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'Global' norms and 'local' agency: frictional peacebuilding in Kosovo

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This article explores how the 'liberal democratic peace package' is received in post-conflict spaces. As such, it is part of a critical peace research agenda that raises critical questions concerning the quality of peace in many post-conflict societies. A close reading of the peace-building process in post-conflict Kosovo provides the backdrop for the theoretical discussion that identifies friction in norm diffusion processes and the different agencies that are generated through encounters between global norms and local practices. We unpack the interplay between the 'global' and the 'local' in peacebuilding and, through the lens of friction, we reveal the diverse and unequal encounters that produce new power relations. By foregrounding agency, we theorise different agentive subjects in the post-conflict setting, and map local agency from various segments of society that may localise, co-opt or reject global norms pertaining to the liberal democratic peace.

Introduction

The discourse of liberal peacebuilding builds on the idea that the international community has a moral obligation to modernise and democratise post-conflict societies. To do so, the post-conflict space is constructed as a normative vacuum waiting to be filled by 'global' norms pertaining to peaceful conflict resolution, good governance, human rights, rule of law and democracy. In these spaces, international peacebuilders expect civilisation, progress, modernisation and democracy to evolve mirroring the global North experience. However, despite decisive efforts, the transplanted liberal democratic peace norms often fail to take root in post-conflict societies as these societies resist being moulded in the image of the global North.

We endeavour to explore how the 'liberal democratic peace package' is received in post-conflict societies. In so doing, we contribute to a peace research agenda that raises critical questions concerning the quality of peace in post-conflict societies (Björkdahl and Höglund 2013; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). Our close reading of the peace-building mission in Kosovo reveals that peacebuilding is political as it is about competing ideas, political contestation and power (Jabri 2007). By unpacking

the interplay between the 'global' and the 'local' in peacebuilding, we are able to capture friction between ideas, actors and practices and expose asymmetrical power relations, identify local resistance and a register of local agency that may localise, co-opt or counteract global norms pertaining to the liberal democratic peace.

Our theoretical contribution destabilises the boundaries between the global and the local and is developed around three analytical concepts: friction, resistance and agency. Friction is a concept that captures the diverse and unequal encounters between global and local agency, ideas and practices that produce new power relations. It reveals how the 'global' and the 'local' are in constant confrontation and transformation (cf. Eschle 2002; Tsing 2005). Through the concept of resistance, the article explores localisation, co-option or counteraction by agentive subjects of the post-conflict space. Such process unmasks contestation between competing peace(s) and visions of democracy as part of the political reality of a war-torn society. The notion of resistance brings to the fore agentive subjects and we develop a register of local agents based on their encounters with the diffused global norms of the liberal democratic peace. 'Localising agents' question the global norms on the basis of their limited fit with the local post-conflict context and work to mediate, adapt and translate such global norms into local institutions and practices. 'Co-opting agents' hijack the norm diffusion process and disregard most of the normative content of the promoted norms while selectively employing the ones that are perceived to enhance their own position of power. Finally, 'counteracting agents' resist and eventually reject global norms as irrelevant to local post-conflict realities. Thus, theoretically, the article unravels questions of agency, explores the balance between global ideas and local practices, and unsettles the boundaries between the global and the local in peacebuilding.

A close reading of the peace-building process in post-conflict Kosovo provides the backdrop for the theoretical discussion and identifies friction in norm diffusion processes and the different agencies that are generated through such encounters. Few post-conflict spaces have been targeted with such wide and deep reconstruction as Kosovo after the NATO intervention in 1999. The subsequent peace-building mission(s)[1] consisting of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Kosovo Force (KFOR) and later also the European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) and the International Civilian Office (ICO) took upon themselves to govern almost every aspect of the Kosovar society (Knoll 2005; King and Mason 2006; Ernst 2011; Hehir 2011). When the peace-building missions envisioned a multi-ethnic Kosovo, this vision faced competition from various registers of local agency. Thus Kosovo, with its unmatched external presence, provides an illustrative case for analysing norm diffusion into post-conflict spaces.

A note on methodology will provide the reader with insights into how the research findings from Kosovo were obtained. This article, which combines conceptual development with empirical analysis of local agency, is grounded in interview- and field-based research undertaken in Kosovo during two months in the autumn of 2011

and in the summer of 2014. Our engagement with the Kosovar peace-building processes, however, is a long-standing relationship. We have explored various ways of conducting fieldwork in a self-reflexive manner drawing on ethnographic methodologies (O'Reilly 2004).[2] This has enabled us to transcend the object/subject dichotomy and reflect upon the power relations that are inherent in knowledge production (cf. Lykke 2010; Livholts 2012). We also find that participant observation enables us to capture experiences of international peacebuilding 'on the ground' (cf. Nordstrom and Robben 1995: 139). The interviews include citizens, local politicians, activists, NGO workers and Kosovar as well as international staff from various external organisations that operate in Kosovo (e.g. EULEX, UNMIK, ICO).[3]

The article unfolds in three parts. The first part provides a critical reading of peacebuilding through the lens of norm diffusion and challenges mainstream interpretations of the interplay between global ideas and local agency. This is followed by the development of a theoretical framework that captures the power dynamics of norm diffusion and foregrounds local actors and actions in frictional peace-building encounters. Three registers of local agency are conceptualised: localising agency, co-opting agency and counteracting agency. This is followed by an in-depth empirical analysis of local agency and resistance towards the transplantation of liberal democratic norm package in Kosovo. Finally, the article concludes by recognising that peace-building encounters always generate friction as the promotion of the so-called global or universal norms in post-conflict societies is met with some form of resistance by a register of local agency.

