States: a solution to conflict or a product of it? A critical analysis of how statebuilders represent violent conflict

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Introduction

Like a variety of international activities which purport to spread peace, statebuilding – 'the creation of new government institutions and strengthening existing ones' – has greatly expanded since the end of the Cold War (Fukuyama, 2004:ix). Many non-western countries have been or continue to be the subject of these initiatives which are generally led by international organisations (the United Nations and the World Bank most prominently) and western states. Proponents of statebuilding and policymakers or 'statebuilders' themselves claim that statebuilding is a solution to a multitude of issues in 'fragile' or 'failing' states, such as civil conflict, economic development, poverty, organised crime, corruption, mass migration, and terrorism (Rotberg, 2002).

Violent civil conflict is the most serious and widespread problem which statebuilding is regularly employed to tackle: it aims to 'help prevent, transform, and resolve conflicts' (Branch, 2011:39). But, as Carol Bacchi (2009) has pointed out, policies construct 'problems' in certain ways which promote specific 'solutions' in response. It is therefore important to reflect on how policymakers understand and talk about this problem of conflict, and the relationship between conflict and states. By critically analysing statebuilding policy documents, I will argue that statebuilders represent conflict as destructive of states and forms of political order and governance. This is a dramatic departure from a large body of academic work on domestic state formation which conceives that conflict can, and may even be necessary to, *produce* states. Yet, the particular narrative offered by statebuilders serves a vital purpose: it legitimises their statebuilding interventions.

In order to make this conceptual argument, the following proceeds in five key steps. The first section introduces statebuilding, the relevant literature, and the methodology of this thesis. Second, statebuilding policy documents since the end of the Cold War are examined in relation to how they represent violent conflict and states. The third turns to a body of academic work which I will call the 'domestic state formation literature', which offers competing conceptions of the relationship between conflict and states. The purpose here is not to side with either argument but, fourthly, to expose and draw out their major divergences. The final section attempts to make sense of statebuilders' narratives about

conflict, and explores their effects on policy: they help legitimise the norm and practice of international statebuilding.

I. Literature Review and Methodology

The broad idea of statebuilding as externally led efforts to construct or reconstruct certain types of political institutions was not new to the 1990s. It has a long history; the most notable projects include states created by European colonisers, Germany and Japan after 1945, and Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s (Gawthorpe, 2016). Statebuilding since end of the Cold War has been situated within the major expansion of global governance which, due to the reduced threat of interstate war, directed great attention to threats emanating from intrastate or so-called 'new' wars (Kaldor, 1999). Much has been written about how the United Nations, other international organisations, and western states found a new role in the world that professed the importance of keeping and building peace around the world (Curtis, 2013).

The emerging era of cooperation in this sphere was formally marked by the 1992 *An Agenda for Peace*, which called for action among states, international and regional organisations to promote peace. Alongside reaffirming the importance of 'preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping', the concept of peacebuilding is introduced (UN, 1992: para.5). This is defined as a post-conflict endeavour to 'identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict' (UN, 1992: para.21).

As Curtis points out (2013:81), practitioners and scholars have normally understood statebuilding as one form of peacebuilding. After wars end, international actors have indeed aimed to 'consolidate or institutionalize peace' by creating functional, legitimate states with inclusive and non-violent political systems (Call, 2008:5). The model of 'the state' is drawn from western models and Weberian ideas: a state which successfully claims a legitimate monopoly of violence (Weber, 1994[1919]:310) can thereby maintain order and peace in its territory, and effectively fulfil the varied functions and services of modern states.

However, statebuilding is not *solely* a post-conflict activity occurring after wars such as in East Timor and Bosnia. In fact, such practices have been used in 'wide spectrum of developing countries, both in war and peace' (Bickerton, 2007:93). Statebuilding initiatives have been employed in countries with ongoing large-scale conflict, such as Somalia and Afghanistan. On the other hand, it has also been tied-on to military or peacekeeping

interventions. Iraq is one such case, as multilateral statebuilding followed military invasion that saw the fall of Saddam Hussein. Libya, at the time of writing, is the recipient of major international efforts to form effective and legitimate systems of government, which followed the 2011 NATO intervention under the Responsibility to Protect doctrine.

Statebuilding is therefore a policy that can have multiple and often overlapping aims: to recover from past conflict, resolve and transform ongoing conflicts, and prevent a return to violence in the future (Branch, 2011:26). In doing so, it also can denote a range of activities surrounding the construction of legitimate and capable states, including, as Chandler points out (2010:1) a wide variety of initiatives which encourage 'good governance'.

Academic scholarship on the subject of statebuilding has expanded in line with the rising prominence of the practice at both national and international levels of governance. Now extensive, the scholarly literature generally divides along Cox's (1981) distinction between problem-solving and critical approaches. The former kind 'takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organised, as the given framework for action' (Cox, 1981:128). Problem-solving works on statebuilding subscribe to the liberal peace paradigm – that democracy and capitalism together promote peaceful states – and therefore also to the premise that weak states require international intervention to help reconstruction in order to achieve well functioning, stable, peaceful states (Kumar, 1997; Fukuyama, 2004; Krasner, 2004; Chesterman et al., 2005; Paris and Sisk, 2009; Call and Wyeth, 2008; Miller, 2013). Writers intend to make existing structures and policy practices more effective. Therefore, criticism here may well be attuned to the 'dilemmas' (Paris and Sisk, 2009) or 'paradoxes' (Zaum, 2007) of statebuilding but will remain within the liberal peace consensus and may offer policy recommendations.

Problem-solving approaches 'in which attention has been largely placed on technical and administrative problems of policy-making' indeed constitute the majority of scholarly work on statebuilding (Chandler, 2010:3), but critical approaches are also well-established. These aim to call into question 'social and power relations' by 'standing apart from the prevailing order of the world and asking how that order came about' (Cox, 1981:129). Critical scholars examine statebuilding discourses, assumptions, ideas, concepts, and

practices, while being attentive to the global and historical dimensions of power. This thesis falls under the banner of critical approaches, as it examines the conceptions statebuilders hold, and the narratives they promote about violent civil conflict and its connection to states. Before describing my approach and contribution in more detail, it is worth briefly expanding on existing critical work.

Power dynamics are one main point of critique for these approaches. Stemming from Cox's (1981:128) contention that 'theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose' many scholars have questioned how statebuilding practices and discourse serve certain global power relations. Analysis focuses on the ways in which statebuilding discourses naturalise and its practices secure the nation-state system based around the UN, and the global governance framework that surrounds it (Berger and Weber, 2006; Chandler, 2010; Milliken and Krause, 2002). Terms such as 'postmodern imperialism' (Fearon and Laitin, 2004), and 'empire in denial' (Chandler, 2006) have been used to critique the self-interested and somewhat hegemonic intentions behind seemingly altruistic post-conflict reconstruction. In a similar vein, the dominance of neoliberal ideas in statebuilding has received significant criticism. Moore (2000), Guttal (2005), and Howarth (2014), for instance, expose how neoliberal reforms are pushed on reconstructed countries, thereby shaping states to serve global free markets.

A second core focus of critical works is statebuilding discourses: the policy framework and the ideas, norms, values and concepts it promotes. Sovereignty is one such frequently debated concept. Bickerton (2007) not only makes the bold and convincing empirical case that statebuilding fails to promote sovereignty, he also makes the conceptual argument that statebuilding policy is in fact premised on a radical critique of liberal notions of sovereignty, as it denies others' capacity for self-rule, and considers external regulation necessary. For Bickerton (2007:93), this causes its ultimate failure, because by 'removing popular will from the process of political creation… [it] produces hollow institutions with shallow roots'. In a more recent book, Chandler (2010) expands this conceptual reflection on whether statebuilding is truly liberal. It is not so much guided by liberal values, he concludes, but is a post-liberal critique of classical liberal ideas of rights, law, politics, democracy and sovereignty, where these ideas are 'inverted and transformed' (2010:4).

Rather than taking for granted the ideas, conceptions, norms and values in statebuilding practices and discourses, critical approaches questions them. They have therefore been framed around the notion that ideas and power are connected, often in complex ways. It interrogates how they hold together, what power dynamics they indicate and serve, and what their effects are in terms of shaping 'real-world' deployment of statebuilding policies.

