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When, during the summer of 2007, the Catholic Primate of All Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh, Sean Brady, attended a celebration of Irish culture in Milwaukee, he had more to speak on than the usual subjects of social breakdown and sexual abuse; his other main concern was to promote inward investment to support the Northern Ireland peace process. Echoing pleas by political, economic and cultural leaders across the Northern Irish political spectrum, he called on the British government to bring down corporation tax in the North to the same 12.5 per cent level as in the Irish Republic, and urged American companies to increase their investment in Northern Ireland (Cooney, 2007). His call was made at a time of growing concern within the Republic about the potential economic repercussions of the resumption of power-sharing in Belfast – a concern that economic growth may become increasingly concentrated in the Dublin–Belfast corridor, crystallised above all by an Aer Lingus decision to open a new Belfast flight hub at the expense of established routes from Shannon (Connolly, 2007). And his call was also made against a backdrop of ongoing discussions in the North, and with London, over a plethora of economic issues – about water bills, house prices, public sector investment, cross-border cooperation and much more besides.

As this illustrates, issues of political economy not only can be, but I would argue always are, absolutely pivotal to the form and functioning of peace processes. These issues do not simply pertain to natural resources, to poverty and criminality or to any of the other development–security problems so commonly identified by ‘post-conflict’ peacebuilders, but also include issues ranging from corporation tax to credit ratings. Moreover, as the concerns above indicate, peace processes are disparate and divergent in their economic and social impacts – benefiting some while harming others, or at the very least raising troubling questions about who they might leave behind.

This chapter provides a summary critical perspective on the political economy of peace processes. I use the term ‘peace processes’ rather than ‘peacebuilding’ because the former are quite distinct from the latter, and pose
quite distinct analytical challenges. Moreover, I say a ‘critical perspective’
because, while mainstream discourse on peace processes is informed by a
range of liberal assumptions about the relations between political and eco-
nomic change, this chapter submits these liberal assumptions to critique,
and points towards an alternative historical materialist reading of peace pro-
cesses. The chapter draws primarily upon evidence from the Middle East, but
also from peace processes in South Asia, Latin America and, with the case of
Northern Ireland, Europe. The bulk of the chapter first sets out the liberal
orthodoxy on the political economy of peace processes, and then proceeds
to critique it. Beforehand, however, we need to clarify precisely what ‘peace
processes’ are, how they differ from ‘peacebuilding’, and why they merit
close scrutiny.

Peace processes

The notion of ‘peacebuilding’ has moved to the centre of academic and
practitioner discourse on how to end wars and promote peace (Boutros-
public and high political discourse, the more common focus has been ‘peace
processes’. Certainly, centrist British and US media outlets such as the BBC
and the *New York Times* discuss peace processes much more than they do
peacebuilding. The term ‘peace process’ has become a standard part of the
global political lexicon, applied to contexts as different as Northern Ireland,
Sudan, Columbia, the Basque country, the Middle East and India–Pakistan.

In conflict resolution accounts, peace processes are understood as phased
processes for negotiating and nurturing peace. They can be either intra-state
(as in Sudan or Columbia) or inter-state (as in the cases of the Arab–Israeli or
India–Pakistan processes). They can involve extensive mediation from inter-
national actors and significant international peacebuilding support (as in the
Israeli–Palestinian peace process), or barely any such third party involvement
at all (as in India–Pakistan, where India resists all efforts to internationalise
resolution of the dispute). Peace processes are first and foremost between
the immediate parties to a conflict. They commonly begin with unofficial
and secretive negotiations, undertaken by academics, businesspeople, reli-
gious leaders and other non-state or third-party actors, within the context of
ongoing conflict and often government prohibitions (or fear of hostile public
response) to formal negotiations. If productive, such back-channel talks then
typically open the way for public and formalised negotiations, either around
skeletal framework agreements or around public statements, letter exchanges
and/or agreed negotiating frameworks – on condition of some sort of cease-
fire. A series of accords then usually follow, the early ones full of general
statements of principles, confidence-building measures and agreements on
issues with positive-sum dimensions (such as pledges to pursue joint eco-
nomic development programmes); the later ones more concerned with the
details of implementation, as well as attempts at resolution of the most contentious political issues separating the parties, which are typically left unresolved, even unaddressed, within earlier negotiations. These developments are accompanied by economic and social reconstruction programmes funded by international peacebuilders or state authorities, which, in combination with the resolution of outstanding political differences, hopefully usher in a final peace settlement and a happy conclusion to the peace process (Darby and Mac Ginty, 2003; Guelke, 2003).

