A CONCEPTUAL UNPACKING OF HYBRIDITY: ACCOUNTING FOR NOTIONS OF POWER, POLITICS AND PROGRESS IN ANALYSES OF AID-DRIVEN INTERFACES

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Abstract

The concept of hybridity is increasingly employed as an analytical tool to explore the varieties and outcomes of externally led interventions, and in some cases is portrayed as a desirable political project that could stimulate alternative and counter hegemonic programming. This article critically explores this trend in peace and development studies by examining some of the tenets and critiques of the concept of hybridity with the aim of furthering its development as a useful conceptual tool. It also explores the underlying normative implications and rhetoric that underpin some of the work on hybridity in these fields. In doing so, it offers a set of queries that could be used to explore practices, impacts and potential alternatives in peace and development programming.

Keywords: hybridity, peace, development, power, local agency, critical theory, normativity, emancipation

If hybridity is pervasive, as most scholars seem to agree, then we do need to call it as it is and develop conceptual tools to tackle its vexing ambiguity (Kraidy 2005, 70).

Introduction

Alongside an emerging consensus among scholars and practitioners regarding the inadequacies, if not failures, of liberal models of externally led peace and development assistance is a growing recognition that critiques of these models are also saddled with a number of their own limitations. While studies pointing out the theoretical and practical flaws of these now ubiquitous modes of liberal aid have proven useful in challenging the often flawed logic and negative impacts associated with external assistance, they have also been open to many criticisms, including their tendency to homogenise practices and impacts of aid and to offer only critique as opposed to alternatives. These ‘critiques of the critiques’ have led scholars and practitioners to seek out not only new ways of understanding the dynamics of interventions, but also potential alternatives to the dominant liberal model.
In recent years, the concepts of ‘hybridity’ and ‘hybridisation’ have been put forward as a response to some of the limitations associated with critiques of liberal peacebuilding and development. These concepts are increasingly being employed as analytical tools to explore the many varieties and outcomes of externally led interventions, and in some cases are portrayed as desirable political projects that could stimulate alternatives and counter what is perceived to be hegemonic, externally driven liberal programming. The study of hybridity involves the examination of a range of practices, responses and agencies – including plural forms of acceptance and appropriation, resistance and the exertion of autonomy … in the process of hybridisation, actors [both locally and internationally based] reshape the norms, institutions and activities in question by means of everyday practices such as verbal interaction, organisation and even overt conflict (Richmond and Mitchell 2011b, 1).

This growing body of literature (Heathershaw and Lambach 2008; Global Governance 2012; Mac Ginty 2010, 2011; Pugh 2011; Richmond 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Richmond and Mitchell 2011a) suggests that a clearer picture of the actual functioning of aid could emerge from a careful exploration of the collision between the ‘local’ and ‘external’ – the interface between the ‘traditional, indigenous and customary’ and internationally supported external peace and development operations (Mac Ginty 2010). Other studies, though not always using the term ‘hybridity’ explicitly, also provide insights into the trajectories and impacts that result when international actors and interventions interact with local actors and structures (Autesserre 2010; Heathershaw 2009). Studies of hybridity thus involve the interactions of a wide array of actors involved in an even wider range of activities through which multiple hybridities are evidenced and created. While much of this work primarily seeks to objectively understand the workings of these interfaces, underlying some scholarship in this field is a normative assumption that depicts the promise of and preference for hybrid models.

While much of this work primarily seeks to objectively understand the workings of these interfaces, underlying some scholarship in this field is a normative assumption that depicts the promise of and preference for hybrid models.

This article critically explores this trend in critical peace and development studies through an examination of some of the tenets and critiques of the concept of hybridity. It seeks to further the development of hybridity as a useful conceptual tool and also explores the underlying normative implications and rhetoric that are seen to underpin some of the work on hybridity in these fields. In doing so, it offers another set of queries and problems that could be used to explore the practices, impacts and potential alternatives in the fields of peace and development programming.

Analytical Utility: Reflections from Post-colonial and Cultural Studies

Hybridity has a long history and has been used in a multitude of debates and disciplines, ranging from the biological sciences and (controversially) race in the Victorian era to modern communications theory (for a good history of the term, see Kraidy 2005).
However, it is from the field of post-colonial studies and in particular post-colonial cultural theory that the term is most clearly articulated in relation to understanding modern cultural, social and political relationships. So while hybridity is extensively used to explore post-colonial themes in novels such as Findley’s *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984) and Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000), and as a framework for socio-cultural commentaries in works such as Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1993) and *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002), post-colonial theory’s contribution of the term has also found increasing currency in the analysis of externally driven peace and development interventions.

The concept of hybridity is most often attributed to the work of Homi K. Bhabha, who in one work defines it as

> the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal … It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but re-implicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power (1985, 34–35).

