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Book Review

Richmond, Oliver P. 2007 (hardback edition 2005). The Transformation of Peace. Series Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies. xiii + 286 pp. ISBN 978-0-230-55407-8 (pb). Price £18.99 (pb).

by Bjørn Møller (4 April 2008)

In the introductory chapter the author provides an account of conceptualizations of peace found in the literature (but featuring surprisingly few works given the number of books written about war). Most of the book, however, is devoted to a critique of the so-called liberal peace.

Richmond starts by tracing the origins of liberal peace not to Immanuel Kant (as is customary) but back to St. Augustine, Hobbes, and Locke. This is followed by a brief account of thinkers such as John Stuart Mill and the attempts at building a stable peace, for example, through the post-WW I Treaty of Versailles, inspired by Wilsonian liberalism. In this connection, he also touches upon Keynes who basically agreed with these attempts, but warned against the exclusive attribution of guilt to Germany and the subsequent demands for reparations, which proved counter-productive by inadvertently paving the way for the Nazi regime and, *ipso facto*, WW II. Then comes an account of more successful post-WW II peacebuilding attempts, based on institutionalization, interdependence, and integration. The entire account only takes around thirty pages, but nevertheless seems surprisingly exhaustive of the topic.

Following an equally concise account of the Cold War and the immediate post-Cold War period, featuring approaches such as *détente*, peace-through-hegemony, and collective security, the remainder of the book is devoted to more recent Western attempts to create and maintain order in the Third World. Based on what Richmond calls the “peace-building consensus” which emerged gradually through the trial-and-error evolution of increasingly complex and intrusive U.N. peacekeeping missions, these are viewed as “part of a nascent form of global governance where conflict zones provide interveners with the opportunity to construct a liberal peace,” underpinned by a Foucaultian “regime of truth about peace” (pp. 96, 113).

The second half of the book is devoted to a critical account of how this consensus is transformed into practice, and subdivided into peacebuilding from below and from above. In the first category, the increasingly prominent role played by NGOs is addressed. NGOs are categorized into authentic NGOs and QUANGOs and DONGOs (quasi NGOs and donor-created NGOs). In the latter category we find problematic phenomena such as neocolonialism, where U.N. forces, effectively controlled by the West, use illiberal means to forcefully create a liberal order from above. Worse, such “savage wars of peace” may get stuck: “The unspoken bargain is that governance will be devolved to local inhabitants once a sustainable outcome can be expected. But this might never happen. Thus, the peacebuilding consensus might lead to permanent ‘peace-as-governance’ ” (p. 178). Well written and meticulously referenced, the book is suitable both for practitioners and for university classes at all levels.

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