To such mainstream liberal conflict resolution depictions of peace processes, further points can be added. First, peace processes are a historically novel political phenomenon or institution: the term ‘peace process’ was first used only in the mid-1970s, when American diplomats coined it as a label for the tentative thaw in relations between Israel, Syria and Egypt (Quandt, 2001: 1; Saunders, 1985: 3), and the practice of making peace through a staged and protracted process of negotiation between enemies is likewise historically unique. Second, peace processes usually fail: as with most of the examples listed above – though with the striking exception, at least for now, of Northern Ireland – peace processes typically end by stalling, collapsing or dying altogether (Mac Ginty, 2006). Third, a good part of the reason for this is that peace processes are inter-elite political accommodations whose aim is often not so much ‘peace’ as the reconfiguration of domestic hegemony and/or international legitimacy; peace processes are reformist, conservative and far from revolutionary phenomena, and often therefore do not provide a basis for the social transformations necessary for sustainable peace. And fourth, because they are so protracted, peace processes furnish plenty of opportunities for participants to both ‘have their cake and eat it too’ – that is, for the parties to peace processes to on the one hand claim and display their commitment to peace and accrue various benefits as a result, while on the other hand avoiding, often for many years, having to make substantive political compromises. (For further discussion of the nature and late twentieth-century emergence of peace processes, see Selby, 2007.)

Peace processes, then, differ from peacebuilding in several key regards. First, whereas in peacebuilding it is international organisations and liberal Westerners who are usually considered the primary agents of peace, in peace processes it is local elites who occupy centre stage. So while peacebuilding is founded on a neo-colonial civilising mission, as Paris (2002) observes, this is not true to nearly the same extent of peace processes. This does not mean that peace processes are purely local exercises – indeed as indicated below this is far from being the case – merely that local dynamics, situated within their global context, need to be our main concern. Second, while peacebuilding is an essentially liberal exercise, an attempt to transplant liberal democratic structures into post-conflict societies, peace processes are typically informed by a sharply realist power politics. It is surely no coincidence that the very first peace process was born out of a US administration whose
key foreign policy figure was that doyen of realist diplomacy, Henry Kissinger (Quandt, 2001). Third, whereas peacebuilding is concerned, relatively narrowly, with transplanting templates for social and economic reconstruction, peace processes are broader and more complex political phenomena, home to bewildering and unique transitional political arrangements (a Palestinian Authority, for instance, which under the Oslo peace process was responsible for administering over 200 non-contiguous pockets of West Bank territory) as well as final-status political differences which remain intractable for most of their duration. And fourth, whereas peacebuilding is usually thought of as being a ‘post-conflict’ activity, peace processes attempt to span the whole temporal divide between protracted conflict and sustainable peace. In all of these respects, peace processes are both distinct from and much more complex than peacebuilding.

The liberal orthodoxy on peace processes

Given the specificity and complexity of peace processes, there are, as one might imagine, numerous ways in which economic transformations might be thought to affect them. Indeed there are five main strands to mainstream liberal thinking on the political economy of peace processes: a broad equation of economic liberalisation, globalisation and peace; a liberal functionalist understanding of the route to regional stability; a belief that globalisation is ushering in new styles of politics and identity; an emphasis on the importance of fighting poverty and supporting the economic reconstruction of war-torn societies; and a generous faith in business actors as important agents of peace and social transformation.