The diffusion of the liberal democratic peace through the practices of peacebuilding

Recent research struggles to understand how global norms travel to societies emerging from violent conflict (Richmond 2010; Mac Ginty 2010b; Belloni and Jarstad 2012). In much of the norm diffusion and mainstream peace-building literature there is an inherent normative bias towards liberal global norms and an assumption that the adoption of these norms represents positive progress (Finnemore 1996; Risse *et al.* 1999; Chesterman 2001, 2004; Paris 2004, 2010; Tannenwald 2007). The reference to 'global' as in global norms is often a prefix for universal moral frameworks and cosmopolitan awareness as well as for the ability to move across borders. In contrast, 'local' often tends to refer to particularities, contextuality and lack of mobility. Thus, our reading of peacebuilding in conflict-ridden societies reveals how the 'global' norms of liberal democratic peace underpin the internationally mediated peace agreements and guide the externally promoted and funded peace-building process. Such a reading also demonstrates that norms we call 'global' are often uploaded and circulating 'local' norms (cf. Levitt and Merry 2007; Björkdahl and Höglund 2013). The perception that these global norms are 'universal' means

that 'norms that are rooted in other types of social entities — regional, national, and sub-national groups' — are often ignored (Legro 1997). Hence, norms and practices of peace and democracy derived from outside the global North/Western democracies are rarely recognised and absorbed by the international peace building discourse.

Turning to the critical peace-building literature, which has been more attentive to the dilemmas of transmission of 'global' norms to post-conflict spaces, it is possible to zoom in on how these norms are received (Björkdahl 2007; Talentino 2012; Zahar 2012). International peacebuilding functions as a channel for norm diffusion, through which a specific set of 'global' norms are bundled together under the umbrella of the liberal peace and transmitted to post-conflict societies (Paris 2010; Richmond 2010; Talentino 2012; Zahar 2012). Such norm diffusion process produces meetings between 'global' and 'local' norms, actors and practices that, in turn, create new hybrid arrangements as the 'global' and the 'local' merge, co-exist, and/or compete (Mac Ginty 2011; Richmond and Mitchell 2012). Hybrid peace, hybrid political orders as well as hybrid peace governance are ways in which hybridity has been conceptualised in relation to peacebuilding (Mac Ginty 2010a; Belloni and Jarstad 2012). Hybrid outcomes of the global-local interplay are often regarded as more authentic than the liberal democratic peace promoted by external peacebuilders. Three important contributions to the norm diffusion literature can be derived from recent critical peace-building research: critical exposure of power asymmetries, the importance of politics and hybrid outcomes, and an enhanced focus on local agency.

Power asymmetries

The aspect of power asymmetry is visible in the frictional encounters between the global peace-building industry and the post-conflict society. Such encounters unmask an unequal power relationship with international domination and local subordination in most spheres of peacebuilding. Both the peacebuilding and the norm diffusion research provide analyses of agency which are biased towards the role and influence of external agents of norm export, that is, international peacebuilders acting as 'teachers' of good governance, peaceful conflict resolution, rule of law (cf. Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Keck and Sikkink 1998). The 'recipient' of norms, that is, the war-torn society, is frequently ignored in this literature, which often views such societies as *tabula rasa* and downplays the agency of local actors. When the recipients of norms are brought into the analysis it is often the political elite that is in focus. It is believed that, through various 'learning' processes, the local elite will be socialised into accepting the new normative package and, by adopting these norms, gain legitimacy from the international community (Checkel 1999). Alternative agents that work in the margins to localise global norms, or that resist the liberal democratic peace package or co-opt the norm diffusion process, are rarely analysed.

The politics of norm diffusion

The tendency to regard peacebuilding mainly as a technical process that does not require local agency, in combination with an inclination to privilege norm senders in norm diffusion, magnifies the perception of passive local recipients of global norms lacking agency (Chandler 2004). Roland Paris' argument that institutionalisation should precede political liberalisation is based on the premise that politics without strong institutions can lead to the recurrence of conflict (Paris 1997, 2004). Hence, much of the peace-building research has focused on designing formal institutions to support the idea of the liberal democratic peace rather than on how the underpinning norms are perceived by local actors or how they fit with the local context (e.g. Fukuyama 2004; Paris 2004).[4] For example, the norm of democracy inherent in liberal peace is narrow and institutionalised mainly in the practice of free and fair elections. Democratic practices outside 'electionism' are rarely imagined in peace-building processes (Pugh and Cobble 2001). Yet, politics cannot be 'on hold' while liberal democratic institutions are established. Politics is ever-present in the peace-building process as will become obvious in our analysis of localising, co-opting and counteracting agency. Thus, internationally sponsored peace accords are highly political in the sense that they outline a new political framework containing the norms of a new post-conflict order (Cousens and Kumars 2001). A critical reading of norm transfer through peace-building processes questions the ability of international actors to construct and export the liberal democratic peace and zooms in on local agency and efforts to shape a peace of their own making.