One avenue of critical analysis, however, has been under-appreciated. Existing critical work has examined the statebuilding policy framework largely in terms of what it *does* or aims to *do.* This is to focus what actions or 'solutions' policies promote. In contrast, this thesis aims to take a step back by reflecting on the 'problems' that statebuilders claim to tackle in the first instance. In particular, I examine how statebuilding policymakers, in states and international organisations, have understood these 'problems'. This pursuit is fuelled by Carol Bacchi's (2009) general method of policy analysis, which asks 'what is the problem represented to be?' This approach is grounded in post-structuralist theory, with the core contention that problems are not pre-given. They do not simply 'exist', but are social constructions. Events or situations are interpreted, theorised and considered 'problems' by policymakers and academics (Bacchi, 2009:xi).

Applying this method to statebuilding, we must begin with the contention that statebuilders do not simply respond to the world 'as it is'. By posing and constructing 'problems' in certain ways, they promote specific policies in response. Thus, employing Bacchi's (2009) approach, the key questions on which this thesis is centred are: What are the problems which statebuilders are concerned with and believe can be solved through statebuilding? How do they understand and represent these problems in their policies? What are the effects of these representations? Rather than taking these representations for granted, are they contestable?

To be sure, Chandler (2010) does formulate a similar approach (albeit without explicitly drawing on Bacchi). He describes statebuilding as a 'paradigm' (2010:8): a way of understanding the world and engaging with it. Indeed he (2010:10) asks 'how do international statebuilders understand the world?' and 'how are different problems constructed or understood'? Chandler focuses on how statebuilders narrate the conceptual problems around governance, politics and sovereignty in the non-west. Absent from his

work is the more fundamental, empirical problem that statebuilders claim to tackle: violent civil conflict. As will be described in the following section, statebuilding policy documents are concerned with a wide range of phenomena such as civil war, genocide, anarchic violent, rebellion, insurgency, violent protest, organised crime, national, cross-border and international terrorism.

The pronounced intentions of statebuilding are to prevent conflict, to end conflict, and/or to consolidate peace. This thesis offers a vital detailed, critical reflection on how this problem is represented. I will therefore analyse how statebuilders understand and represent violent civil conflict and the relationship between conflict and the process of state formation, strengthening or weakening. These representations form narratives (Wibben, 2011:2; Butler, 2009:8): ways of presenting, understanding and telling a certain story about the phenomenon of violent conflict and its relationship to states. Subsequently, this thesis explores the impact of these narratives, by questioning the strategies and policies they legitimise.

To do so, I examine official documents, policy papers and statements published by the international organisations and states that are most prominent in promoting and implementing statebuilding. I will examine a range of documents published since the end of the Cold War by the United Nations, World Bank, UK Department for International Development, G7, and others. While academic critiques do not always give major attention to these publications, they are worth examining because they are the formal and official views of the organisations. Policy documents reflect, and also are likely to play a role in shaping and solidifying the norms, values, and strategies of these organisations and their partners. Most importantly, they also serve as the public justification for statebuilding. I therefore use them to examine how statebuilders present violent conflict and how they legitimise and promote statebuilding as an appropriate response.

While analysis of problem-representation has been largely ignored in the statebuilding literature, there exists some critique of this kind in relation to the 'failed state'. This concept was brought into academic discourse in the early 1990s by the influential works of Helman and Ratner (1992) and Zartman (1995). It lacks a strict definitional consensus, but functions as a general label or framework used to denote certain kinds of (non-western) states which are deemed to fail to fulfil the necessary criteria of properly functioning states,

such as capacity and legitimacy. The set of ideas around failed states, or its various substitute labels of 'fragile', 'failing' or 'weak' states, have since been regularly used in the discourses surrounding a variety of policy areas such as development, aid, humanitarian intervention, the Responsibility to Protect, human rights, democracy promotion and, of course, statebuilding.

Critical scholars have lobbied various challenges to the concept. Most closely related to this topic of how 'problems' are represented, it has been regularly dismissed for abstracting states from the global and historical contexts in which they are embedded (Bilgin and Morton, 2002; Bøås and Jennings, 2005; Call, 2008; Jones, 2008). As Jones (2008:184) demonstrates through the western depictions of the 'failed state' of Somalia, when the problems of Third World states as narrated as internal issues of bad governance, the 'deeply historical and structural causes' of their conditions are ignored. This serves to legitimise continuing interventions and allows the 'reproduction and entrenchment' of current western-dominated global power relations (Jones, 2008:184).

The 'failed state' is not synonymous with civil conflict, but is a broader concept which includes a range of different problems such as lack of state capacity, failure to provide public services, mass corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, unresponsive to public demands, and a disregard for the rule of law. Violence does often takes centre-stage in the depictions of such states, and it appears to loom large as its most catastrophic consequence and cause (Curtis, 2013:81). While critical scholars recognise that 'failed states' are viewed as extremely violent, they do not analyse how policymakers understand this conflict and, in particular, the relationship between conflict and the state itself.

Given that statebuilding practices are used to strengthen or rebuild weak states that are undergoing conflict, it is vital that we critically reflect on how statebuilders understand and represent such conflict and its role with regard to state formation, strength or weakness. This thesis can thus be located within, while advancing, the broader critical work on both statebuilding and failed states. It delves into how one type of policy area – statebuilding – narrates one important element of the failed state – violent civil conflict. It therefore also draws on Branch's (2011) method: he analyses the ways in which Africa is understood and represented in popular, academic and international policy discourses, and examines how they legitimise ubiquitous interventions in Africa under the banner of human rights. This

thesis takes a similar critical interrogation of how problems are represented, and what the effects are on legitimising certain policies. Its contribution is to apply this approach to the narrower topic statebuilding, while not being exclusive to Africa as Branch's account is.

While the method of analysing how problems are represented is not new, this thesis is novel in applying it to statebuilding and thus makes an important contribution to critical work on the topic. The unique methodological step this thesis offers is to juxtapose statebuilding policies to a body of academic literature on domestic state formation. It is surprising that critical scholars have not brought in this political, historical and sociological research; it is useful for exploring how and why external statebuilding departs from the evidence and theory on how states have been formed historically.

By applying these methods, I will make three core arguments. Firstly, statebuilders represent violent conflict as destructive of states and all forms of political governance. Second, that this is in fact a dramatic departure from the domestic state formation literature which, in contrast, suggests that states are formed through processes of violent conflict. This illustrates that statebuilders' narratives are far from inevitable, but are highly contestable. In exploring how to make sense of them, I end with a third, conceptual and critical argument: the narratives about violent conflict promoted by statebuilders are vital for legitimising their interventions.

Narrating violent conflict as solely destructive of states makes organic domestic solutions appear impossible. This legitimises external actors' statebuilding interventions as the only way to build political governance. When combined with a pledged commitment to humanitarian ethics and the representation of violent conflict as 'crisis', statebuilding interventions are also considered an urgent moral necessity to save lives and secure human rights. It thereby legitimises external stifling of new organic possibilities for alternative forms of political organisation which may result from violent conflict. These may include boundary changes, sub-state, or non-state formations. Thus, statebuilders' narrative that violent conflict destroys states ultimately enables the maintenance of status quo international arrangements.

II. The Statebuilding policy literature

This section analyses the official policy documents published by international organisations and states – namely the U.S. and the UK given their particularly active role in international statebuilding practices. Understanding statebuilding as a 'paradigm' or policy framework is not to suggest that the discourses within it are homogenous. Variation is likely to appear across several axes. Policies and the ways they are formulated have changed over time, even in the near-three decades time frame since the end of the Cold War that this thesis focuses on. Organisations and states each have their own agendas, purposes and intended audiences, and similarly, policy documents take different forms, such as short agreements to long, comprehensive reports. While disaggregation of the statebuilding policy literature is a worthwhile endeavour, this thesis is more interested in its unifying commonalities. I wish to examine the conceptions held widely throughout the policy literature, in an attempt to expose the general narratives at work. Therefore, the following offers a broad analysis which highlights the key elements in how the policy literature represents violent conflict and the relationship between conflict and states – their formation, strengthening and weakening.