It involves what Bhabha also terms ‘processes of mimicry’ whereby between the coloniser and the colonised there emerges a ‘desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite … in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference’ (1994, 122). This mimicry, or repetition, of the colonial order ‘does not merely “rupture” the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a “partial” presence’ (Bhabha 1994, 123). In these original articulations of hybridity and the processes associated with it emerge the themes of resistance to domination and the creative power of the ‘other’ underlying currents that arguably give the term an undeniable appeal to those interested in economic, political and social justice, an issue that will be explored below.

Beyond Bhabha and in simplified terms, hybridity also ‘refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2000, 118). It is from this more straightforward understanding of hybridity that much of the work on peace and development interventions is drawn. Analytically, it is the notion of the ‘contact zone’ (i.e. between local and external) and the creation of ‘new forms’ (i.e. non-liberal or post-liberal) that resonate most clearly in current usages of hybridity within the fields of peace and development studies. In these analyses, the traditional ‘colonial power’ under scrutiny (primarily European states, but also neocolonial powers such as America) is replaced by liberal, externally driven aid interventions. Such a replacement should not be viewed as being too analytically problematic as current iterations of post-colonial theory accept that geographically based empires of the past have been replaced by non-spatially bound processes of globalisation (Ashcroft 2001), including the modes of intervention under discussion here. What does need to be problematised, however, is the conceptual and normative utility of the concept of hybridity in terms of it allowing for effective analysis of current interventions and the imagining of alternative practices of aid delivery. It is to these questions that the article now turns, again making use of the post-colonial literature to explore both the benefits and limitations of the concept.
Why hybridity? The value of employing hybridity as a conceptual lens

The concept of hybridity has been heralded as a tool that aids researchers in moving away from what have come to be seen as unhelpful binaries (Moreiras 1999) such as modern versus traditional, Western versus non-Western and towards thinking about the multiplicity of outcomes that might occur when two entities meet and interact. In this sense, the images of homogeneous forms or impacts dissipate and are replaced by a range of more complex and context-specific realities. As a correlate of this, through the collapsing of binaries, notions of universals are challenged – there is no good versus evil, no right or wrong, just a series of iterations and in-betweens to be analysed and judged on their own merits.

It is the shift away from these binaries and absolutes that appears as the primary appeal of hybridity and hybridisation in the analysis of peace and development programming. The use of these concepts allows for a more accurate and context-specific exploration of the actual interfaces of peace and security interventions. The lens of hybridity allows for both the recognition of hegemony (the external liberal model, which can be characterised as homogenous to a degree) alongside the contextual, heterogeneous specificities of the locale. Thus, hybridity becomes a conceptual tool through which scholars and practitioners can simultaneously explore and assess the problematic dominance of interventions and the reality that no two interventions are identical in terms of implementation processes or impacts. This analytical tool allows for the critique of liberal interventionism to exist alongside and within the recognition that policy and practice are an amalgam of different factors such as localised political allegiances and culture. The dominance of liberalism can be assessed without collapsing into a stereotype of an all-encompassing ideological behemoth. In sum, this helps critics of externally led liberal interventions to manage one of the most common counter-critiques against them – the tendency of assessments of liberal interventions to homogenise. At the same time, the critique against the universal (liberal) notions of progress and ‘the right way of doing things’ can be somewhat maintained as it remains within the scope of analysis.

Another key analytical advantage of using the lens of hybridity is the way in which it grants individual agency a greater role in analysis, which in turn allows for a heightened understanding of differences between cases and in terms of exploring specific examples of resilience and adaptability (Ashcroft 2001; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002; Kraidy 2005; Mac Ginty 2011). This focus on agency has struck a chord with those seeking to produce more accurate reflections of peace and development interventions. For ethical reasons of escaping the paternalistic (even if well intentioned) critical approaches, which arguably place too much emphasis on the power of external actors and formal institutions, but also for the more tangible goal of accurate representations of interventions, understanding the active role aid recipients play in the implementation and progress of programming is essential.

Analytical hurdles: what can be missed or skewed through the hybridity lens

As with all analytical approaches, post-colonial theory faces a range of critiques (Childs and Williams 1997; McClintock 1992). However, of all the conceptual tools of post-colonial studies, it is hybridity that has emerged as one of the most debated and contested (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2000, 119–121; Drichel 2008; Hutnyk 2005; Loomba 1991;
Pieterse (2001) sums up the tone of the responses as the ‘anti-hybridity backlash’. While there is not space to explore all of the concerns related to the use of the concept, a few key debates emerge. The purpose of exploring these critiques is not to deny the overall utility of hybridity as a conceptual tool, but to challenge scholars and practitioners to think more carefully about the terminology, categorisations, assumptions and politics that a hybridity approach entails.