Local agency in the process of transferring global norms

Prior research on norm diffusion through peacebuilding has not captured sufficiently the need for local agency to bring about norm change in transitions from war to peace. Yet, important research by Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry (2007) discusses the role of local agents in vernacularisation, that is, the process of appropriation and local adoption of global norms. In a similar vein, research by Amitav Acharya (2004, 2009) on norm localisation highlights local agents' effort to reconstruct foreign norms to ensure that the norms fit with their cognitive priors and identities. This research demonstrates that local actors are not passive in norm diffusion processes but may actively seek or resist change. By tapping into the local turn in critical peace-building research, local agency in post-conflict societies is highlighted further (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). It is clear from recent writings on critical agency in peacebuilding that it is not always easy to conceptualise agentive subjects in post-conflict settings, nor to pin down who these agents are and what they do that adds to the translation of global norms (e.g. Mac Ginty 2010a; Kappler and Richmond 2011; Richmond 2011; Jabri 2013; Björkdahl et al. 2015). In this article, we contribute to this body of work with an investigation into the

relationship between global norms and a register of local agency, and we attempt to think more closely about the friction between global norms and local resistance. Theoretically, we aim to advance conceptualisations of local agency and explore how such agency is exercised as well as differentiate between different registers of local agency that may be performed in norm diffusion processes. Consequently, interest lies in frictional encounters between global norms and local agents and between various local agents with competing stakes and claims in post-conflict society.

Foregrounding local agency in peacebuilding

Challenging the idea that institutions should precede politics, this article explores the problems for the liberal democratic peace to take root in post-conflict societies by zooming in on frictional encounters between global norms and local agency. We adopt an approach here that makes it possible to critique the dichotomy between the global norm exporter and the local norm importer, the political dynamics and democratic deficit of peacebuilding, as well as the monolithic understanding of local actors. Without privileging or romanticising local agency, this framework is premised on the assumption that different forms of resistance towards democratic peace rest with various local actors that attempt to invest peace with the political, societal and cultural characteristics of the post-conflict society and construct a 'peace formula' that resonates with society.

The framework proposed here builds on insights from critical peace research and adds to this research agenda in three key respects. First, it views norm diffusion to post-conflict societies through the prism of friction, allowing us to capture the conflictual interplay between global norms and a register of local agency. Second, it proposes that norm diffusion is neither a result of the inherent persuasiveness of the exported norms, nor a product of elite socialisation, but a complex and interactive process of various modes of resistance outside and inside the process of peace-building. Third, such an approach to norm diffusion brings to the fore local agency and allows for localisation, co-option, and rejection of the norms of the liberal democratic peace, and it opens up a space for differences in the willingness to import this norm package between various segments of society.

By locating agents in the post-conflict time and space, we investigate how a register of local agents lays claim to emplaced knowledge and grounded experiences and how they claim to be the legitimate representatives of the post-conflict society. Our theorisation of three registers of local agency does not exclude agency to evolve and unfold in the same space, at the same time, in parallel, competition or complementarity, providing a cacophony of local voices speaking back to the global. It focuses our interest in the potential for transformations towards multiple peace(s) and turns our investigative gaze beyond the formal spaces of peacebuilding. It serves our ambition to access 'peacebuilding from below', which engages agentive subjects

that construct, adopt, resist or reject norms pertaining to peace and are seldom thought of as agents of norm diffusion and peacebuilding.

Friction

To grasp the abrasive, unequal and unpredictable ways in which global, so-called 'universal' norms travel to and through particular spaces and times, we build on the notion of friction (cf. Shaw 2007: 187). Friction provides us with an understanding of the co-constitution of the global and the local, as well as with a necessary feedback loop through which local agents speak back to the global blurring these boundaries (Björkdahl *et al.* 2016). It assists us to disclose the unequal relationship between the international peace-building community exporting these norms and the recipients of the normative package, that is, the post-conflict society, and it unmasks the hidden power relations in post-conflict spaces that challenge the diffusion of global norms. Furthermore, through the lens of friction, we can take into account local power asymmetries between different communities and sections of the recipient society (Tsing 2005). Persuasive ideas travel across difference and are charged and changed by their travel. Attending to the 'frictional' travel of the norms pertaining to liberal democratic peace means that both repressive top-down imposition of peace and local resistance can be captured (Björkdahl and Höglund 2013). This opens up a space for understanding local agency both as oppositional but also as accommodating since encounters between the global and the local 'can be both a site for empowerment and for domination' (Mannergren Selimovic 2010: 24). In a sense, the 'global' and the 'local' are in constant confrontation and transformation with each other (Tsing 2005). As actors, ideas and practices rub against each other at sites of peacebuilding, new power relations, agencies, ideas and practices emerge that may or may not resemble their originals. Although the encounters we focus on entail a contest between actors, ideas or practices, 'the outcomes of frictional engagements are by no means determined to have negative consequences for the long-term prospects of peace, development and democratisation' (Björkdahl and Höglund 2013: 290).

Resistance

Much interaction is regarded as frictional as power and resistance to power often come into play. The process of norm diffusion is a case in point as diffused norms often face resistance of some form, as norms are never transferred into a void. Rather, norm diffusion is contingent upon the relational interplay between norm senders and norm recipients and their contexts. To capture the constitutive role of local agency in frictional encounters with 'global' norms, practices and agency, the concept of resistance is used. Resistance becomes a useful concept to understand the role of different agents in the deployment of power. As Foucault states: 'if there was no resistance, there would be no power relations, because it would simply be a matter of

obedience' (Foucault 1997: 167). Consequently, this understanding not only makes resistance constitutive of power, but also inherently and always present in relations of power (Foucault 1978). In processes of norm diffusion, 'global' norms are always translated into practice in a certain locality and through frictional encounters that contain resistance and produce agency (cf. Foucault 1978). This makes resistance towards norms more complex and multifaceted as it stretches across a wide spectrum. On the one side of the spectrum, resistance can take antagonistic forms that counteract advanced norms and produce opposing alternatives. On the other side, resistance can also include agentive subjects that embrace the diffused norms but make their own interpretations of and alterations to the norms in order for them to fit the local context (cf. Foucault 2009).