A point in need of clarification concerns the definitions of conflict and violence. Both are extremely hard to define, and this has important implications for how to measure and analyse trends of conflict, and for how peace is defined (see Galtung, 1969; Keen, 2000; Sambanis, 2004; Bufacchi, 2005; Cramer, 2006). Despite this, violence, conflict and peace are in fact extremely ill-defined in the statebuilding policy literature. Descriptions of what these involve are forthcoming, but stated definitions are rare. Rather than getting caught up in definitional difficulties, then, it is more fruitful in this project to simply run with statebuilding literature. While recognising the flaws in conceptual precision of the documents, it still possible to examine how statebuilders think about and represent violent conflict. Therefore, the below analysis will mix up different types of civil conflict because the policy documents regularly discuss them collectively and without rigid distinction too.

In fact, policymakers' vagueness is itself significant because it allows 'violence' or 'violent conflict' to be employed flexibly. The terms can be used to denote a variety of issues such as organised crime, terrorism, rebellion, insurgency, violent protest, and gang violence. Clustering these together may signal the simplistic ways in which western policymakers

understand violence in other part of the world, but the loose definition does have an important effect: the 'problem' itself is immediately vague and open to elastic use. Any of these dynamics can represent 'violent conflict' which statebuilders aim to prevent or end, enabling a huge variety of countries and situations to be pulled into the sphere of relevance for policymakers.

Conflict is morally undesirable

A 2011 agreement among the G7 and 19 partners for "A New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States" marked a renewed commitment to statebuilding while refining some technical aspects of activities. It begins with the resounding statement: '1.5 billion people live in conflict-affected and fragile states' and that 'about 70% of fragile states have seen conflict since 1989' (2011:1). It intends to be a powerful opening, but the terms 'conflict' and 'conflict-affected' are undefined, and no examples are offered. Yet it remains a clear call for action. This perfectly captures that while 'violent conflict' may lack conceptual clarity in the statebuilding policy community, it holds clear normative status. The document need not explain why conflict is bad, it is assumed to be self-evidently morally undesirable.

Emotive descriptions are still often forthcoming. The 1992 *An Agenda for Peace* marked a new era in the role of UN; without the superpower rivalry that had characterised international politics during the Cold War, and new cooperation could be directed towards threats other than interstate conflict. It notes that civil conflicts 'continue to bring fear and horror to humanity, requiring our urgent involvement to try to prevent, contain and bring them to an end' (1992, para.13). Little appears to have changed in this stance. The World Bank's *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development,* which involves numerous policy recommendations including those under the banner of statebuilding, highlights the range of threats associated with intrastate conflict and 'fragile' states. Its micro-level description is chilling: 'war, looting, and crime destroy the household assets of the poor, and fear of violent attacks prevents them from tilling their fields or travelling to schools, clinics, workplaces, and markets' (2011:58). In its most recent practice paper on statebuilding, the UK Department for International Development similarly laments the products of civil conflict: 'divided communities, traumatised children and adults, human

rights abuses, destroyed livelihoods, food insecurity and other humanitarian needs' (DFID, 2010:20). Violent conflict is considered morally undesirable because of its human impacts.

Conflict is destructive

The 'devastating effects of violent conflict' are wide ranging (DFID, 2010:4). At the fore in these policy documents is its destructive impact on states. According to the UK's 2011 Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS), which contains the country's position on statebuilding policies, violent conflict undermines the 'formal and informal institutions… on which long-term peace and stability depend' (2011:4). Most visibly, physical infrastructure like 'roads, schools, hospitals, factories – can be destroyed' (BSOS, 2011:7). More broadly, a country's political, economic and social institutions are deemed to be damaged by conflict. For example, democracy is undermined or collapses, public services are eroded, the central state is no longer able to enforce a monopoly of control over its territory, taxation systems become less capable, and general social order cannot be maintained.

Throughout the policy literature, violent conflict is made synonymous with a breakdown of governance. Instability, chaos, and state fragility are deemed tightly wedded as causes and consequences of civil conflict. The perceived consequences are enormous. Boutros-Ghali, in his 1995 Supplement to *An Agenda for Peace,* goes as far as to suggest that the 'a collapse of state institutions' caused by civil war results in the 'paralysis of governance, a breakdown of law and order, and general banditry and chaos' (1995: para.13). More recently, following his influential Brahimi Report (2000) on global security, senior UN diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi argues in a 2007 paper on statebuilding that conflict 'leads to the collapse of the systems and institutions that make a stable society function and these are the very systems that need to be resurrected' (2007:3).

Not only does conflict destroy, it also divides. Like natural disasters, conflicts 'destroy institutions, fracture social relations, and polarize political culture' (UNDP, 2012:12). Countries are left 'war-torn'. According to Kozul-Wright and Fortunato's (2011:1) policy-oriented book published by the UN, the 'deep and cumulative divisions' produced by civil wars in turn 'undermine social cohesion, threaten the norms and institutions of the State, and create a sense of fear and distrust among citizens'. States become 'fragmented' to the point where 'no party is capable of reestablishing central authority' (World Bank,

1997:158). Conflict is thus interpreted as 'crisis' (DFID, 2010:51; World Bank, 2011:1; UNDP, 2012:11).

As part of its destruction, the negative impact of civil conflict on economic development is given major attention. This derives from the generally held view that economic development is vital for stability: economic growth is necessary for a state to gain legitimacy and requires financial revenue to expand its capacities. The core policy narrative is that 'conflict is the antithesis of development' (Brahimi, 2007:19) or represents 'development in reverse' (World Bank, 2003:32). This draws from econometric work on the 'conflict trap', most famously promoted by Paul Collier (2003; 2008). It denotes that low development levels are a significant cause of civil conflict, and that conflict further 'retards development' (Brown, 2011:53) and thus 'exacerbates poverty and inequality' (DFID, 2010:20). Conflict 'erodes the tax base', distorting development strategies while governments divert finances from public services to war (Brown, 2011:54). As Branch (2011:19) points out, the state is therefore viewed by policymakers in one of two ways. Either it is seen as weak and unable to protect its population, or on the other hand, as a violent criminal actor itself that commits human rights abuses at the expense of its legitimacy and public capacities.

Both the UK and U.S. have highlighted their own security concerns over this perceived breakdown of governance. The UK's current National Security Strategy emphasises how civil violence produces 'ungoverned spaces which can be exploited by terrorists and criminals' (2016:63). This stance became dominant among many western states following the September 11, 2001 attacks, which highlighted to western leaders the global dangers of far-away disorder. Statements in the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review produced by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (2010:xii), such as 'weak governments and failing states create safe havens for terrorists, insurgencies, and criminal syndicates', show a continuity with the rhetoric of the Bush administration in the immediate aftermath of the devastating attacks. Part of the reason why the UK and U.S. are so concerned with distant civil conflict, is also due to its perceived regional spill-over effects: 'neighbouring countries and wider regions are often destabilised by the flow of small arms and light weapons, mercenary or other armed groups, illicit goods and displaced people that conflicts can produce' (BSOS, 2011:7). Conflict is narrated as implosion, but where the destruction is not confined to the one state.

All bad things go together

In his 1973 critique of foreign aid, Packenham argues that Western development doctrines are based on an assumption that 'all good things go together'. Peace, stability, economic growth, social cohesion, and justice (1973:123) have indeed been conceived as logically compatible and mutually reinforcing. To inverse Packenham's observation, I find that, in representing the 'problems' which they aim to tackle, statebuilding policymakers suggest that all *bad* things go together. Policy documents often describe (although rarely explain) links between poverty, underdevelopment, violent conflict, disease, terrorism, crime, famine, corruption, unemployment, market volatility, state weakening, instability, disorder and general anarchy.

The UN's *A More Secure World* report (2004:14) goes so far as to call this a 'witch's brew common to those areas where civil war and regional conflict intersect'. Disordered and desperate images of the so-called 'Third World' are not novel. Aside from echoing colonial-era portrayal of non-western peoples as incapable of self-governance due to their inherent deficiencies (see Said, 1978; Mudimbe, 1988), statebuilders' narratives closely reflect the more recent in-vogue concept of the 'failed state'. Rotberg (2002a:132), for instance, neatly epitomises the 'all bad things go together' outlook when writing about the dangers of 'failed states' soon after September 11, 2001. For him, they are characterised by an apocalyptic plethora of ills:

> 'a rise in criminal and political violence; a loss of control over their borders; rising ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural hostilities; civil war; the use of terror against their own citizens; weak institutions; a deteriorated or insufficient infrastructure; an inability to collect taxes without undue coercion; high levels of corruption; a collapsed health system; rising levels of infant mortality and declining life expectancy; the end of regular schooling opportunities; declining levels of GDP per capita; escalating inflation; a widespread preference for non-national currencies; and basic food shortages, leading to starvation.' (2002a:132).

