

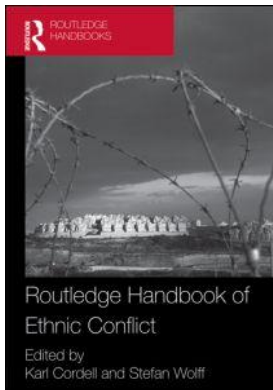
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17 Post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies

Monika Heupel

Post-conflict reconstruction first appeared on the agenda of the United Nations and multilateral development agencies in the early and mid-1990s. With the end of the Cold War, many proxy wars in developing countries came to an end and other conflicts in weak and failing states escalated, so that new strategies were needed to create the conditions for self-sustaining peace in post-conflict settings. In this context, the United Nations and other global and regional agencies exploited their new scope of action to devise reconstruction strategies and build up respective capacities. Over the years, commonly accepted principles and a ‘standard operating procedure’ (Ramsbotham 2000) developed that guided efforts at stabilising peace processes in the aftermath of armed conflict or war.

Two decades after the end of the Cold War, a rich body of research on post-conflict reconstruction has emerged. Earlier work predominantly concentrated on conceptualising the term post-conflict reconstruction and describing and debating what measures were and should be initiated within the scope of reconstruction endeavours (e.g. Kühne 1996). Later studies increasingly centred on exposing the flawed liberal bias of the ‘standard operating procedure’ of post-conflict reconstruction and suggesting alternative approaches (most notably Paris 2004). Within the research on post-conflict reconstruction, the question of ethnically divided societies holds particular significance. With the number of ethnic conflicts on the rise since the early 1990s (Wolff 2006) and ethnic conflicts being more difficult to settle and durably pacify than non-identity conflicts (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003), a great number of scholars engaged in debating what measures were most suitable to lay the foundations for stable peace in the aftermath of armed conflict or war in ethnically divided societies.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the state of the art of post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies. It describes the ‘standard operating procedure’ of post-conflict reconstruction (next section), reviews the main perspectives on post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies (second section) and presents the arguments of the critics of the conventional approach to post-conflict reconstruction (third section). The conclusion summarises the key points and marks out avenues for further research.

Post-conflict reconstruction

Post-conflict reconstruction – or post-conflict peace-building – is defined as ‘activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the

absence of war' (United Nations 2000: II.A). Reconstruction activities in the aftermath of armed conflict or war are usually divided into four fields of activity that address security-related, political, psychosocial and socioeconomic problems of post-conflict societies respectively. It is commonly assumed that progress in all four fields of activity is required to render post-conflict reconstruction effective (Hamre and Sullivan 2002). Also, progress in each field of activity is assumed to depend on progress in the other fields, with the provision of security frequently being considered the necessary precondition for progress in other fields (Schwarz 2005).¹

Security-related reconstruction refers to the (re-)transfer of the monopoly of force to the state. The build-up of the state monopoly of force normally involves the disarmament and demobilisation of private and parastatal combat units (Knight 2004; Ball 2001). In many cases, security-related reconstruction also requires security sector reform. A core element of security sector reform in post-conflict states is the integration of members of all relevant warring parties and societal groups into national security institutions. Other elements are the establishment of civilian control of the military and the police as well as the reduction of the military to providing external security (Bryden and Hänggi 2005; Pauwels 2000). Frequently, security-related reconstruction also involves the temporary deployment of multilateral peacekeeping forces that tend to be increasingly endowed with robust mandates. Peacekeeping forces can monitor and enforce cease-fire agreements and provide an environment that is secure enough to carry out other reconstruction efforts. Thus, they are meant to ease the security dilemma that is presumed to prevent or at least complicate peacetime co-operation among formerly opposing parties (Walter 1997, 1999; Feil 2002).