Consequently, our understanding of resistance differs from how resistance is usually understood in peace studies. Whereas scholars such as Richmond or Mac Ginty understand resistance as one possible counterpart to power, in contrast to, for instance, co-option or compliance, we understand resistance as one form of power present in all power relations (cf. Foucault 1997; Mac Ginty 2011; Richmond 2011). This incorporates a wider set of actions into the production of norms and acknowledges that even marginalised actors can resist power to some extent and in some ways (Butler 1990). Instead of labelling certain acts as resistance towards norms and other acts as compliance, we acknowledge the inherently relational nature of norm diffusion and understand some form of resistance as always present in frictional encounters that produce a register of agency. In this way, the diffusion of norms is nuanced, the dichotomy between the active external producer and the passive local recipient of norms is challenged, and the constitutive role of local actors in norm diffusion is acknowledged.

Agency

An initial step in our effort to unpack agency is to expose the fuzzy border between actor and agency. A defining component of 'agency is the achievement of change, in contrast action presumes no such transformation' (Shepard 2011). Recent conceptualisations of local agency have explored the acts of resistance towards external peace-building efforts (e.g. Richmond 2010; Kappler and Richmond 2011). Although these contributions to critical peace-building research have been valuable in making visible local agents that perform resistance, the search for the local agent has mostly taken an interest in acts of resistance to power, not the agents as such. Our ambition is to deepen the understanding of agency by investigating the agency generated by frictional encounters with external peace-building discourses and practices. Thus we conceptualise three registers of agency: localising agency, co-opting agency and counteracting agency that is performed in response to the transfer of global norms to post-conflict spaces. Empirically, we trace how such a register of

agency unfolds in spaces of friction where the international peace-building community meets the local post-conflict society.

Localising agency wrestles with the dilemma of presenting global and presumably 'universal' ideas about peace and democracy in terms that correspond with notions of peace and democratic participation in the post-conflict society, yet are sufficiently different to challenge local inequalities, post-conflict divides and injustices in order to create a 'grounded' peace (cf. Levitt and Merry 2007). They unpack the liberal democratic peace, assess and negotiate its norms, and reframe and adjust them to present a set of norms that resonates with the local context. Such peace localisers are also engaged in local processes to construct and articulate local notions of peace that may confirm or challenge the normative underpinnings of the liberal democratic peace (Björkdahl 2012). This talking back to the global level is a feedback loop that may alter the normative content of the liberal democratic peace (Björkdahl and Höglund 2013). Local formulations and implementation of peace are not unproblematic and some local institutions, norms and practices are not necessarily legitimate or conducive to constructing a just and durable peace. At the same time, many elements key to establishing a liberal peace are already part of the local community, such as autonomy, resources, liberation, customs, identity and society (Richmond 2011). Localisation, it seems, rests partly with local agents' ability to invest the global democratic peace package with local attributes.

Co-opting agency implies an agency that situates itself within the framework of the global norm package but without accepting all of its normative substance. By strategically selecting only the politically useful norms, interconnected norms are ignored, deemed useless and inappropriate (Franks and Richmond 2008). This is often the case, for instance, with norms pertaining to transparency, anti-corruption or minority rights, which are frequently transferred to post-conflict societies undergoing processes of democratisation. In short, co-opting agency engages with norms in a strategic, instrumental and manipulative manner resulting in a 'fake adoption' of the normative framework (cf. Devic 2006; Franks and Richmond 2008; Björkdahl and Gusic 2013). Thus, such agents refuse to accept the entire normative package and selectively adopt only certain strategically useful norms. The frictional encounters between the promoted global norms and co-opting agency yield ambiguous norm adoption as these agents co-opt the global norms and hijack the norm diffusion process for their own strategic purposes.

Counteracting agency resists the normative frameworks promoted by the international peace-building community and points to inconsistencies between the norms diffused and the peacebuilders' practices on the ground, claiming that the international peace-building community is not practicing what it preaches (Foucault 2009; Vardari-Kesler 2012; Cocozelli 2013). As such, the liberal democratic framework is not regarded as a normative content to adapt, or to adopt strategically, but as imposed externally. Resistance to and rejection of the global norm package is used strategically to attempt to enhance the legitimacy and power of certain local agents

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(Mulaj 2011). The normative framework is depicted as undemocratic or colonial and its 'nice words and big promises' are seen to hide practices of power and domination as well as double standards and hypocrisy. Thus, attempts are made to reject, displace and oust it (Peterson 2009; Zaum 2009; Björkdahl and Gusic 2013). At times, resistance and rejection are accompanied with (re)articulations of alternative norms and (re)inventions of practices that are envisioned to replace global norms and practices. Resistance can be expressed in different ways, for example, by not participating in elections, by engaging in various forms of political activism outside conventional political spaces, or by constructing and upholding parallel institutions. Thus, counteracting agency discredits external norms, formulates alternatives, and undermines the existence of imposed normative frameworks.

Local agencies in Kosovo

The theorisation of three registers of local agency is employed in our empirical investigation of frictional encounters between global norms diffused through external peace-building practices in the post-conflict space of Kosovo. The external involvement in Kosovo has evolved over time, and a broad range of global organisations has been engaged in the post-conflict space of Kosovo.[5] In the aftermath of the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999, UNMIK was mandated to place Kosovo under the UN rule until Kosovo's future status was agreed upon. This mission held executive, legislative and judicial competencies and was to gradually turn these over to the newly constructed Kosovar institutions. In connection with the unilateral declaration of independence in 2008, ICO was given the task to supervise Kosovo's independence, yet again with full executive, legislative and judicial competencies until 2012 when the mission ended. Parallel to ICO, EULEX was set up to assist local institutions in strengthening Kosovo's rule of law. The mission was given executive powers to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate sensitive cases such as war crimes or high-profile corruption. The current EULEX's mandate expires in 2016. However, the continued presence of UNMIK and EULEX[6] as well as ICO[7] means that the external involvement in Kosovo is ambiguous and somewhat contradictory. What adds to this complexity is the EU presence in the form of the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the continuous influence of dominant Western governments. This means that even if the direct external governance of Kosovo has ended, Kosovo remains under international influence.