The idea that all bad things go together, and the key role that conflict plays in contributing to such 'crises' is regularly expressed through the language of negative spirals. Phrases like 'conflict-trap' (Brown, 2011), 'witch's brew' (UN, 2004:14), and 'vicious cycles'

(World Bank, 1997:15) are all lobbied to describe how poverty, underdevelopment, violent conflict, and state weakness are mutually reinforcing. Each is a cause and consequence of the other, so 'when internal conflict erupts, the downward trajectory is not easy to reverse' (Brahimi, 2007:2). These negative cycles are often treated with explicitly normative language of decay; they represent 'descent into war and chaos' (UN, 2004:3) or 'descen[t] into fragility and conflict' (DFID, 2010:13). An important point to note is that these 'deadly cycle[s]' (UN, 2004:1) are perceived as having primarily internal origins within the state. Their consequences may be regional, but any external or global structural causes such as global market fluctuations, external interventions, or climate change are ignored. Failed states are viewed as implosion, a breakdown of state governance.

Disease imagery adds to the dominant portrait of conflict as a destructive and disruptive force. Violent conflict is 'chronic' (UNDP, 2012:11), or 'endemic' (UNDP, 2012:17); it 'breaks out' and is contagious as its spill over effects 'contaminate its immediate neighbours' (Brahimi, 2007:2). Depicting 'war-torn' or 'conflict afflicted' states furthers the narrative of violent conflict as an aberration, outside the normal functioning of states. The chronic perception of conflict underpins policymakers' emphasis on the tendency of conflict either to endure or to re-emerge in the same country after periods of peace. A statistic often repeated is that ninety percent of civil wars in the first decade of the 21st Century had experienced civil war within the preceding thirty years (World Bank, 2011:2; BSOS, 2011:9). The implication: stable peace is extremely difficult to regain as conflict and state decline spiral downwards together.

No self-improvement

The statebuilding policy literature thus represents violent conflict as morally undesirable for its direct human impacts, but also extremely destructive. According to these documents, it destroys state institutions, capacity, and legitimacy; producing weak and fragile states, instability, chaos and generally undermining prospects for economic development. In this sense, situations of conflict can be easily described as crises: trapped in negative spirals of economic, political and social decline and fragmentation. It represents a seemingly unmitigated disaster for the state, the domestic population, its neighbours and global security as a whole. Statebuilding policies suggest that, as a result, states undergoing violent

conflict are largely unable to improve their own situation because they are too divided and incapable to resurrect their own effective states alone. The UNDP makes the claim most explicitly:

> 'During the months and years after war, or during volatile transitions, governments lack the physical infrastructure, human resources, and rules and procedures to be able to deliver a peace dividend' (UNDP, 2012:12).

> Fragile states 'exhibit few capacities to recover, and have fatally ruptured the social contract with their citizens' and are 'unable to either prevent or recover without substantial assistance' (UNDP, 2012:16).

The UK's key policy document on statebuilding also makes this kind of argument (BSOS, 2011:5). While non-violent conflict can produce positive change when it is successfully managed, it contends, this can only occur 'through numerous formal and informal institutions' such as elections, courts, and stable government (BSOS, 2011:5). In contrast, 'violence undermines the institutions and relationships on which long term-peace and stability depend' (BSOS, 2011:5). If violent conflict is perceived to erode that which is necessary for managing social conflict in a way that is conducive for positive change, then state reconstruction, and thus recovery, is viewed as empirically impossible.

We can tie this point into, and situate it within, Bickerton's (2007) argument about how statebuilders deny developing countries sovereignty. He argues (2007:102) that the concept of the 'failed state' perpetuates the perception that these states lack the 'local capacity for political self-creation'. Bickerton suggests that this is based on certain normative attitudes about the non-west which western policymakers hold. My above analysis shows that the perception is also based, however, on a claim about the empirical nature of violent conflict. The notion that conflict is destructive serves to back-up the narrative, as states are deemed to be left torn, trapped in negative decline, and therefore unable to improve their own condition.

The connected ideas are implicit in how statebuilders describe their own roles. *An Agenda for Peace* first spearheaded peacebuilding practices, part of which is the 'rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife' (1992, para.15).

External intervention is deemed necessary for the re-construction of that which has been destroyed or damaged: particularly 'rebuilding institutional infrastructure shattered during conflict' (Kumar, 1997, quoted by Brahimi, 2007:3). The idea has lasted in the 21st Century: in 2007 the United Nations Secretary-General's Policy Committee defined peacebuilding as 'a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and developments'. The very idea that 'national capacities' require 'strengthening' points to the belief that violent conflict erodes, if not eradicates, domestic agency for recovery.

As a result, in a similar way to how Mutua (2001) characterises human rights activists, statebuilders ascribe themselves saviours with solutions. Indeed, the Overseas Development Institute (2009:1) begins its report by asking 'what does it take to fix fragile states?'. External, rationalised policy is validated in order to 'fix' a 'problem' that cannot be 'fixed' internally. Put simply, statebuilding is employed for 'ending a conflict, rebuilding what has been destroyed by years of war and strife, ensuring that what has been built does not crumble again into conflict.' (Brahimi, 2007:19). Prevention has also been emphasised by policymakers in more recent years. The UK's strategy, for instance, highlights that due to the severity of the consequences of prolonged violent conflict, 'it is far more cost-effective to invest in conflict prevention and de-escalation than to pay the costs of responding to violent conflict' (BSOS, 2011:4).

Precisely because of the narrative that violent civil conflict destroys states, their capacity and legitimacy. Counties are thus perceived to have little prospect of domestically rebuilding the state or political order in these conditions, as they are trapped by negative spirals of state decline and conflict. Statebuilding thus appears as the necessary, external impetus for reconstruction. Of course, it is often couched in cooperative terms of local-ownership, the language of partnership, or simply as 'lending a helping hand' (Brahimi, 2007:2). Whether this level of collaboration is true or merely rhetoric is an issue for separate debate.

III. An alternative narrative

These representations of conflict are unlikely to surprise many people in western countries. Equating conflict with breakdown is not unique to statebuilding policies but is, as Branch (2011:27) points out, a dominant narrative in contemporary global governance discourses, and is applied to a variety of domains:

> 'in the economic, [conflict] leads to poverty and underdevelopment; in the social, it leads to a breakdown of social solidarity and civil society; in the cultural, it leads to a crisis of traditional values and authority; and in the legal, it leads to a breakdown of accountability and a rise of impunity'.

Due to the fact that this is a prevailing conception in the west today, statebuilders' narratives may appear to be 'natural' in the sense that they appear undeniably true and simply describing conflict as it is in reality. In contrast, this section aims to illuminate that many of the core tenets in statebuilders' narratives are in fact highly contestable.

Of course, the relationship between violence, conflict and states has been a historically staple focus of political thinking; Hobbes, Machiavelli, Weber, and Arendt would make suitable starting points for any discussion on the topic. In this thesis, I just examine the academic research most suitable for the purpose, those strongest arguments which diametrically oppose statebuilders' narratives about violence as destructive of states. What results is a set of different academic works that I group together and term the 'domestic state formation literature'. It has varied academic roots in political, historical and sociological disciplines, and in terms of cases, it ranges from early modern Europe to contemporary so-called 'Third World'. What binds them is the core claim that violent conflict has been a vital process for producing stable and peaceful forms of political governance, including highly capable modern states.

The point of analysing this literature is not to side with it. I do not aim to prove, empirically or theoretically, that its narrative about conflict is correct or more convincing than that of the statebuilders. Instead, the purpose is simply to expose a major disjuncture between statebuilding policies and an influential academic literature on domestic state formation. Doing so will illustrate that statebuilders' narratives about conflict and state

destruction are far from natural. This will open up space for the following sections to critically analyse why statebuilders take their view in spite of much opposing academic research. This will follow in the next sections.