The belief that economic liberalism promotes peace is hardly new; indeed the idea has a powerful intellectual heritage, with Montesquieu, Kant, Cobden and Angell amongst its most celebrated advocates. But since the 1980s, it has been espoused with renewed vigour – as a plethora of policymakers and intellectuals have sought to examine, and by and large argue for, neo-liberal economic reforms. Economic liberalisation, it is argued, reduces barriers to the movement of goods and capital, increases levels of international trade and investment, deepens global interdependencies and, in turn, inspires a transformation of state and societal interests away from war towards commerce and peace. According to such arguments, there is a clear positive correlation between economic integration and peaceful inter-state relations. The existence of such a correlation is a well-established ‘common-sense’ within both academic (Russett and Oneal, 2001) and popular (Friedman, 2005: 515–39) liberal discourse. The moral seems abundantly clear: if states want sustainable peace, one crucial way for them to bring this about is by liberalising their economies and entering into the spirit of globalisation.
If this applies primarily at a global level, a second strand of liberal thinking – functionalism – is explicitly regional in emphasis. According to functionalists, regional cooperation on relatively insignificant ‘low political’ issues can create patterns of mutual interest and trust which will eventually ‘spill over’ into the ‘high political’ arena, nurturing both bilateral peace settlements and regional economic and political integration. It was just such a process, functionalists contend, which facilitated the emergence, growth and consolidation of the European Union out of those small seeds planted, in the early 1950s, by the European Coal and Steel Community (Haas, 1964; Mitrany, 1975). By the same token, it is argued, inter- and intra-state peace processes are best supported by broader processes of regional cooperation and integration – in places as disparate as the Middle East, South Asia and Northern Ireland. Thus during the early 1990s, the Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres argued, in clearly functionalist terms, that the challenge was to construct a ‘new Middle East’, in which mutually reinforcing processes of democratisation, domestic political stabilisation, and regional economic and security cooperation would eventually effect regional political integration and sustainable bilateral peace settlements (Peres, 1993). Many other Israeli and international experts argued along similar lines, emphasising in particular the pacific effects of regional economic cooperation (Carkoğlu et al., 1998; Fishelson, 1989; Fisher et al., 1993, 1994; Merhav, 1989). In turn, the framework of the Middle East peace process was structured not only around bilateral negotiations, but additionally around a multilateral track which focused on low-level and regional issues, and oversaw a series of annual regional economic summits (Peters, 1996). In the South Asian context, similarly, Pakistani and especially Indian elites and commentators regularly identify links between the consolidation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and their bilateral peace process, and often depict their planned Iran–Pakistan–India gas pipeline, like the European Coal and Steel Community 50 years earlier, as a potential catalyst to regional cooperation and peace (Dixit, 2005; Khosla, 2005). Finally, in the case of Northern Ireland, it has often been argued that European integration and the resultant economic and political transformation of Britain and Ireland, and of their relations, have been crucial contextual factors behind the peace process and the winding down of ‘the Troubles’ (Cox, 1998; Guelke, 1988; Meehan, 2000).

The third strand within mainstream liberal thought holds that, quite aside from the direct causal impacts of commercial interdependence, globalisation is engendering various new styles of politics and identity which indirectly support peacemaking. Globalisation is thought to result in a softening of state boundaries and, in more extreme versions of this thesis, to herald their wholesale disintegration in the face of rising global flows of goods, capital and people (Omae, 2002). It is also often associated with increasingly pluralised structures of governance, as power is dispersed away from the
sovereign state – moving both upwards to international organisations, and downwards to regional and local governments (Rosenau and Czempiel, 1992; Selby, 2003a). Finally, globalisation is also often said to inspire a decline in traditional state-centric national identities, to foster a concomitant upsurge in new forms of sub-national, ethnic and religious identities, and by contrast to stimulate the phenomenon of cosmopolitan post-nationalism (Habermas, 2001; Held, 1995). All of these supposed developments have been identified as having (or as being likely to have) profound effects upon peace processes. Thus in the South Asian context, analysts and political leaders alike have argued that the softening of state borders, courtesy of globalisation, provides an opportunity for resolution of the India–Pakistan–Kashmir dispute without the redrawing of state boundaries (Kumar, 2005). In the Middle East, Shimon Peres has argued that ‘borders are irrelevant’ within a global knowledge economy, and that this creates potential for the construction of a new Middle East and resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict (Peres, 2000). In the Northern Ireland context, the expansion of the EU and its federal systems of governance are said to have reduced the significance of the question of sovereignty, and thus created space for North–South cooperation: in a post-sovereign world, it is claimed, the question of whether Northern Ireland remains part of the UK or becomes part of a united Ireland is increasingly redundant. In places as different as Ireland and the Middle East, global economic integration, the withering of state power and increased levels of cross-cultural interaction (as a result of improved communications and transport, as well as the growing size and self-confidence of diasporas) are said to lead to a decline in parochial forms of established national identity and a concomitant rise in liberal, cosmopolitan and post-national understandings of selfhood – which in turn engender a reduced commitment to nationalist narratives and struggles (on Ireland, see Hume, 1988; Kearney, 1997; on Israel, see Ezrahi, 1997; Nimni, 2003).