Localising agency

Localising agency attempts to translate global norms into local contexts. Although disagreements regarding the normative content might exist, the central feature of localising agency is that such local agents share the normative content of the

transferred 'global' norms and, therefore, attempt to adapt the norms in order to implement them on the ground. However, this normative agreement rarely implies that the encounter between global norms and local context is without friction or resistance. Rather, localising agency unfolds and evolves in a dynamic and relational interplay with external and local counterparts, as well as the local context in which these agents operate. In this process, the agents adapt to each other in ways that change their relations and the content of the normative framework.

To illustrate the process of localising agency, we turn to Community Building Mitrovica (CBM), a local NGO in the city of Mitrovica in northern Kosovo. Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs run CBM jointly; to a large extent, CBM operates across the Mitrovica divide[8] and in tune with the norms advanced by external peacebuilders. It has grown from a small NGO into a substantial player in Mitrovica with widespread activities and competences. In its statute, CBM defines itself as a 'non-profit and civil society organization […] that identifies, encourages and facilitates joint actions of citizens in the Mitrovica region in order to promote cooperation, co-existence and democratic culture' (Community Building Mitrovica 2014: Article 1). The ambition is to encourage co-existence, build democratic capacity and strengthen good governance. CBM bases its work on the principles of equality, transparency and accountability, and it works to involve the local community (especially women, youth and minorities) (ibid.: Article 7).

Still, CBM challenges the methods of norm diffusion, which causes frictional encounters that reveal CBM's agency. In discussions with CBM members, it becomes clear that even if CBM, to a large extent, operates according to their understanding of these global norms, the members are frustrated with the ways in which external peace-building actors attempt to advance them. As the former director and one of the founders of CBM asserts:

> [P]eople are frustrated, because nobody asks them about what they want, what their vision for this city is, this goes for Albanians and Serbs. Nobody ask anybody, this local ownership, it does not exist. That is why the situation is like it is, it is the wrong approach towards the problems in Mitrovica that have led to this situation. The strategies of the International Community do not work […] all strategies [for Mitrovica] are formed and written somewhere else, the people [of Mitrovica] are never asked about anything, they are never included into anything, everything comes from the outside. (Former Head of CBM, personal interview by author, 27 November, 2011)[9]

Although CBM embraces the global norms underpinning the peace-building mission, the diffusion process is resisted as it is perceived to be neo-colonial, counter-productive, and out of touch with people's experiences (current Head of CBM, personal interview by author, 30 November, 2011). Thus, CBM attempts to localise global norms by distancing itself from external actors and de-emphasising the connection between global norms and the norms that CBM advances. CBM adapts

'global' norms to make them resonate with the local context. Members of CBM find that external peace-building actors do not always practice what they preach when it comes to democracy and tolerance, and this gap between global norms and practices undermines CBM's localising efforts.

> We do a lot around here, but we do not provoke, we do not use the 'Republic of Kosovo'[10] anywhere, just the territory of Kosovo. We follow laws from Pristina, but we try not to provoke. We need to be flexible and pragmatic in order to create a space for people to interact […]. It works, but the approach needs to be flexible. Declaratively going in as the 'Republic of Kosovo' is not the right way, but unfortunately strangers are declarative and talk about [that the Kosovo Serbs need to start] 'accepting reality of the Kosovo institutions'. But people like me that said that more work is needed [in dealing with the problems in Mitrovica] were ignored. A sustainable progress and development cannot be achieved because the right actors are not included. [The right people] are people that live here, work here, and plan to stay here, not these from the outside. (Former Head of CBM, personal interview by author, 27 November, 2011)

CBM resists by not allowing external actors to dictate their agenda and by organising projects parallel to the externally initiated projects. CBM focuses on projects that have substance (music classes, transparency monitoring, or assisting small-scale enterprises) and avoid principal questions of Kosovo's independence that deter local Kosovo Serbs (local EUSR official, personal interview by author, 16 November, 2011). CBM thus embraces the normative substance of 'global norms', while dismissing the incoherent external peace-building practices through which these norms are diffused. Externally dictated benchmarks, unsubstantial aims, implied superiority, and reproduced hierarchies stand back for locally formulated needs and rights (cf. Duffield 2007; Björkdahl and Höglund 2013). This local interpretation of global norms is derived from their own 'learning by doing' and positions Mitrovica and its citizens as active producers of norms rather than passive recipients of imposed global norms. This approach is summarised neatly by CBM's current director, who also delivers an implicit critique of external practices:

> We try to be careful to not impose things […] we try to not bring people together and say: 'now you have to talk', but we try to make it natural, that way it is sustainable. (Current Director of CBM, personal interview by author, 30 November, 2011)

The global norms of liberal democratic peace are generally embraced and localised by CBM, illustrating the organisation's localising agency. Not only does its statute correspond to global norms, but its everyday work, in projects, and towards the contested ground that is Mitrovica, is imbued with ideas of human rights, inclusion and democracy. It is a translation of global norms that builds on CBM's own visions and alternatives and finds resonance as well as resentment on the ground. From the

perspective of peacebuilding and norm diffusion, CBM's localising agency in Mitrovica has unfolded and evolved in interplay with other norm producers and generated insights that 'global' norms need to be adapted and that external actors are unable to make 'global' norms take root without local translation (member of CBM, personal interview by author, 19 June, 2014). CBM's work has changed from a separate resistance parallel to other local and external actors to a more engaged involvement. Today, CBM cooperates with numerous other NGOs as well as external actors, some of its projects have become independent organisations, and it has contacts with external organisations, media and various levels of government (local political analyst, personal interview by author, 27 November, 2011). It develops policies, produces analyses of the future of Mitrovica and lobbies for its agenda. CBM activities have created a better match between the diffused norms and the local context (current Head of CBM, personal interview by author, 20 June, 2014). External actors have come to realise gradually that successful norm diffusion relies on local agents with the ability to translate and localise global norms.