Political reconstruction refers to the promotion of the rule of law and to the (re-)building of democratic institutions in post-conflict societies. Oftentimes, political reconstruction first and foremost requires the composition of a constitution that embodies basic principles and norms as well as actionable rights (Samuels 2005). Rule of law promotion involves the establishment of a judicial system that is open to every citizen and shielded against political influence (Mani 1998; Carothers 1998). Democracy promotion is based on the assumption that stable democracies are less likely to become embroiled in internal armed conflict or war (Ellingsen and Gleditsch 1997). Democracy promotion usually draws upon a procedural and a substantive understanding of democracy. Thus, it aims to create formal democratic institutions and hold free and fair elections, as well as strengthen civil society organisations and foster acceptance of the values that underpin democratic orders (Barnes 2001; Ottaway 2003).

Psychosocial reconstruction refers to reconciliation both between civilians and former combatants and between different social groups. Given the high number of civilian casualties in many of today's armed conflicts and wars, psychological reconstruction is believed by many to be both highly relevant and particularly difficult (see Schnabel 2002; Bigombe et al. 2000). Truth commissions that provide a forum for perpetrators to acknowledge their wrongdoings and for victims to recount their stories and possibly forgive the perpetrators are believed to have the potential to facilitate reconciliation in the aftermath of armed conflict or war (Hayner 2002; Rotberg and Thompson 2000). Furthermore, tribunals such as the international tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda and the hybrid tribunals for Sierra Leone and Cambodia are assumed to make reconciliation possible through a decollectivisation of guilt (Meron 1999; Bassiouni 2002). More recent studies, however, increasingly question whether truth-telling mechanisms and war crimes tribunals really contribute to

reconciliation and point to counterproductive side effects (Mendeloff 2004; Graybill 2004).

Socioeconomic reconstruction, finally, refers to the improvement of the socioeconomic well-being of civilians and former combatants in post-conflict societies. In the immediate aftermath of armed conflict or war, the provision of humanitarian assistance often takes centre stage. It is also frequently necessary to clear land mines and (re-)build infrastructure to enable refugees and internally displaced persons to return to their homes and resume agricultural production or other economic activities (Black and Gent 2006; Chimni 2002). Assisting former combatants to (re-)integrate into civilian life and take up work that enables them to support themselves and their dependants is considered to be particularly important. That way, former combatants are assumed to have fewer incentives to take up arms again and more incentives to support the peace process (see Humphreys and Weinstein 2007). In the mid and long run, socioeconomic reconstruction aims at the creation of sustainable economic growth and the reduction of social inequality, acknowledging that low levels of development (Collier and Hoeffler 2004) and high levels of social inequality (Boyce 1996; Nafziger and Auvinen 2002) can be important sources of armed conflict and war. The ‘standard operating procedure’ in this regard is the introduction of a free market economy, normally with the help of macroeconomic structural adjustment programmes (Mendelson Forman 2002; Collier et al. 2008).

Post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies

Research on post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies forms part of the broader research on post-conflict reconstruction. It draws heavily on the insights of the long-standing research on the causes and dynamics of conflict in pluralistic societies as well as on broader theoretical insights of several disciplines. The growing interest in post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies after the end of the Cold War has been inspired by the rising number of ethnic conflicts and by a growing perception among scholars and policymakers that ethnic divisions replaced the ideological fault lines of the Cold War as the dominant factor of conflict.² Moreover, post-conflict reconstruction turned out to be more difficult after ethnic wars than after non-identity wars (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003; Doyle and Sambanis 2000), thus making research on the preconditions for successful reconstruction in ethnically divided societies all the more imperative. One can discern three main perspectives on post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies that each relate to a specific field of the above specified reconstruction activities: a (neo-)realist perspective underlines the importance of security-related measures; an institutionalist perspective points to the value of balanced political institutions; and a constructivist perspective highlights the significance of reducing the political salience of ethnic divisions.

Scholars in the (*neo-*)realist tradition argue that the concept of the security dilemma can be used to explain the behaviour of non-state actors in anarchical environments. Traditionally, the security dilemma concept describes a situation in which two states that do not wish to harm each other end up going to war against each other. The dilemma arises because the anarchical structure of the international system compels states to make worst case assumptions and rely on self-help strategies to increase their security, which in turn decreases the security of other states (Herz 1951). The same dilemma, the argument goes, occurs before the outbreak or in the aftermath of ethnic

conflicts if a state fails to provide security throughout its territory. Hence, ethnic groups can equally be caught up in a situation in which they cannot trust one another and thus feel compelled to introduce measures that decrease the security not only of other parties but eventually also their own security (Posen 1993; Roe 1999; Snyder and Jervis 1999).