War makes states

Charles Tilly was probably the most influential theorist on violent conflict and states in the latter half of the twentieth century. Jones and Rodgers (2011:984) appear surprised that Tilly is a 'notable absentee' in the World Development Report 2011 on conflict, security and development. But it is no real surprise: Tilly's work is absent from all statebuilding policy documents. He published a great deal, but his most famous and influential thesis remains that 'war makes states and states make war' (1992:67). This dictum summarises his examination of the roots of nation-states in early modern Europe (1975; 1985; 1992). They emerged between around 1400 and 1700 as unintended results, he claims, of the actions of elite power-holders such as lords. State formation in Europe was an extremely long process which involved a great deal of conflict between power-holding groups, coercive exploitation, protection rackets and banditry. These actors had self-interested aims; they wished to gain monopolies over power, territories and resource. In order to do so, power-holders engaged in a mixture of eliminating, demobilising, disarming and co-opting rivals such as warlords with private armies.

The development of the apparatus which we now consider the basis of the modern state, was an inadvertent consequence of these processes. Making war requires resources: tax-collecting bureaucracies, police-like forces, and courts were created to control territory and extract from local populations. As power-holders continued to expand territory and defeat their external and internal rivals, other elements of modern states took shape with the creation of standing armies, war industries and bureaucratic and educational institutions (1985:183). Over time, these processes produced nation-states: 'relatively centralized, differentiated organization[s] the official of which more or less successfully claims control over the chief concentrated means of violence within a population inhabiting a large contiguous territory' (1985:170). Part of this process included popular resistance to coercion. With increasing control and extraction, European populations made demands for protection

of themselves and their property, to constrain power holders with courts, guaranteed rights, and representative institutions.

Naturally, Tilly (1985; 1992) goes into great empirical detail on the violent centuries which included extensive Napoleonic Wars, the rise of capitalism, empires, and various revolutions. I have only described the general process; violent conflict looms large in it, interacting with 'extraction, and capital accumulation… to shape European state making' (1985:172). As Samuel Huntington (1968:127) puts it, 'war was the great stimulus to statebuilding': it creates the need for governance systems and spurs the concentration and accumulation of power. Coercive power enables extraction from domestic populations, but also their protection. Conflict does not simply destroy states, and to think in such a one-way dynamic ignores the winners and losers Tilly describes in European history. The most capable of waging conflict destroy their rivals, but in doing so the winning state strengthens its own capacities and expands its own monopoly of power over larger areas. This represents the strong claim that states are in many ways a product of violent conflict.

A point of clarification is needed. Is Tilly just talking about interstate war? If so, his analysis might appear incomparable with statebuilders' interest in intra-state civil conflict. But the two are not separate in Tilly's histories. Because war making is a continual process of creating and redefining the state and its borders, the distinction between intra and interstate wars does not make much sense. Once state borders are codified, as they are in the today's UN-based international system, the distinction works. However, when in civil wars there exist sub-state power-holders which challenge the government, desire or border changes, then surely the Tillian framework about conflicting power-holding rivals applies.

Tilly's work has been debated extensively, but this is not the focus of this thesis. Rather, the point is that his conception of the positive relationship between violent conflict and state formation has been highly influential in academic scholarship. Recently, for instance, Ian Morris's (2014) popular book *War! What is it good for?* takes up the theme of generative violence, and goes beyond Tilly's focus on Europe by arguing that over the last 10,000 years, war has been the only way through which humans have been able to create peaceful societies.

Cohen, Brown and Organski (1981:902) echo Tilly, by suggesting that the European state formation process was 'a long and violent struggle pitting the agents of state

centralization against myriad local and regional opponents'. Their interesting contribution to the research on European state-making is their critique of the common interpretation of violence as political decay. Over a quarter of a century on from their work, it remains a widely accepted narrative which can be seen in the statebuilding policies. Intrastate violence may appear on the surface to simply indicate political decay but, they argue, it usually indicates a movement towards political order because it constitutes part of the process of accumulation and 'centralization of power resources' in newly-emerging or weak states (1981:902). Like Tilly, the fundamental conception relevant to this thesis is that conflict actually contributes to state formation and strengthening. It is not simply erosive of governance, but spurs its development.

In contrast statebuilders' narrative that all bad things go together, the academic literature accepts the paradox that terrible violence can produce good things like political stability and order. Sheri Berman's (2007) application of Tillian logic to democracy in Europe further opens up to question statebuilders' representations. She illustrates that the emergence of democratic states in Europe was extremely violent too. Not only was this the case in the early modern period, but also in the revolutions and catastrophic wars of the early 20th Century. At the end of the Second World War, for instance, many authoritarian regimes had been left defeated, and their ideology discredited. Publics in Italy and West Germany were able to pursue democracy and reclaim the 'institutions and practices of democracy' that remained from previous eras (Berman, 2007:37). Modern states, as well as modern democracies, are presented as having a history of 'struggle, conflict and even violence' (Berman, 2007:38; see also Bermeo, 1997; 2003).

Contemporary state formation

There has also been a great deal of scholarship on state formation and consolidation in the so-called 'Third' or 'developing' world. The relationship between violent civil conflict and state formation are complex and extensively debated and nuanced in the wide range of case studies. Particularly prominent cases about which the overarching theory that states are produces by civil conflicts has argued to stand true include, for instance, Eritrea (Müller, 2006, 2012; Clapham, 2000; Iyob, 1997; Pool, 2001), Mozambique (Bertelsen, 2016), Lebanon

(Delatolla, 2016), Taiwan, South Korea (Herbst, 1990) and Somalia and Somaliland (Menkhaus, 2007; Walls, 2009; Balthasar, 2013).

One section of these studies researches states that were consolidated or formed as a result of liberation wars or insurgencies. These have been termed 'post-liberation states' (Dorman, 2006), a perspective which highlights how warring parties can actually be viewed as capable of, and even interested in, governance. Reno's (20008, 2011) analysis of insurgency in Africa highlights that 'rebels', which are commonly blamed for causing instability and anarchy, often aim to build political power and institutions. Since the late colonial period at the middle of the twentieth century, he argues, much of Africa's conflicts have been over political control. In general, rebels have aimed to overthrow and install themselves in government at the state level or, particularly since the 1990s, 'parochial' rebels have developed political programmes and tried to administer sub-state communities in opposition to the state (2008:144, 2011).

More recently, Huang (2016) has advanced this scholarship on rebel governance by researching the wartime origins of democratization. In attempting to explain why so many states emerge from war more democratic, she uses empirical data to demonstrate that it is a result of how rebels govern the civilians in their territories. When rebels rely on them and extract heavily for support during war, these civilians become politically mobilised: they gain an understanding and information about political rights, the role of the state in relation to them, and potential alternatives (2016:9). This leads them to apply greater pressure to victorious new regimes to democratize. Uganda, Mozambique and Tajikistan are the main cases she explores to demonstrate this process.

In a different vein, there is also an emerging literature on illiberal state building in Africa: where authoritarian and violent means are employed by ruling governments which consolidates the state and boosts its power (Jones et al., 2013; Fisher and Anderson, 2015). While African states are often considered weak by policymakers and academics alike, these works illustrate that certain regimes today have successfully followed state-building aspirations, such as Rwanda, Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Angola. These states have been effective in centralising economic resources and establishing 'a stranglehold over the political economy', and using this to expand and solidify state institutions and the regime's control of them. State-led coercion has maintained political control by cracking down on the

media, disrupting protests and eliminating political opposition. Often, western counter-terrorism agendas are being manipulated by these states to gain resources, build armies and national security structures (Fisher and Anderson, 2015). Without delving into further detail, these scholars' overarching argument is that African states' institutions and control over their territories are being strengthened through authoritarian and violent measures. Dan Slater (2010) has also described similar processes in Southeast Asia, where state consolidation has been led by elites in response to threats and fears over violent eruption from major ethnic or class divisions in society.