In the fourth strand of most contemporary liberal thinking, poverty is viewed as an accomplice to conflict, and thus as a problem that needs to be addressed for security as well as development reasons. Thomas Friedman’s ‘Golden Arches theory of conflict resolution’ clearly illustrates the core assumptions: ‘when a country reaches the level of economic development where it has a middle class big enough to support a McDonald’s network, it becomes a McDonald’s country’, Friedman writes. ‘And people in McDonald’s countries don’t like to fight wars anymore, they prefer to wait in line for burgers’ (1999: 195). The middle class, so the argument goes, prioritise material prosperity and opportunity over war: they are an essentially peace-oriented class. The poor, by contrast, lack these opportunities, and are thus much more likely to be attracted by the lure of self-affirmation through violence: ‘poverty and distress’, as Peres writes of the Middle Eastern context, have given rise to ‘fanaticism, fundamentalism and false messianism’ (Peres, 1993: 45–6). This problem is deepened, according to liberal thinking, by the
fact that protracted violent conflicts have crushing economic repercussions – typically including reduced levels of domestic and international investment; the flight of local middle classes and their capital; increased unemployment and poverty; and the growing economic importance of conflict-related and criminal activity, which in turn empower local interests dependent upon the continuation of violence and disorder. War-torn societies find themselves trapped within a vicious cycle of poverty, desperation and violence; and thus the task of foreign governments and international organisations is to help reverse these vicious dynamics into more virtuous ones, in which economic growth and stability will promote peace, and growing political stability will in turn provide the necessary foundation for ever-more sustainable economic growth. The existence of such powerful linkages between development, peace and security is now an unquestioned orthodoxy within international development and post-conflict reconstruction thinking (DFID, 2005; NORAD, 2004; SIDA, 2005; also Duffield, 2001). Indeed, together with the goal of creating functioning political institutions, the ambition of creating the foundations for sustainable economic development, and thereby peace, is the central stated aim of the contemporary liberal peacebuilding agenda.

The fifth and final strand of mainstream liberal thinking assumes that business actors are a powerful and essentially positive constituency for peace. Increased foreign and domestic private sector investment is vital, it is assumed, for societies emerging from conflict, helping those societies to reap the material rewards of peace, as well as to strengthen constituencies opposed to a return to war. Business ties are also viewed as crucial to functionalist ‘spill-over’, since business interactions are amongst those low-level forms of cooperation which slowly help to consolidate shared interests and understanding between erstwhile enemies. Finally, business actors’ standard combination of high influence and (formal) political non-partisanship is such that they can often play, it is claimed, defining roles in formal and back-channel peace negotiations. As the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy has declared, typifying this orthodoxy, the ‘business community has a great deal to contribute to any peace process’, there being ‘a natural partnership between business and peacebuilding’ (IMTD, 1998; see also International Alert, 2006; Nelson, 2000; Wenger and Mockli, 2003). Or as Peres said at the 2007 World Economic Forum, during a ‘feel-good’ session on prospects for the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, ‘the snow of Davos’ is no less than ‘the hope for the future’ (Peres, 2007).

Such is the liberal orthodoxy on the political economy of peace processes – a series of interrelated claims which are so widely accepted, and treated as so compellingly commonsensical within global political discourse – that they are almost beyond the reach of questioning. But question them we must, for this liberal orthodoxy is almost entirely mistaken.
The contradictions of globalisation

To start with, the liberal model of the nexus between peace and globalisation begins from the premise that economic liberalisation and globalisation create interdependencies which in turn help to forge ties of trust, interest and peace, both globally and across conflict regions. There are at least four major flaws in this model.