The application of the security dilemma concept to ethnic conflicts prompts scholars in the neorealist tradition to make rather grim predictions for the success of many of the post-conflict reconstruction measures summarised above. However, they come to different conclusions on how to surmount the challenges posed by the security dilemma in post-conflict settings. Some argue that warring factions might sign a ceasefire or peace agreement but are unlikely to disarm and agree to power-sharing formulas if there are no credible guarantees that all factions will abide by the terms of the agreement. A necessary precondition for the success of post-conflict reconstruction is therefore the presence of peacekeeping forces that are prepared to enforce the agreement and can thus provide such guarantees (Walter 1997, 1999; Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Hampson 1996). By contrast, other scholars call for the geographic separation of ethnic groups. They claim that, due to the security dilemma, cross-ethnic political appeals are unlikely to resonate in the aftermath of armed conflict or war. Accordingly, they consider the creation of ethnic enclaves, with or without independent sovereignty, to be a suitable way to reduce both incentives and opportunities for armed conflict or war (Kaufmann 1996, 1998; Mearsheimer and Van Evera 1995).

Many scholars who draw on *institutionalist* insights assert that the establishment of consociational democracy facilitates post-conflict reconstruction of ethnically divided societies (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003). This is based on the assumption that the needs and interests of all relevant groups must be accommodated to prevent the recurrence of armed conflict or war in pluralistic societies. Therefore, it is crucial to develop power-sharing mechanisms and/or agree upon group autonomy rights to give all relevant groups the opportunity to participate in rule-making (see Lijphart 1977, 2004; Gurr 1993). Power sharing typically refers to centralised joint rule and consensus-based decision-making of all relevant (ethnic) groups in divided societies. A narrow conception corresponds to power-sharing provisions in the executive and legislative branch, such as all-party governments or the right of all parliamentary factions to veto decisions. A broader power-sharing conception refers to proportional representation of all relevant groups, not only in the executive and the legislature but also in the public administration, the judiciary and the security institutions (Lijphart 1977, 2004; Sisk 1996; Schneckener 2002; Hartzell and Hoddie 2003; Reynal-Querol 2002). Territorial group autonomy provisions imply the introduction of federal structures in divided societies with geographically concentrated (ethnic) groups. Non-territorial group autonomy provisions relate to the granting of minority rights, for instance related to religion, education and language, to (ethnic) groups that are not geographically concentrated (Coakley 1993; Ghai 2000).

Horowitz and Reilly also draw on institutionalist insights but arrive at different conclusions on how voting systems ought to be designed in ethnically divided societies to contribute to the prevention or re-escalation of violent conflict. According to them, power-sharing provisions that guarantee proportional representation of all relevant ethnic groups in decision-making are counterproductive in that they reinforce ethnic divisions and reward radical parties. Instead, they recommend alternative vote systems that require voters to rank candidates according to their preferences, thus encouraging parties to bid for support from different constituencies. Alternative vote systems

consequently reward moderate parties and facilitate coalition-building across ethnic divides (Horowitz 1993, 1991; Reilly 2001, 1997).³

Finally, scholars that draw on *constructivist* theory point to the social construction of ethnic identities and maintain that it is of particular importance to address the symbolic and emotional roots of ethnic conflicts to cultivate stable peace in post-conflict settings. Rational approaches, they argue, err in assuming that ethnic identities are fixed and cannot be transformed. Proposals such as the geographical separation of ethnically defined groups or the institutionalisation of power-sharing mechanisms and group autonomy rights are therefore flawed because they build on the faulty assumption of unchangeable ethnic identities. Moreover, such proposals hold risks in that they institutionalise ethnic cleavages in post-conflict societies (Kaufman 2006; Simonsen 2005). Consequently, rather than institutionalising ethnic divisions in post-conflict societies, steps should be taken to reduce the salience of such divisions and facilitate a redefinition of identities and attitudes (Long and Brecke 2003).