Finally, consideration must be given to those scholars who interrogate the validity of the 'war makes states' thesis in non-western contexts. These efforts are fuelled by the observation, stemming from Jackson and Rosberg's (1982) influential article, that African states are internally weak. While they possess *juridical* recognition from the international community, they lacked the *empirical* capacity and internal sources of legitimacy of modern states. This is because, they argue, these states were arbitrary colonial constructions which were weakly developed as political units (1982:14). Their distinction between the international and domestic sources of statehood appears to have since inspired scholars' explanations of why strong states have not emerged in much of the 'Third World' over the last century. The international system is commonly deemed responsible because it prevents the opportunity for Tillian processes to create states through war (Herbst, 1990; Desch, 1996; Sørensen, 2001; Taylor and Botea, 2008). According to these accounts, war might indeed make states, but the post-1945 UN-led system has entrenched state boundaries, delegitimized, outlawed and quashed interstate and intrastate war, including the validity of separatist movements (especially those based on ethnicity). Many non-western states have therefore never had same incentive from war to develop states. Rival power-holders cannot defeat or be defeated by others, nor do existing states face the prospect that their territories may fragment into smaller units. Unlike the violent anarchic European context, today's international system protects the status quo organisation of states.

For the policy practice of contemporary international statebuilding, we can imagine that these arguments could be interpreted in two different ways to influence policy. First, proponents could argue that the implausibility for Tillian state formation today means that international intervention is all the more necessary to help existing states gain capabilities

and legitimacy. However, this line of argument is in fact never made by in statebuilding policy documents; Tilly or the idea that violent conflict could be in any way generative is ignored in the first place.

Second, the opposite conclusion, which has actually been argued, is that if weak and tumultuous states result from the fact that Tillian processes are *not* being allowed to occur in non-western contexts, the solution might be to allow them (Luttwak, 1999; Herbst, 2004). Herbst (2004) posits that state failure is a normal feature of the world. States defeat each other, states fracture and split apart for various reasons like 'problems in the collection of taxation, the primitive nature of basic transport, shifting military balances, and the inability to overcome religious, ethnic, and national divisions' (2004:303). Yet, when states aren't allowed to fail, the international system is guilty of maintaining unviable political formations. The international community needs to let go of idea that status quo state boundaries must be maintained: 'let them fail' instead, and accept 'the cycle of state creation and destruction' through which 'political orders evolve by changing form and scale' (2004:316). Luttwak (1999:36) makes a similar point about the paradoxes of conflict; while civil war is 'a great evil' it also brings peace because either one side defeats the other, or both are so exhausted they come to a resolution. Intervention during conditions of conflict or unstable peace 'systematically' prevents the transformation when war eventually brings peace (1999:37). The international community should thus 'give war chance'. Both authors' arguments rest on the conception that violent conflict is generative of new political formations which tend towards more order and stability, even if this costs a great number of lives and takes decades.

Any attempt to cover the literature on the positive relationship between conflict and state formation would be inexhaustive; this short overview is undoubtedly so. Yet the key points have been made. There is an extensive body of work which, despite having various perspectives, arguments and empirical case studies, promotes a general narrative that violent conflict has, can, and may even be necessary to produce modern states as we know them today. All of these arguments are, of course, still open for debate, but the point is that they undoubtedly represent reputable, well-researched and reviewed academic scholarship. The next section explores and clarifies the main divergences between these works and the statebuilding policy narratives.

IV. The juxtaposition

Having examined the statebuilding policy and academic domestic state formation literatures separately, it is possible to draw out the key differences in their conceptions of violent civil conflict and its relationship with states. This requires us to treat both sets of literature as broadly coherent, at least in their most fundamental ideas on this topic. Three key conceptual differences between the narratives appear.

The effects of violent conflict

The first crucial distinction concerns an empirical claim about the consequences of violent conflict for states in which such conflict occurs. On the one hand, statebuilding policies represent violent conflict as a destructive process. It erodes the state's capacity and legitimacy, and thus represents a form of breakdown. The coherence of neighbouring states, too, can be weakened through the transnational spill-overs of illicit trade and migration. In this narrative, different types of violence are not distinguished: civil war, insurgency, banditry and organised crime are all considered destructive of governance.

In contrast, the domestic state formation literature suggests that violent conflict has the potential to generate states. Of course, the strength of this argument can vary. However, those scholars I have examined have not gone so far as to claim that conflict *inevitably* produces states, although oftentimes it does appear that conflict has a *necessary*, but not *sufficient*, role in the creation of modern states. Conflict is perceived to be highly contingent in its effects; whereas for statebuilders it is represented as solely and inevitably destructive. Even at the most minimal argument – that violent conflict *can* or *might* contribute towards state formation – it is still a far cry from statebuilders' narratives which conceive of no such potential. For statebuilders, violent conflict is necessarily antithetical to state formation: all bad things go together.

The prospects for countries in conflict

Different conceptions of the effects of conflict lead to a second divergence regarding the prospects for states in these situations. For statebuilders, as conflict is destructive, 'war-torn' countries are incapable of improving their own situation. In negative spirals of state decline

and conflict, violence is a consequence and a cause of state weakness. States are thus deemed trapped, declining capacity means that there is ever-smaller chance for organic positive transformation. In contrast, for domestic state formation scholars, violent conflict itself can act as a stimulus for positive change. Conflict and recovery are not, here, separate processes, but are interlinked because transformation occurs through violence and war. Weinstein (2005) terms this 'autonomous recovery', and calls for interventionist policymakers to recognise that states like Uganda have been able to achieve long-term peace and development without external intervention.

This position demands a reckoning with the perceived paradoxes of violent conflict which, despite being an abhorrent process, still tends to produce peace (Luttwak, 1999:36). The link between violence and political change is not a new observation. For instance, at the end of the 19th Century, U.S. Admiral Stephen Luce (1891:672) suggested that 'war is one of the greatest agencies by which human progress is effected'. The paradox cuts to the core of how to understand political change and, thus, the possibilities of politics. Huntington's (1968) influential elucidation of this issue frames this as a critique of modernisation theories. He suggests that economic development and political stability do not necessarily evolve in parallel. Social and economic modernisation, which occurs through growth and increasing social mobility, are instead often hugely destabilising processes that lead to civil violence (1968:46). The tensions of progress are expressed in the domestic state formation literature in the overarching narrative that conflict can lead to positive transformation, but not necessarily with a linear trajectory or pre-determined destination. Whereas, in statebuilders' narratives, the prospects are binary: violent conflict leads to state decay, while peace is necessary for raising state legitimacy and capacity.

Part of the reason for this divergence is that the domestic state formation literature also perceives greater significant of other violent actors. They suggest that non-state groups can be political and often attempt to form breakaway sub-state units of governance. The possibilities for new political formations are wide: states can fragment, implode, or simply alter their boundaries in relation to other states. In contrast, in the statebuilders' narratives, existing states are either strengthened in peace or weakened through conflict, there is no mention of changing current entrenched formations.

Policy Implications

As a result of the two preceding differences, the bodies of literature offer diverging recommendations for how external actors should act concerning 'failing', 'fragile' or 'weak' states undergoing conflict. For statebuilders, the policy implication is obvious: if conflict destroys states, and they are thereby incapable of reconstructing themselves, external intervention is required to do so in order to stop conflict, prevent its recurrence, and transform states. The title of Call and Wyeth's 2009 book *Building States to Build Peace* neatly summarises this aim.

As the domestic state formation literature is rooted in academia, scholars are often less interested in with explicitly recommending policy options. Tilly (1985:169), for instance, tries to clarify that his analysis of European history should not be taken as a blueprint for contemporary policy: 'in no simple sense can we read the future of Third World countries from the pasts of European countries'. He does hope that it 'will help us to grasp what is happening today, *perhaps* even to do something about it', but this remains an exceptionally non-committal and vague comment (1985:169, my emphasis). It is understandable why many scholars may be keen to evade the troubling policy implications of their work. For instance, having illustrated that some wars can lead to democratization Huang (2016:11) feels it necessary to explicitly state that she 'prefer[s] nonviolence over violence' and does not 'extol war for its potential for benefits'. As noted in the previous section, Luttwak (1999) and Herbst (2004) not only face up to, but forcefully promote the policy implications of the positive connection between violent conflict and state formation. To 'let them fail' or 'give war a chance' is more likely, they claim, to establish peaceful, capable and legitimate states than external statebuilding interventions.