Co-opting agency

Although some actors embrace and attempt to localise 'global' norms, co-opting agents adopt diffused global norms strategically and selectively, in what can be characterised as 'fake' adoption. Certain aspects of the normative package are ignored while other aspects are emphasised and prioritised, not because of their normative content as such but due to their appropriateness as a means to an end (Franks and Richmond 2008; Richmond 2011; Charbonneau 2012). Thus, this co-opting agency is characterised by politically savvy agents who are 'talking the talk but not walking the walk'. Over time, the co-option of norms tends to result in deviation from the diffused global norms as new meanings are produced locally.

Co-opting agency is here foregrounded through frictional encounters between the Kosovo Albanian political elites and the diffused global norms. The external vision for Kosovo is a multi-ethnic and civic polity based on global norms of inclusiveness, equality and human rights for its entire population. This vision is produced by and guaranteed through the establishment of democratic institutions, good governance and rule of law (ICO official, personal interview by author, 17 November, 2011; cf. Gheciu 2005; Peterson 2009; Ernst 2011). The local Kosovo Albanian political elites, on the other hand, strive consistently for international recognition and a 'full-blown Kosovo Albanian nation-state' (Krasniqi 2012: 360). In more concrete terms, the local elites want a speedy exit of the external supervision, and Kosovo Albanian dominance of Kosovo (Gheciu 2005; Franks and Richmond 2008; Mulaj 2011).[11] Yet, the Kosovo Albanian elites do not reject the global norms but employ democracy, accountability and legitimacy in a systematic and strategic way to end the external presence. This is the essence of co-opting agency. The local Kosovo Albanian elites do not share

the external vision for Kosovo, but find that they have a lot more to gain by paying lip service to these norms instead of just rejecting them.

With reference to these global norms, the external governance of Kosovo is accused of being an undemocratic enterprise that contains a 'tension between the norms around which [it] define[s] its role, and its actual governance of Kosovo' (Gheciu 2005: 122). While not embracing democracy as such, the Kosovo Albanian elites have an opportunity to capitalise on the democratic deficit that the external governance creates and subsequently 'mak[e] strategic use of democratic norms to advance their political interests' (Mulaj 2011: 253). From the global norm package the elites select self-determination as an imperative while resisting related norms such as minority rights and rule of law (Ernst 2011: 127). Adopting an 'appropriate' rhetoric in line with the external discourse, they seemingly rush to the defence of democracy, pointing to the discrepancy between the promoted norms of liberal democracy and the undemocratic practices of the external peacebuilders, such as lack of accountability and transparency (Gheciu 2005: 122; Lemay-Hébert 2012). The local elites claim that, as the external peacebuilders are not practicing the democracy they preach, they should withdraw and allow the Kosovar people to govern themselves. In essence, the norms promoted by the external administration provide the framework within which the local elites are able to claim their rights to exercise control over their own affairs (Gheciu 2005: 134; Ernst 2011; Mulaj 2011). They refuse to implement certain decisions of the external missions as these decisions are not made democratically by the population of Kosovo (Gheciu 2005; Ernst 2011; Mulaj 2011). As argued by Dominique Zaum (2009: 198), 'even if local elites do not necessarily accept the legitimacy of particular norms, they can strategically employ and reinterpret them to argue against the presence of international administrations, to push for more local participation in the statebuilding process, and to support exit from the mission'. This co-option means that the external presence slowly lost its legitimacy and was forced to transfer power successively to local power holders in order to bridge this gap between norms and practices (Ernst 2011; Mulaj 2011).

Today, there are few signs that the local elites' use of global norms is anything but co-opting agency. The local elites show little interest in upholding and actually adhering to any of the norms they employ to weaken the external actors. Instead, consolidating power is more important than turning norms pertaining to transparency, equality or rule of law into practice (cf. Boyle 2010; Ker-Lindsay 2012; Krasniqi 2012). Corruption is widespread, nepotism common, and minorities are discriminated systematically (Peterson 2009). Thus, the co-opting actors instrumentalise global norms to end the external presence, while systematically refusing to adhere to them. Resistance in frictional encounters between 'global' norms and the Kosovo Albanian elites has resulted in a 'fake adoption' of the externally promoted norms of democracy, where 'the Kosovo Albanian majority monopolises political, social and economic institutions, freeriding upon

a majoritarian democratic discourse to serve the goal of an independent Kosovo Albanian state' (Franks and Richmond 2008: 91). Through co-opting agency, the norm diffusion process is undermined while the peace-building process is steered away from its goals of a multi-ethnic Kosovo.