There are several propositions on how to facilitate identity-related and attitudinal changes in ethnically divided societies that emerge from armed conflict or war. Some scholars underline the potential of problem-solving workshops that bring together representatives of conflicting groups and social scientists to engage in informal communication (Kelman and Cohen 1976). Others consider truth and reconciliation commissions to be a promising tool to make identity-related and attitudinal changes possible (Kaufman 2006; Hayner 2002). Again others suggest promoting societal cleavages that cut across ethnic divisions in order to de-ethnicise politics and lay the foundation for multicultural democracy in post-conflict settings. According to this view, members of ethnic groups are supposed to become aware of the fact that they share interests with members of other ethnic groups if they define their identity and interests not only along ethnic but also along regional, gender, class and other lines. The long-term objective, eventually, is not the suppression of ethnic identities but the creation of an overarching national identity (Simonsen 2005; Kymlicka 1995).

'Liberal internationalism' and its critics

Throughout much of the 1990s, research on post-conflict reconstruction was primarily concerned with mapping out how specific reconstruction strategies could be designed to be effective and thus widely took a problem-solving approach. In the late 1990s, however, when more and more efforts at post-conflict reconstruction in homogeneous and ethnically divided societies alike faltered and failed (Tschirgi 2004), scholars increasingly challenged the appropriateness of the normative underpinnings of 'liberal internationalism' or the 'liberal peace', which are generally used to denote the 'standard operating procedure' of post-conflict reconstruction. In their view, post-conflict reconstruction was based on the assumption that the introduction of a Western-style democracy and a free-market economy would help states emerging from armed conflict or war to lay the groundwork for self-sustaining peace. Yet, while democracy and a free-market economy were indeed correlated with a low risk of violent conflict, political and economic liberalisation engendered competition and were therefore not qualified to stabilise countries that lacked reliable institutions for the peaceful management of conflicts in the immediate aftermath of violence. The disillusioning success rate of post-conflict reconstruction since the end of the Cold War can consequently, at least in part, be attributed to untimely liberalisation (Paris 2004, 2002, 1997; Richmond 2006; David 1999).

Some scholars endeavoured to flesh out why *premature democratisation* in post-conflict situations was risky. They showed that states undergoing a transformation from autocracy to democracy are more susceptible to armed conflict or war than stable autocracies or mature democracies. States in limbo between autocracy and democracy are considered to be particularly at risk because the process of democratisation enables societal groups to gather and voice their demands while the governing regime is frequently not yet in a position or willing to accommodate such demands (Ellingsen and Gleditsch 1997; Mousseau 2001; Paris 2004, 1997). The heightened vulnerability of democratising states to violent conflict also applies to states with ethnically divided societies. What is more, there are indications that the pacifying effect of maturing democracies is less pronounced in ethnically divided societies than in homogeneous societies (Mousseau 2001). The introduction of democracy in multi-ethnic societies, it is argued, is likely to stimulate political competition along ethnic lines, facilitate ethnic mobilisation and thus foment ethnic conflict. Especially premature elections are a gamble, given that ethnic groups often perceive elections as a zero-sum game and may resort to violent means if elections produce undesirable results (Snyder 2000; Horowitz 1994; Diamond et al. 1995; Huntington 1997; Zakaria 1997).⁴