First, it is far from clear that there is indeed a positive relationship between commerce or economic openness on the one hand and peace or peace processes on the other. Among the world’s most economically open and most globally penetrated societies are many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America which are persistently home to civil and cross-border violence (Chossudovsky, 1997; Chua, 2004). At the other end of the economic spectrum, Great Britain during the nineteenth century and the United States during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have not only been the leading advocates of liberal free trade, but also the leading exponents and practitioners of war (Blum, 2006: 162–220; Carr, 1946). Close US–German economic relations during the 1930s and 1940s did little to build ties of trust and interest between the two rising hegemonic powers. Equally, the United States was the primary purchaser of Iraqi oil throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, but this hardly seems to have moderated US policy towards it. And if we consider peace processes specifically, the picture is no clearer. Peace processes have in some cases roughly coincided with periods of neo-liberal economic transformation: the Arab–Israeli peace processes of the mid-1990s followed hot on the heels of the liberalisation of Israel’s capital markets (Nitzan and Bichler, 2002; Shafir and Peled, 2002), while the Northern Ireland process was likewise narrowly predated by the flood of largely US foreign investment into the Irish Republic (O’Hearn, 2001). And yet, the most startling period of liberalisation in Israel, during 2001 to 2003, coincided with heightened Israeli repression in the West Bank and Gaza and the effective cessation of the entire Arab–Israeli peace process (Peled, 2004). Similarly, Columbia and Sri Lanka have amongst the most open economies in Latin America and South Asia respectively, but neither have managed to successfully prosecute peace processes (Embuldeniya, 2003; Richani, 2002). Perhaps the best that can be said is that there is abundant counter-evidence to the liberal equation of commerce and peace.

A second problem with liberal discourse on the peace–globalisation nexus is that it is largely silent on questions of economic inequality and unevenness, and their political implications. For even if we accepted that there is indeed a generally positive relationship between commerce and peace, it would not necessarily follow that globalisation or liberalisation are inherently pacific – for the simple reason that global production, trade, investment and wealth are so unevenly distributed. Manufacturing remains heavily concentrated within Western Europe, North America and now also East Asia – the
rise of the last being in many ways code for globalisation. Over 75 per cent of world trade and foreign direct investment are within or between this triad of developed capitalist regions. International income and wealth inequalities are as never before, having risen steeply since the early 1990s (Nederveen Pieterse, 2002; Wade, 2004). Moreover, this highly uneven pattern becomes more striking still when one also considers the growing internal differentiation of societies and economies, especially within the post-colonial South – the growing divides between regions, between urban and rural areas, and between social classes that are the products both of economic development and of the limited capacity of state authorities, informed by neo-liberal ideas, to seriously pursue strategies of regional or social redistribution. The significance of these growing global and internal inequalities is twofold. Not only are they often a direct or indirect source of violent conflict – as in Colombia, where reduced tariffs on agricultural imports in the early 1990s led to a crisis in the small farming sector, to increased coca production, and to violent class-based conflict over its spoils (Richani, 2002); or in Indian-administered Kashmir, where the corrupt local political elite are fiscally dependent upon the Indian state, and opposed on both economic and political grounds by the majority populace of the Kashmir Valley (Bose, 2005). In addition, the unevenness of the contemporary global order is such that it is arguably characterised more by dependency than by interdependency. In the admittedly extreme case of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, for instance, the Palestinians are dependent on Israel for most foodstuffs and manufactured goods, as well as for revenue collection; while for their part, Israel is dependent upon the Palestinians for next to nothing (West Bank and Gaza Palestinians used to constitute an important pool of cheap labour for the growing Israeli economy, but now Eastern European and Asian workers perform this function instead). Mainstream liberal thinking has it that interdependencies breed mutual trust, understanding and interests in peace. In contexts of structured economic subordination and dependency, however, this model can hardly apply.