Counteracting agency

Other agents declare their opposition publicly, resist the imposed norms, and work actively for an alternative way of structuring socio-political life (Vardari-Kesler 2012). This *modus operandi* with open resistance and vocal counter-conduct is here conceptualised as counteracting agency. The resistance of counteracting agents is open and confrontational resistance that produces antagonistic friction and strives to undermine the norm diffusion. Although the localising and co-opting actors work within the normative framework and utilise it for their own political goals, counteracting actors mobilise and work outside and against the diffused norms. The Vetëvendosje! movement[12] represents this form of agency in Kosovo. Vetëvendosje! resists openly the external norms and actors that uphold this framework. The movement participates in the political frameworks of Kosovo as well as takes the resistance into the street, meaning that it tries to oppose the external normative framework in every way possible (cf. Mouffe 2013). It is probably the most vocal political movement in Kosovo, while the Kosovo Albanian elites also perceive it as one of the most 'destabilising' movements (Krasniqi 2012; Vardari-Kesler 2012).

The global peace-building discourses of UNMIK, ICO and EULEX are met with firm resistance by Vetëvendosje!. The diffused norms of multiethnicity, civic citizenship, and a shared Kosovo are understood as imposed and 'established according to the principles and framework of colonisation, non-recognition and disdain for the country's sovereignty' (Vetëvendosje! 2013b: 1). In this sense, both the way in which external actors operate in Kosovo and the diffused norms by which they operate are resisted. Vetëvendosje! accuses the external actors in Kosovo of being 'above the law which they are here to implement', unaccountable to the people they govern, and lacking a separation between executive, legislative and judicial powers (ibid.). The movement stresses that it is impossible to appeal decisions and that oversight is lacking, while lamenting the sustained influence of external actors after the end of the supervised independence. The external presence is understood as colonial with hegemonic aspirations and correctional powers and simply 'contrary to our interests' (cf. Cocozelli 2009, 2013; Vetëvendosje! 2013b: 1). The external presence is understood as the 'antithesis of our self-determination', while the external insistence on multi-ethnicity and non-unification with Albania is understood as 'the denial of people's will' to be part of Albania (Vetëvendosje! 2013a: 2). The unilateral

declaration of independence in 2008 has not changed this relation between the Kosovar people and the external administration according to Vetëvendosje!:

> Despite Kosova's declaration of independence, we will continue to be governed by an unelected and unaccountable international administration, which consists now of not just one, but three missions: International Civilian Office, EULEX and UNMIK. The very existence of these missions as executive administrations denies us our right to enjoy the independence and sovereignty declared on 17 February: our right to freedom from Serbia and to democratic government. […] We are not opposed to international guidance and expertise, but we are opposed to being governed by internationals. (Vetëvendosje! 2013a: 1)

The presence of international peace-building missions in Kosovo is seen as 'installed from outside and not chosen from inside' (Vetëvendosje! 2013c: 2). In essence, it is an 'anti-democratic regime' that (re)produces the same domination as Serbia once did (Vetëvendosje! leader Albin Kurti, quoted in Lemay-Hébert 2012: 1835). By rejecting global norms and practices, Vetëvendosje! claims that it advances the democratic will of the people, individual freedom as conditioned upon collective self-determination, and Kosovo as a Kosovo-Albanian state that should unite with Albania.[13] They claim that 'we do not need pseudo-institutions because they mean we have no right to decide for ourselves' (Vetëvendosje! 2013a: 1) and they want to 'allow Kosova to be governed by its own sovereign and freely elected Assembly' (Vetëvendosje! 2013d).

Vetëvendosje! deconstructs the inconsistencies of democratic norms and undemocratic practice, unmasks the implications of external governance as virtual and empty 'independence', and finds ideas such as a non-Albanian Kosovo unacceptable (Vetëvendosje! 2013c: 2). Although it might seem that their resistance is focused mainly on the methods and behaviour of the external presence and not on the imposed norms as such, Vetëvendosje!'s calls for democracy and self-determination challenge the norms of multiethnicity, civic citizenship, and Kosovo as a state shared between all its groups (UNMIK official, personal interview by author, 23 June, 2014). Vetëvendosje!'s understanding of democracy is largely monoethnic and non-inclusive.

Vetëvendosje! sees the Kosovo Albanian elites and the external actors as interdependent and mutually benefiting from the *status quo* in Kosovo. As a result, both need to be resisted. But because the political system is seen as biased and corrupt, Vetëvendosje!'s campaign originally took place through activism in public spaces, such as deflating the tyres of the UN vehicles and 'adding an "F" and a "D" to UN, making it "FUND", loosely meaning "end" in Albanian' (Lemay-Hébert 2012: 1835). Other vehicles have been given parking tickets for 'parking in the wrong spot — Kosova' (ibid.), while EULEX, the acronym for Kosovo (KS) and the word 'experiment' have been mixed to read 'EULEKSPERIMENT' in graffiti all over Kosovo. Additional activities are sitting protests, wrapping buildings of external administrations in tapes reading 'Crime Scene/Do not Cross' and demonstrations

(Vardari-Kesler 2012: 164). In 2008, Vetëvendosje! dumped a substantial amount of trash in front of UNMIK's headquarters, accusing the mission of not producing anything but waste. Thus Vetëvendosje!'s counteracting agency 'constructs a model of collective action which is not perceived as instrumental *per se*, but as a normative praxis since it frames civic participation as the essence of citizenship and as the foundation of a democratic society and a sovereign state' (Vardari-Kesler 2012: 175). This is also done by working within the criticised institutions in order to work against them. In December 2010, they participated in the parliamentary elections for the first time and became the third largest party, a position they maintained in the 2014 elections. In November 2013, they won the local elections in Pristina where Vetëvendosje!'s candidate, Sphend Ahmeti, was elected mayor. Today they use the parliament as an arena for opposition to what they see as a corrupt government and policing external administration, and to present Vetëvendosje! as an alternative that emanates from the 'will of the people' (Vetëvendosje! 2013a: 2). Thus, those unsatisfied with the state of affairs and the local elites and external actors are given a voice in the public debate. The actions and ideas of Vetëvendosje! resonate mainly with young, urban voters critical of the functioning of the Kosovo state.