The three conceptual divergences concern the effects of conflict, the prospects of states undergoing conflict, and the policy implications. When we take these conceptions at their most general level, a three-part argument is produced by each set of literature about the nature of violent civil conflict and its relationship with states. This can be represented in the table:

Statebuilding policy literature	**Domestic state formation literature**
1. The effects of violent conflict are destructive of states and undermine governance.	1. The effects of violent conflict can often generate states.
2. States undergoing conflict lack the capacity to domestically reconstruct states, re-establish political order or improve their situation.	2. Conflict tends to resolve itself and stable, peaceful forms of political governance are likely to be produced by conflict in the long term.
Therefore	*Therefore*
3. External intervention is required to build states.	3. For the long term benefit of these countries, international inaction may be preferable.

Interestingly, both sets of arguments appear simultaneously pessimistic and optimistic about the possibilities for politics in situations of conflict. For statebuilders, conflict is so destructive; it has enormous human costs and takes extensive time and resources to rebuild 'failing' states. But there remains a kind of optimism that states can be built peacefully. The contention is that if the correct technical approaches can be combined with the international political will, then the international community is not powerless in the face of violence. The two-sidedness can be seen in the domestic state formation literature too, in a different way. It is pessimistic that, while strong, stable and well-functioning states can be created by humans, it often comes at the price of violent conflict, war, and major upheaval. There is still some optimism: in abhorrent conflict there lies the generative potential for new, lasting forms of peaceful political governance.

V. Understanding Statebuilding

Clearly, statebuilders' narratives concerning the relationship between conflict and states represent a radical departure from an established set of academic research on domestic state formation. Despite this, statebuilders do not explicitly regard their conceptions as particularly unusual, and nor do they outwardly recognise any need to justify why they hold their view as opposed to any other possible ones. Having exposed the disjuncture, this last section explores why statebuilders' promote their narratives, and what the impacts of them are for policy. To do so, I draw on liberal humanitarianism. This lens will help reveal how statebuilding representations of conflict are infused by fundamental humanitarian moral attitudes. By carefully analysing statebuilding in this way, I also shed light on the complexity with which it poses problems and legitimises its own solutions. In particular, this section will illustrate how, precisely because of the particular narratives about the destructive relationship between conflict and states, policymakers place upon statebuilding a multifaceted authority: it appears as a moral and pragmatic practice, necessary in the urgent and long term, in order to promote both human and state security.

Humanitarianism

Statebuilding is rarely explicitly discussed in terms of humanitarianism. In fact, it may appear to be its opposite in a number of ways. Humanitarianism is usually associated with short term relief, altruism and its proponents often declare themselves apolitical and display a 'pretence that somehow it is possible to stay outside politics' (Rieff, 2002:75). Whereas, statebuilding is a long-term, transformation project which policymakers explicitly describe as political, as they pursue political reforms and collaboration with domestic governments and other political groups. Statebuilding practices (Iraq and Afghanistan most acutely) have also received far more public criticism for being self-interested or a form of neo-imperial empire.

However, a different picture emerges if we use 'humanitarianism' in a minimal way: not as a sphere of practice with its long history and varied internal debates, but instead to denote its core set of universalist moral principles (Ignatieff, 2001:9). These are 'to respond to

the suffering of others regardless of their identity, to act selflessly, to do what can be done to save lives, and to place humanity above all considerations' (Barnett and Weiss, 2008:6).

The term 'humanitarian' might appear slightly confusing because, today, these moral principles are expressed in the policies and ideas surrounding human rights and human security. As Slim (2002:14) points out, human rights have been the most important development for humanitarian morals in the post-1945 era by institutionalising them in a 'moral, political and legal framework for affirming universal human values'. Since the 1990s this has combined with the 'human security' framework which gained major prominence in global governance institutions. The concept first emerged in the UN *Human Development Report 1994;* it stresses the need to look beyond state security which focuses on military security, territory and state integrity. Human security instead highlights the importance of social, economic, environmental and other non-military threats towards individuals and communities (Paris, 2001; Hunter and McIntosh, 2010). The shift in global concerns followed the end of the Cold War which reduced threat of interstate conflict. International organisations and states' foreign policies oriented towards, and directed more resources to, human security activities such as aid, development, human rights promotion, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding.

Does statebuilding reflect humanitarian moral concerns? Contrary to the initial temptation to place statebuilding in a different category, I argue that it does. The depictions of violent civil conflict are clearly underpinned by the same universal morals about giving primacy to human life, saving lives, relieving suffering and protecting human rights. Conflict is not only condemned for its direct human consequences, but its indirect impacts on the state are also described in extremely moralistic terms. The state weakness produced causes more violence, insecurity, poverty, underdevelopment, 'chaos' and generally brings 'fear and horror to humanity' (UN, 1992, para.13). As the state is considered the only legitimate bearer of the responsibilities to protect and provide the human rights of its population, the destruction of the state is deemed a human rights issue.

To argue that statebuilding is not fundamentally humanitarian in its moral outlook would be to simply ignore how statebuilders represent conflict. One need not look hard. Annan, in discussing African conflict, neatly highlights the dominance of humanitarian morals in statebuilding: 'preventing…wars is no longer a matter of defending States or

protecting allies. It is a matter of defending humanity itself' (1998:para.3). Policymakers deem 'failing' states to have little capability to pursue their own reconstruction, but it is a liberal humanitarian step to claim, as they do, that the responsibility falls on international actors. Paris and Sisk's (2009:14) call for action illustrates the point: 'retreating from the postwar statebuilding project would be tantamount to abandoning tens of millions of people to lawlessness, predation, disease, and fear'.

However, to conclude that statebuilding is *only* humanitarian also seems wrong. Nuanced analysis demonstrates that violent conflict is not represented *solely* as an issue of human security for the concerned population. It is also regularly narrated within the framework of traditional state security concerns. Regional stability and the security of states in other parts of the world are believed to be threatened by the global impacts of failing states such as illicit trade of arms and drugs, terrorism, mass refugee flows and market fluctuations. Is it simply a case that different organisations have different concerns? One might expect that states' foreign policies show little regard for human security, while development-oriented bodies are less interested in the security of distant states. True, there is some noticeable leaning; institutions like the UN, UNDP and DFID are more forthcoming with emotive description. Despite this, however, in general, all organisations with statebuilding policies problematise 'failing' states as both human and state security issues. The UK policy paper on statebuilding neatly summarises this duality between human and state security: 'Working to address instability and conflict upstream is a sound investment… it is both morally right and in our national interest' (BSOS, 2011:2). Policymakers are able to imbue statebuilding with this dual authority, I argue, precisely because conflict is presented as destructive of states. This constructs any conflict as a potential human and global security threat.

Kai Koddenbrock (2012:216) suggests that international statebuilding activists possess an attitude that reflects what Fassin (2009, 2012) has termed a 'humanitarianisation of politics'. This is when 'moral sentiments' and 'the emotions that direct our attention to the suffering of others and make us want to remedy them' gain an 'essential force in contemporary politics' (Fassin, 2012:1). Fassin is not focusing on statebuilding, but argues that this has characterised both domestic and international politics in general since the late twentieth century. Koddenbrock (2012) may be correct that practitioners in the field have a

mindset that reframes all political issues as simply humanitarian ones. But the above analysis demonstrates that the critique cannot validly apply to statebuilding policies themselves. Rather than simply a 'humanitarianisation' (Fassin, 2012) or 'moralization' (Branch, 2011:24) of international politics, close examination sheds light on how statebuilding policies actually fuse humanitarian and traditional state security frameworks. Interventions are legitimised by both simultaneously.

Urgency

Going further with the lens of humanitarianism, the universal moral principles of relieving suffering and saving lives lend themselves to the ideas of 'urgency' and 'emergency'. As Rieff (2002:67) points out, as humanitarian universal morals place primary value on human life, substantial threats to it anywhere can be conceived as a 'crisis'. The consequences are serious. Laïdi (2001) offers a broad critique of modern politics for being overly impulsive to such calls of 'crisis'; as he notes, urgency demands and 'legitimizes immediate action'. I argue that statebuilding policy documents also echo humanitarianism in this respect, as they too narrate states undergoing conflict as in 'crisis' (DFID, 2010:51; World Bank, 2011:11). Violent conflict is made synonymous with breakdown, and the imagery of spirals of decline is deemed to have disease-like chronic impact on 'failing' or 'fragile' states.

