisations of psychological and social-psychological understandings, such as the individualism/collectivism distinction. However, developed two lines of critique by showing that the social-psychological is rather uncertain – in the terms of their own measures – about the efficacy of the distinction, and exploring to what extent the distinction itself might be considered a cultural artefact.

Brigg suggested that selfhood is much more historically and culturally contingent than the individualism- collectivism distinction suggests, including in the West where a certain type of individualism can be understood to drive the development of the distinction itself. Instead, Brigg argued that most people are in fact part of each other, participating intrinsically in each other’s existence in ways that cannot be adequately characterised as individualist or collectivist. He highlighted a number of commonplace misunderstandings, including by showing that personal autonomy asserted by many Indigenous peoples should not be confused with Western individualism, and that the exercise of autonomy is asserted through a mutuality of being. Brigg also drew on research into comparative conceptualisations of the selfhood of Melanesian people and a missionary woman in colonial times to show that ‘perhaps the deep ruptures of personhood presumed to have taken place as part of colonialism, did not in fact take place, because they were not so different in the first place’. The implication, he argued, was a need to better understand how structures of selfhood and sociality linked to contemporary institutions of governance and peace in order to better engage across cultural difference in peacebuilding.

During Session 4, **Dr Abou Jeng**, Postdoctoral Fellow, KHK/Centre for Global Cooperation Research presented on the topic: ***“Between Indifference and Reluctant Accommodation: Law, the Judiciary and Individualism-Collectivism Distinction”***. In his presentation, Jeng discussed how conceptualisations of difference, including through a framework of individualism and collectivism, are reflected in law and



judicial processes. Jeng discussed, for instance, the approach to human and collective rights taken in the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*, explaining the importance of such instruments as a source for the judiciary to draw on when making decisions pertaining to human rights.

Jeng discussed cases in Botswana and The Gambia involving issues such as spousal inheritance, citizenship and land rights to illustrate some of the ways in which conceptualisations of culture and difference had been applied through the legal process. He explained that through judicial activism, judges have in some cases consolidated the individualism/collectivism distinction, and in others, challenged its relevance. As such, the the jurisprudence in relation to this issue is far from consistent. Nonetheless, the reflection of the individualism-collectivism distinction in both the activity of the judiciary and regional and international legal frameworks highlights tensions in other areas of society – particularly in relation to development – that need to be carefully worked through, including with attention to the philosophical and political values that local peoples bring to bear in their lives.



In Session 5 **Pol Barges Pedreny**: Associate, KHK/Centre for Global Cooperation Research Doctoral Candidate, University of Westminster, UK presented on the topic: ***"Managing Ethnicity or Pluralising Identities: Peace without Autonomy in Kosovo"***. During his presentation, Barges Pedreny reflected on the conflict in the Balkans, in particular focusing on the role that ethnicity has played in the conflict in Kosovo. He suggested that conflict could be divided into pre-Cold War 'Old wars' characterised by ideology and individualism and 'New wars' characterised by collectivism and identity politics.

Drawing on recent interviews conducted in the field, Barges Pedreny discussed statements made by local actors including by Albin Kurti, leader of the social movement Vetevëdosje (self-determination) and recently formed political party.. Through reflecting on such statements, Barges Pedreny discussed the nature of the Kosovo conflict, and in particular how external actors and commentators have framed conflict in the region through an emphasis on ethnicity and collectivism. Barges Pedreny emphasised the way Kurti and others are moving against this characterisation, including by drawing upon universalist values including self-

determination, economic development and service delivery to re-define the future of peace in the region.



Wren Chadwick KHK/Centre for Global Cooperation Research reflected on the Resonance of the Individualism-Collectivism Distinction in Postcolonial Institutions in Solomon Islands. In her presentation ***“You whiteman like to be Lonely’: Practitioner Reflections on the Cross-cultural Dynamics of Statebuilding”*** Chadwick drew on her experience as a practitioner working in post-conflict Solomon Islands to reflect on whether the individualism/collectivism distinction offered a useful frame for analysis. She concluded that while some experiences of working in social policy and institutional building projects could be framed as reflecting and individualism/collectivism distinction to some degree (especially in terms of the institutional legacy of colonialism), such characterisations were generally overly simplistic and therefore unhelpful for understanding the challenges and tensions at play in sufficient detail. Better tools are required, Chadwick suggested, to provide more nuanced ways of understanding the continually changing complex cultural dynamics at play in post-conflict, post-colonial environments such as Solomon Islands.

The presentations generated considerable and animated debate among participants with many commenting that the workshop was valuable for advancing their thinking, including for taking new and alternative steps to address the puzzle of differences in selfhood and socio-political order in situations of hybrid peace and order. The workshop helped to advance the individual publication efforts of presenters. In addition, Dr Schmidt, in collaboration with Barges Pedreny, will build upon the workshop to develop a Special Issue publishing project that will draw in several contributors from the workshop.