Third, and most importantly, there is a striking contradiction between globalisation and the functionalist dream of peace through regional integration. There are good grounds for doubting whether liberal functionalist reasoning has ever had much value: even in the European case, integration was always a ‘high political’ project, led by France, facilitated by the occupation of Germany, within the permissive contexts both of the Cold War and of the internally homogeneous European nation-states produced through war-time genocides and post-war displacements (Judt, 2005). But if that was the case in the 1950s, then a half century later the project of peace through functional integration is even more transparently fantastic. In present-day India, for instance, while political and business leaders repeatedly emphasise in their public discourse the potential for SAARC to provide a regional context for bilateral peacemaking, the reality behind the rhetoric is actually
quite different. For, quite understandably, Mumbai’s or Bangalore’s business elites are much more excited by the prospects for enhanced production, trade, and investment ties with the United States, Europe, and East Asia, than they are by the negligible benefits to be had from any rapprochement with Pakistan. In any case, while it is true that the India–Pakistan conflict prevents all but minor levels of official bilateral trade and investment, political restrictions are easily circumvented in a variety of ways: thus the Indian company Tata sells its tea in Pakistan under the name of its subsidiary, Tetley, while Indian goods destined for Pakistan are routinely shipped via, and relabelled in, Dubai (Khan, 2005). For their part, Delhi’s foreign policy elites are much more preoccupied with India’s place on the global stage than they are with the question of India’s difficult regional relations (a May 2006 speech by India’s foreign minister on India’s place in the world failed to even mention Pakistan – see Saran, 2006). India’s interest in regional integration is, in sum, fairly shallow. Similarly in the context of the Middle East peace process, while throughout the early and mid-1990s Israeli politicians and analysts spoke enthusiastically of the opportunities for regional integration and its potential ‘spill-over’ effects, the major opportunities for Israeli capital lay elsewhere. The central problem facing the Israeli corporate sector during the early 1990s was that diplomatic isolation and the secondary Arab economic boycott posed profound obstacles to the country’s global penetration, making it more difficult for Israeli businesses to enter emerging markets in South and East Asia, or to attract investment from, and into, joint ventures with European and North American companies. Addressing this situation became a priority for Israeli business leaders, and the Oslo peace process was launched in part for this reason. Crucially, however, Israeli political and business leaders were only marginally concerned with the benefits to be had from regional economic integration: there were opportunities to be had from US-supported export processing zones in Jordan and Egypt, to be sure, but the Middle East was just too small and too heavily penetrated a market to be of any great economic significance to Israeli businesses. Much more enticing were the opportunities afforded by China, Japan, India, Europe, and North America (Ben-Porat, 2005; Bouillon, 2004; Moore, 2003; Peled, 2004; Shafir and Peled, 2002). For, as both of these examples suggest, economic and political elites in the global South are generally more interested in expanding North–South ties than they are in consolidating intra-regional ones – which effectively means that there is little concrete support for the project of peace through regional integration.

Finally, it is simply not the case that globalisation is reducing the significance of borders and sovereignty, and thereby territorial disputes. For, counter-intuitively perhaps, the development of capitalism has been characterised by a social – and also spatial – differentiation of the political and economic spheres, in which political sovereignty and boundaries become more precisely defined and regulated at one and the same time that these
boundaries are ever more routinely transgressed (Rosenberg, 1994, 2000). Absolute sovereignty and free trade developed together, as products and defining features of capitalist modernity, and not in opposition to one another; and equally since 1980, the increased global flows of capital and bodies that are the hallmarks of globalisation have been paralleled by a proliferation of new forms of border control, regulation and surveillance. At the extreme, the result has been the construction of towering militarised walls and electrified fences – along the US–Mexican border; around Spain’s north African enclaves of Cueta and Melilla; between Indian- and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir; and most notoriously around and inside the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Davis, 2005). Such fortifications do not simply arise out of the failure of peacemaking: India’s fencing of Kashmir occurred concurrently with its dialogue with Pakistan, and with its espousal of a ‘soft borders’ approach to the resolution of the Kashmir dispute, while the Oslo peace process was marked from its inception by an ever-tightening physical and bureaucratic ‘matrix of control’ of the Palestinians (Halper, 2005). Contrary to Peres’s claim that a global knowledge economy is rendering borders irrelevant, the depth of contemporary conflicts and inequalities is such that – at least where states are capable of constructing and enforcing them – borders and barriers are more relevant than ever.

In view of this, the relationship between globalisation and peace processes needs radical rethinking in two ways. First, ontologically, economic liberalisation and increased global commerce do not necessarily help and may indeed hinder peace processes – because they are also paralleled by increased global and civil inequalities; because, in the global South at least, they impede regional integration; because they have been accompanied by the tightening rather than withering of borders and state sovereignty; and because, in any case, the liberal equation of commerce and peace is very much open to doubt. But second, discursively, both ‘globalisation’ and ‘peace processes’ need to be understood as narrative constructs which, to borrow from Robert Cox, are ‘always for someone and for some purpose’ (Cox, 1981). The discourse of ‘globalisation’ depicts a world in the liberal image, and through so doing can serve a whole range of functions (Cameron and Palan, 2004); more specifically, the argument that peacemaking is facilitated or rendered inevitable by globalisation, voiced so often by Peres and others, is less a statement of fact than a rhetorical positioning of peace processes on the right side of history. Equally, the discourse of ‘peace processes’ allows their participants to claim a commitment to the process of peacemaking, and reap great benefits in return, without necessarily having to make any substantive sacrifices – it allows their participants ‘to have their cake and eat it too’. The consequences can be profound. By participating in that discursive construct called ‘the Oslo peace process’ during the early 1990s, Israel managed to transform itself into a dynamic high-tech globalised economy, without having to make any final status compromises with the Palestinians. Equally,
Pakistan’s and India’s participation in an even more fictitious ‘peace process’ since 2003 garnered them a degree of international space and legitimacy, without requiring them to make any progress on core issues – which, as a result, they have not. As both these cases illustrate, ‘peace processes’ are a means by which states can re-brand themselves in the hope of improving their position and competitive edge within the global political economy. Instead, then, of globalisation furthering peace, it may be more accurate to say that peace processes and the appearance of peace are amongst the competitive strategies of neo-liberalising states and societies in an era of global capital (Selby, 2007).