Branch (2011:24) argues that 'the humanitarian human rights discourse… is subject to easy instrumentalization because of its invocation of crisis and emergency'. Statebuilding policy, however, poses as even more urgent, as it moves beyond the language of simply humanitarian emergency: civil conflict is narrated as a political, social, economic, development, human rights and even global crisis. This is made possible because conflict is deemed antithetical to state formation and political order; it is only erosive of states. These representations legitimise immediate external statebuilding interventions to halt or prevent human and global disaster.

However, again we must ask: is statebuilding therefore presented *solely* as an urgent necessity? It's an important question because, if so, then statebuilding may be open to some of the same critiques of humanitarianism. The most powerful critique on the issue of urgency in politics is offered by Laïdi (2001). He (2001) argues that humanitarian interventions reflect a 'devalorization of the future', whereby the international community

places overwhelming importance on urgent action while eschewing any meaningful long term perspectives. But, having closely examined the statebuilding policy literature, it statebuilders clearly *do* conceive of themselves as offering long term solutions to conflict, as well as short term 'stabilisation'.

This is because they conceive conflict as both an immediate and long term problem: conflict is morally undesirable and destabilising, but its consequences will continue to multiple as the countries are trapped in negative spirals of state weakness and conflict. The prospects for long-term peace and statebuilding are deemed minimal. The danger is that the 'fragile' state will endure a prolonged collapse, having abhorrent impacts on its own people but also regional and global stability. Unlike the academic domestic state formation scholars, statebuilders conceive that no positive transformation can come of conflict even over decades and centuries. The only means for achieving long term peace and stability is the presence of a capable and legitimate state, and this can only arise through external intervention. Therefore, statebuilding policies do not simply devalorize the future. Rather, the way they problematise conflict as both an urgent and long term problem, legitimises statebuilders' interventions as vital to bring violence to a close and stabilise the country, while also being necessary for future stability, and prevention of a relapse into conflict.

Here, a major divergence opens between the statebuilding policy and domestic state formation literatures. The latter implies that there is a choice at stake between the 'good' in the present and the long term future. Luttwak (1999) and Herbst's (2004) policy-oriented works make this most clear: to intervene immediately in a conflict or 'failing' state may appear good in the short term – and if successful will relieve present suffering – but this is counterproductive in the long term. Truly sustainable peace can only be achieved through domestic processes of state formation and consolidation which, tragically, often involve conflict. The choice is thus to act now and undermine long term peace while trying to minimise the current symptoms of conflict and soothing one's present conscience, or choose inaction with the conviction that the long term interests of these countries, and the rest of the world, will be better served.

In contrast, statebuilders can avoid this choice because their narrative of civil conflict as purely destructive of states. As they deny it can organically generate stable and legitimate forms of political governance even in the long term, statebuilders perceive of no benefits to

inaction. It would only allow the situation to worsen, according to the narrative. Therefore, the paradigm that statebuilders offer is one where statebuilding holds moral and pragmatic authority as a necessary action to solve the urgent and long term problems of conflict and state decline.

Using the lens of liberal humanitarianism has facilitated a deep exploration into why statebuilders offer their particular narratives about conflict and states, and furthermore, the genuine complexity of these narratives which defy easy categorisation. Through policymakers' representations of conflict as destructive, statebuilding is able to possess two key dualities. Firstly, it portends to be both a solution to the human and state security problems of conflict. It thereby gains the moral authority of humanitarian universalist values, and the authority as a pragmatic (and perhaps 'realist') strategy of intervention for powerful states to pursue. Secondly, statebuilding can be posed as urgent while also necessary for long term peace and stability.

VI. Conclusion

This thesis has critically examined a subject often neglected: how statebuilding policymakers understand and represent the 'problems' which they seek to tackle. In particular, it offers a unique exploration of statebuilders' narratives about the relationship between violent civil conflict and states, their formation, strengthening and weakening. The aims of this thesis have been fourfold: to expose these narratives; to compare (and thus call into question) them with an established body of academic literature on domestic state formation; to attempt to understand why the narratives statebuilders promote are so radically different to those found in the academic work; finally, to explain the important policy functions of these narratives.

In doing so, I have made a series of three connected arguments. Firstly, the statebuilding discourse presents violent conflict as a force that erodes and destroys states, their institutions, legitimacy, coherence and capacity. According to this narrative, processes of conflict cannot produce legitimate forms of governance, but are only disrupt them. Secondly, this is in marked contrast to the domestic state formation literature, rooted in historical, political and sociological perspectives, which suggests that conflict in fact has the potential, and may even be necessary, to generate legitimate and stable forms of political governance, including modern states as we understand them today.

Rather than siding with one of the narratives, or attempting to empirically prove that one or the other is 'correct', the third argument remains critical and conceptual. Drawing on and applying Bacchi's (2009) general approach to policy analysis which recognises that policymakers construct problems in ways which promote certain policy responses to them, this thesis has provided a unique reflection on the effects of statebuilders' narratives about the relationship between conflict and states. It has illustrated that they help legitimise statebuilding policies.

By representing violent conflict as destructive of states, situations of conflict are viewed as in permanent crisis. Such countries are trapped in self-perpetuating downward spirals of conflict and state decline. It is therefore deemed impossible that domestic resolutions, recovery, or forms of political governance can be organically produced under these conditions. This justifies external statebuilding interventions as the only way to

achieve order and stability, in the short and long term, through constructing or strengthening states. Humanitarian ethics fuse with the state security concerns of international players to present conflict an issue of saving lives, protecting human rights, and guarding global stability. This legitimises statebuilding as a necessary practice to consolidate fragile peace, resolve ongoing conflict, or prevent future conflict.

Going further, this ultimately produces a stifling effect. By diverging from the academic domestic state formation literature, statebuilders vilify inaction. But if we take the academic scholarship seriously, this could actually suppress the opportunities for the development of alternative forms of political organisation which may be generated through violent conflict. Such possibilities could include re-structuring of the existing state boundaries; the disaggregation of large or multinational states into more coherent units of identity, loyalty and governance; or even the creation of non-state models of political organisation which do not resemble the currently dominant nation state. Narrating conflict as antithetical to political order helps justify statebuilders' interventions which, in turn, maintain the status quo international arrangements. Any contingent possibilities for political change through violence is deemed empirically unworkable, as well as a human and state security threat.

Further research on state formation, strengthening and weakening will undoubtedly continue, as it is a core topic of politics, sociology, anthropology and history. But my findings also further emphasise the importance of academic scholarship here, as it can research these topics while insulated from the policy-focused demands and biases of states and international organisations. In terms of advancing this specific thesis project, which has only examined statebuilding in the post-Cold War era, and has treated it as a consistent time frame, further research pursue disaggregation. For instance, studying policy narratives before the 1990s, or distinguishing different periods since the Cold War, will introduce the element of policy change over time. Alternatively, while I have grouped together different types of organisations and states which promote statebuilding, further studies could delve deeper, beyond their overarching commonalities, and into their differences.

As a novel contribution to existing critical approaches to statebuilding, this thesis also implies some broader points for future critical thinking. The depictions of the world offered by powerful institutions must not be taken for granted, especially those which fund

and deploy enormously expensive and invasive statebuilding interventions. Reflecting on how 'problems' and their 'solutions' are posed may not generate any clear answers about the nature of conflict and states, and is unlikely to satisfy the desires of policy-oriented academics or practitioners to know what to do about civil conflict around the world. It will nevertheless provide the analytical tools to question those policies, and the narratives on which they rely, that often appear incontestable. On this note, this thesis has highlighted the importance of distinguishing normative and empirical claims about conflict. Our understandable humanitarian attitudes towards any mass violence must not be allowed to determine our views about the empirical relationship between conflict and states.

How we conceptualise the relationship between conflict and states is not merely a lofty, academic matter. It has concrete effects on international policy. Critically examining the relationship between how 'problems' and their 'solutions' are constructed and publicly narrated is vital for understanding how statebuilding, and other global governance activities, are made possible and legitimised.

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