Other scholars claim that the *hasty introduction of free market economies* in post-conflict societies is likewise risky. They assert that states that are about to introduce a free-market economy (and are at middle levels of development) are exposed to a higher risk of armed conflict or war than states that are less open to the world economy (or less developed) or that are already well integrated into the world economy (or highly developed). The causal explanation of this relation is that the introduction of a free-market economy, often guided by externally imposed neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes, and integration into the global economy, give rise to social inequality in war-shattered societies and create losers that may resort to violent means to assert themselves (Bussmann and Schneider 2007; Mousseau 2001; Cooper 2005; Paris 1997). As in the relation between the degree of democratisation and the risk of violent conflict, the relation between economic openness (and development) and the risk of violent conflict equally applies to ethnically divided societies. Processes of economic development create more issues that societal groups can compete for and thus heighten the risk of group conflicts (Horowitz 1985; Mousseau 2001), especially as long as post-conflict states have yet to institutionalise social safety nets. Moreover, horizontal inequality between ethnic groups renders societies more prone to armed conflict or war, as it produces grievances that can be used by 'ethnic entrepreneurs' to mobilise followers along ethnic lines (Humphreys 2003; Stewart 2002; Gurr and Moore 1997; Chua 2003).

In light of the negative side effects of precipitate political and economic liberalisation, many critics of the conventional approach to post-conflict reconstruction call for what has become known as 'strategic liberalisation' (Paris 1997). Proponents of 'strategic liberalisation' share the normative underpinnings of 'liberal internationalism' but argue for a gradual and controlled implementation of its ambitious agenda and, as a consequence, long-term commitment by external actors. Instead of focusing on holding (premature) elections, they emphasise constitution-building and recommend delaying elections until disarmament and demobilisation efforts have made progress, civil society organisations whose agendas cut across dominant cleavage lines have developed, and electoral systems have been crafted with mechanisms that reward moderate parties (Paris 1997, 2004; Zakaria 1997). To absorb the negative side effects of economic

liberalisation in fragile post-conflict situations, proponents of ‘strategic liberalisation’ suggest adjustment policies that avoid economic shocks and allocate resources to those who are negatively affected by adjustment programmes (Paris 1997, 2004). Other critics of the ‘liberal internationalist’ approach to post-conflict reconstruction question whether external actors have the right and the ability to engage in far-reaching social engineering in post-conflict societies (Chandler 2006). Rather, they demand that local actors have a greater stake in deciding the constitutional foundations of the political system and the parameters of the approach to peace-building (Chandler 2006; Richmond and Franks 2007).

Conclusion

The body of research on post-conflict reconstruction in general and on reconstruction in ethnically divided societies has grown substantially during the past two decades. Until the late 1990s, most studies followed a ‘problem-solving’ approach and concentrated on spelling out what specific reconstruction strategies proved effective. Over the years, more and more scholars focused on the normative underpinnings of the ‘standard operating procedure’ of post-conflict reconstruction and the flaws of their execution. At the same time, a field of research that specifically dealt with post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies developed and generated insights that enriched the broader debate on post-conflict reconstruction in general.

To further enhance our understanding of the determinants of effective post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies, future research should first and foremost strive to overcome some of the divides that separate the different perspectives on reconstruction from each other. First, proponents of the conventional ‘liberal internationalist’ approach to post-conflict reconstruction and proponents of ‘strategic liberalisation’ should engage more seriously with each other and spell out more clearly under which conditions individual approaches prove most promising. Second, scholars that draw on different theoretical insights to account for the effectiveness of post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies should likewise make greater efforts to pool their findings. While it is true that some of the measures put forward by the different approaches countervail one another, it is worthwhile to examine more closely which measures can be combined under particular circumstances. Research on post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies has come a long way and has produced theoretically interesting and practically relevant insights. Yet, bringing together insights from different normative and theoretical perspectives will certainly expand our understanding of what makes post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies work.

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Notes

- 1 For comprehensive overviews of the fields of activity of post-conflict reconstruction see Jeong (2005), Junne and Verkoren (2005) and Cousens and Kumar (2000).
- 2 Since the late 1990s, however, research commissioned by the World Bank and the debate on the emergence of so-called ‘new wars’ has shifted the attention to ‘greed’ and ‘opportunity’ as

factors giving rise to armed conflict and war rather than grievances related to ethnic divisions (e.g. Collier and Hoeffler, 2004).

3 For a criticism of the alternative vote system see Fraenkel and Grofman (2006).

4 For an opposing view see Saideman et al. (2002), who maintain that younger democracies are less vulnerable to ethnic conflict than is commonly assumed.

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