Poverty, development and peace

So much for the liberal orthodoxy on globalisation and peace, but what of its parallel claims regarding the pacific impacts of economic development? The problems here are at least twofold.

First, contemporary liberal thinking is erroneously idealistic about the relationship between violence and development. To recall, the current orthodoxy has it that violence is an impediment to development, with severe economic consequences, and thus that the task of peacebuilding and peace processes is to transform vicious cycles of poverty and violence into virtuous ones of prosperity and peace. If only matters were so straightforward. For historically, large-scale violence has been a universal and arguably therefore necessary feature of the transition to capitalist modernity; and in the contemporary developing world, violence has been a commonplace effect and expression of those conflicts over patterns of accumulation resulting from development (e.g., Cramer, 2006; Moore, 1967). Not only that, but as the experiences of successful late- and late-late-developing societies in Europe and East Asia suggest, state power, coercion and the ensuing legitimacy offer crucial comparative developmental advantages – with internal state violence facilitating the swift destruction of traditional social structures, and geopolitical conflict and nationalism increasing the hegemonic power of development elites (e.g., Kohli, 2004; Weiss and Hobson, 1995; Woo-Cummings, 1999). Equally, in contemporary conflict zones there is plentiful evidence that violence and crisis can bring economic advantages. This is not only in contexts such as Columbia, Afghanistan or Liberia, where conflict provides a potent environment for the rise of shadow or criminalised political economies; it applies in other ways too. Thus the development of Israel’s high-tech sector during the 1990s, for example, had its roots in the military industrial complex of the 1970s and IT training within particular units of the Israel Defense Forces (Levy, 1997). Equally, though very differently, Indian Jammu and Kashmir has become one of the more prosperous states in India largely on the back of federal government investment in the state – its funding of a huge security presence, plus its reconstruction programmes and annual payment of...
state debts – these all having been driven by political and security concerns (Habibullah, 2004). Protracted conflicts often give rise to the emergence of local political economies which, in their own terms or for certain social groups, are quite successful: in Indian Kashmir, Israeli West Bank settlements and also Northern Ireland, for instance, conflict has provided alibis for the maintenance of welfare state structures and spending that have elsewhere been largely abandoned. The usual liberal assumption, of course, is that peace ushers forth an era of peace dividends, and this may in some contexts be true; however, it is also the case that by challenging the political basis of (often quite successful) political economies of crisis, peace can be a threat to development (Cramer, 2006: 245). The benefit of peace processes in this regard is that they usually allow states to simultaneously accrue both economic peace dividends, and continued, even increased, international aid. For example, the Israeli–Egyptian peace process of the mid- and late 1970s saw both parties repeatedly demanding increased levels of military aid from the United States as a condition of accepting US proposals; equally, the Colombian peace process coincided with the start of the US Plan Colombia military intervention and aid programme – such are the contradictions of ‘peace processes’!

Second, contemporary liberal thinking is overly simplistic in its understanding of which social groups support, and which tend to oppose, peace processes. For poverty is not a necessary or trans-historical cause of violence, and middle classes and business communities are not inherently pacific in inclination. Of course, poverty and worsening economic conditions can in many cases be linked to violence, but equally there are numerous counterexamples of cases where violence erupts in the contexts of rapid economic growth and declining poverty (as with the onset of the second Palestinian intifada in 2000). Likewise, while middle-class expansion can in certain cases be associated with a turn away from violence (the transformation of Sinn Fein’s political strategy during the 1990s, for example, has often been linked with the expansion of Northern Ireland’s Catholic middle class – Bew et al., 2002), in other contexts this is far from being the case. In some contexts, middle classes are the main upholders and disseminators of nationalist consensus, fearful of challenging and straying too far from accepted norms; elsewhere, as for instance in contemporary India, middle classes have been at the forefront of support for religious-nationalist parties and violence; and indeed historically, middle classes have typically provided the main leadership for revolutionary political mobilisation. The connections between class change, conflict and peace are, then, historically variable, socially specific, and decidedly not amenable to trans-historical generalisation. As if to indicate this, within a year of Friedman coining his Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Resolution, of claiming that ‘no two countries that both had McDonald’s has fought a war against each other’, and of fretting that ‘Pakistan is still – dangerously – a Macfree zone’ (Friedman, 1999: 195) – Pakistan had not only attained a middle class large enough to support a
McDonald's network, but had also instigated a fourth war with India, over the heights of Kargil in the Himalayas.