Thus, the frictional encounters between the externally imposed norms and the resistance by Vetëvendosje! reveal counteracting agency. The normative framework is openly rejected, deconstructed and blocked. The counteracting agency of Vetëvendosje! is evolving from a student and grassroots movement engaging in unconventional modes of resistance to a major political player that participates in the very institutions it regards as corrupt, such as the Kosovar parliament. The global norms only fill the function of a warning example or a punch ball and, as such, they are refuted consistently and continuously.

Conclusions

The three registers for local agency examined here have unmasked the power dynamics of norm diffusion via peace-building missions, and have revealed frictional encounters as diffused global norms are resisted by local agency. Pointing to this friction between 'global' and 'local' and the various agencies that these encounters produce, we have attempted to challenge the dichotomy between the global and the local. Thus, the scalar levels of the global and the local at the heart of our analysis and their interactions — their frictional encounters — draw attention to the social construction of space and agency over time. Global and local are not ontological entities but the result of exchanges and engagements. In this article, we have found that a relational perspective of space such as global and local, which emphasises their mutual constitution, is helpful in order to penetrate deeper into the process of frictional encounters and how agency is produced.

The analysis has also brought to the fore resistance performed by these various agents in the local context. We have unpacked local agency without pretending to provide more than snapshots of the workings of such agencies and the complexity of exercising agency in post-conflict spaces. We find that local agency can also be a disguised 'global agency' co-opted by the international peace-building community to speak on its behalf. We also find some 'global agency' to be grounded in the post-conflict space and to question or even resist the imposition of global norms in the local post-conflict context. Our analysis of agency challenges the monolithic conceptualisation of the 'local' as we have identified a register of agency situated in the post-conflict spaces of Kosovo and we have shown that such agency is complex, multifaceted and never absent. Our analysis also challenges the standard under-standing of the norm recipient, that is, the post-conflict space of Kosovo as a unitary actor or at least a homogenous group of agents with a similar response to the diffused norm. It has also revealed an important feedback loop issuing from the post-conflict society, where diffused norms are met with different responses as the local agents talk back to the global, making alteration and/or modification of the global norms and the mechanisms for norm transfer possible.

Thus, the encounters between global norms and local agency depict the post-conflict space as a site where asymmetric and diverse power relations are challenged and various forms of agency are expressed in resistance to the projection of the so-called 'global' norms. In Kosovo, imposed norms usually fail to resonate with local actors, but even when there is congruence between local and global norms external actors are portrayed as inadequate partners for peace and democracy. The situation on the ground seems to be shaped largely by local values and practices. Even in cases where there is movement towards 'global' norms, local actors rather than external ones seem to be the driving force. This calls for a revaluation of external assistance to post-conflict areas, as the groundwork and everyday involvement seem to be utilised most efficiently by local actors.

To conclude, this theoretical and empirical endeavour contributes to the ongoing debate in the peace-building research about localness, local agency, and local ownership by differentiating between different local agencies in post-conflict space and by studying the 'global' and the 'local' as mutually constituted through frictional encounters. It also adds to the evolving research on hybrid peace and hybridity in peacebuilding by developing the concept of friction, which defies a simplistic understanding of peace-building processes as a channel of norm diffusion and instead recognises the inherent conflictual elements of such endeavours.

Notes

1 Although the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 did provide the legal foundations for the post-conflict mission, the NATO invasion itself was not mandated by the UN. Thus, to see the international presence in Kosovo since 1999 as monolithic would be deceiving.

2 In Kosovo, but also in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus, Macedonia and Northern Ireland.

3 Full anonymity has been offered to the research participants that have been engaged, a choice some made due to the intricacy of their positions and/or safety concerns that are part of everyday life for some subjects in Kosovo and especially Mitrovica.

4 March and Olsen (1998: 948–49) define institutions as a 'relatively stable collection of practices and rules defining the appropriate behaviour of a specific group in a specific situation' and 'broad enough to encompass things as varied as collections of contracts, legal rules, social norms, and moral precepts'. Hence, institutions here refer also to a collection of norms such as those underpinning the liberal democratic peace.

5 For global norms in Kosovo and the Kosovar democratisation process after 1999, see Ernst (2011), Ker-Lindsay (2012), and Cocozelli (2013). For the democratisation process in Mitrovica, see Gusic (2015).

6 EULEX operates officially as if Kosovo is not independent.

7 ICO operated in support of Kosovo's independence.

8 See Björkdahl and Gusic (2013) and Gusic (2015) for more on the divide of Mitrovica along the Ibar river.

9 Interviews used in this article were conducted by co-author Ivan Gusic.

10 This is something that often provokes the local Kosovo Serbs who do not support or recognise Kosovo as an independent state.

11 Indeed, there is clear disagreement among the major Kosovo Albanian political parties when it comes to internal Kosovar politics, illustrated by the difficulties to form a government after the elections in 2014 and the instability that has followed ever since. However, when it comes to the external involvement in Kosovo, they have been united in their resistance towards it.

12 The word means 'self-determination' in Albanian.

13 Thus, even if the imposed norms are not read in the same negative manner in which Vetëvendosje! interprets them — that is, not seeing Western democracy as a chimera and a smokescreen for colonialism — their ideas still counter liberal democracy and its focus on the individual, multiethnicity, and a civic Kosovar identity.

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