Finally, similar doubts are in order about the learnings of business communities. Mainstream liberal discourse claims, to recall, that there is a natural partnership between business and peacemaking. And yet, business actors can gain in a plethora of ways from conflicts – from the opportunities they provide for illicit economic activity; from the markets they create for heightened defence and related spending; from increased inflation (which is typically uneven in its impact, allowing some actors or sectors to increase their economic power at the expense of others); and so on (Nitzan and Bichler, 2002). Moreover, corporate actors typically have a class agenda – an interest in minimising wages and limiting union activity which often leads them to ally with right-wing, nationalist and sectarian forces (see, for example, Foot, 1989, in relation to the development of sectarianism in Northern Ireland; and see also Chapter 8 of this volume). In the context of our highly mobile contemporary global economy, business people operating in conflict zones can readily relocate – this being a much easier option than entering the political fray and trying to contribute to peacemaking. Most importantly of all, corporate actors are for the most part heavily reliant upon state support and thus have a powerful interest in remaining comfortably within established nationalist consensuses. The fallacy of liberal political economy is that economic actors are properly autonomous from and opposed to the state – it being this that permits them to be a natural partner to peacemaking. The reality, of course, is very different. For instance, while Peres's overblown public rhetoric depicts ‘the snow of Davos’ as ‘the hope for the future’, the stubborn reality, as he himself has observed in interview, is that ‘the [Israeli] business community benefits more from its relations with government than from peace’ (Barsella, 2004: 30). As in Israel, so too elsewhere: business is not a natural partner to peace processes.

Conclusion

In mainstream liberal thinking, economic development and globalisation are viewed as essentially pro-peace, and as pro-peace processes. This view is mistaken, first of all, because the contemporary global capitalist order does not conform to liberal ideals: corporate sectors are dependent upon states, not autonomous from them; middle classes and business communities are not inherently pacific; the global political economy is starkly and increasingly divided, including between a rich core and a subordinate periphery; and dreams of regional integration are for the most part obstructed by global inequality, opportunity and mobility. Given these and related shortcomings of liberal thinking, on balance it would be fairer to say that contemporary patterns of economic development and globalisation are impediments to peace. In addition, the liberal reasoning is mistaken because, in an ironic
mirroring of classical Marxism, it is both reductionist and essentialist in its portrayal of the impacts of economic change upon patterns of war and peace – assuming that economic change determines political transformation, and that the direction of these transformations is historically and socially fixed. For while contemporary patterns of development and globalisation may (or may not) be on the whole conducive to peacemaking, the question of how these patterns play out in different contexts is a socially and historically specific one – for the simple reason that the distinct, though combined, developmental trajectories of different societies make them by and large impervious to trans-historical generalisation.

Finally, mainstream conflict resolution and peacebuilding discourse is mistakenly naive about ‘peace processes’. It is commonly assumed that peace processes involve a natural process of working towards peace, and therefore that liberal claims about the relations between economic change and peace apply with equal force to peace processes. However, peace processes are, as indicated above, historically novel phenomena, not natural or trans-historical ones; they are phenomena, moreover, which can quite readily provide breeding grounds for the entire gamut of regressive political developments. The militarisation of Israel and Egypt, the fencing of Kashmir, the creation of a ludicrously fragmented Palestinian Authority, Plan Columbia, the end of the Arab boycott without the agreement of any final peace, and much more besides, are all the products of peace processes. Peace processes, we might well say, involve simulations of peace (Selby, 2003b, 2003c, 2007). In view of this, it is not only the liberal political economy of peace processes, but also peace processes themselves that are in need of further critique.

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