A character in Zadie Smith’s novel *White Teeth* reflects, ‘you go back and back and back and it’s easier to find the correct Hoover bag than to find one pure person, one pure faith, on the globe. Do you think anybody is English? Really English? It’s a fairy-tale’ (2000, 204). In reflecting on this quotation, Moss (2003) problematises the notion of purity, finding that despite offering to advance analysis beyond simple binaries and universals, analyses of hybridity still problematically rest on essentialised notions of the ‘other’. For example, hybridity in the post-colonial sense reflects on the meetings of two defined subjects – the colonial power and the colonised subject. Thus, although hybridity attempts to move analysis away from homogenous forms, these two subjects are, paradoxically, themselves homogenised, treated as pure, definable entities. Questions therefore emerge regarding the capacity of hybridity to drive us conceptually forward by moving us away from binaries and the homogenisation of groups. If one admits that there is no pure form, then the entities that are supposedly engaged in hybridisation are likely themselves hybrid, hybridised from an earlier set of encounters (and so on and so on back through history). Is the value of the concept of the hybrid reduced as one is forced to accept that it is based on multiple hybrids that came before it?

That hybridity requires one, perhaps unwillingly, to essentialise groups (both the local and the external) in order to engage in analysis of the hybrid is problematic. As an example, if one were to explore the interface between the NATO forces in Afghanistan and the local security forces with which they interact, the standard operating procedures, political interests and values of each of these two entities would need to be clearly set out and contrasted. However, in that process, do we not skew the story by ignoring the hybridity of NATO itself and thus lose some of the important details of the narrative (i.e. that the Canadians operating in Kandahar are involved in creating a socio-political outcome that is different to what is produced in British-controlled Helmand)? Likewise, in terms of considering the hybridity between local governance structures and NATO troops, are important aspects of the story missed by not understanding that the urban Afghan elite are themselves a hybrid of Western-influenced politics, culture and Afghan tradition, whereas local leaders in the border regions with Pakistan are distinctly different ‘hybrids’? In exploring one particular interface, do we ignore other forms of variation or historical or political factors that perhaps explain the locale more effectively? The issue of essentialising and the methodological problems entailed in relation to this critique are discussed below, but are worth raising here to point out that the possibility of greater nuance and clarity through the use of the lens of hybridity are not guaranteed, as analysts must still make assumptions and judgements on categorisations that could skew findings in the same way that binaries and universals often do. The possibility of greater nuance and clarity through the use of the lens of hybridity are not guaranteed, as analysts must still make assumptions and judgements on categorisations that could skew findings in the same way that binaries and universals often do. This is not to suggest that because all actors are themselves products of hybridity the term is inherently flawed. What it does suggest is the need for greater methodological clarity. Researchers interested in exploring hybridity need to consider
carefully who or what entities they seek to analyse and more carefully justify the use of that actor. Part of this justification must necessarily explore the limitations of selecting said actors as their unit of analysis and more time should be given to considering the limitations of their choices in the way detailed in the Afghanistan example above.

A second and perhaps more problematic critique of hybridity relates to the absence or downplaying of issues of injustice and power (Tanikella 2003; Pieterse 2001). Specifically, Hutnyk (2003) notes how within subaltern studies, Marxist lenses with their focus on revolution and injustice were replaced by what some see as the overtly less political focus on hybridity. More generally, the concern is that although the subaltern, the colonised, are seen as being active agents in creating both the colonial and post-colonial order, the overall approach of viewing the world through the lens of hybridity leads to a situation whereby it ‘becomes possible to forget colonial violence, white supremacy, systematic exploitation and oppression: for those who can join the “belonging” reserved to the compliant elite fraction of hybridising capital, hybridity saves’ (Hutnyk 2005, 96). Others make similar claims, arguing that the use of hybridity risks becoming ‘a celebration of syncretism and hybridity per se, if not articulated in conjunction with questions of hegemony and neo-colonial power relations [and] runs the risk of appearing to sanctify the fait accompli of colonial violence’ (Shohat 1992 quoted in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002, 206). In focusing on the ways in which colonial subjects have interacted with colonial powers, by accepting and exploring various degrees of agency, are the violence and injustice of colonial power and indeed other modes of domination pushed to the background?

In relation to peace and development programming, one must question what power differentials might be displaced via an analysis of hybridity. It is argued here that there is potential for two sets of power differentials to be pushed to the background. First, there are concerns that power differentials at the local level might be overlooked. Hutnyk’s (2005) discussion of ‘hybridising capital’ is instructive as it highlights that not all actors will be in the same position or have the same ability to engage international actors in the same way. Aid recipients in urban areas, certain ethnic groups, local elites, men and Western-educated locals will interface with international actors in ways that are perhaps more balanced, assertive or ‘progressive’ (a concept discussed in more detail below) than those in rural areas, women, small minority groups and those who have not had access to formal education. An example from a current intervention illustrates this concern. The Albanian majority in Kosovo, through hybridisation with the international peace and development community, has created a unique political system that has largely worked to its advantage. The Serb community and other ethnic minority groups in the country, such as the Roma, engaged differently both quantitatively and qualitatively with the international mission, largely due to the realities of power in post-conflict Kosovo, and thus much of the inequality faced by these communities remains. These intricacies of power and difference are not immediately or easily exposed through the basic notion of hybridity and its focus on the interfaces between international actors and ‘the local’, though it is possible that such power narratives could be integrated if researchers were also aware of such dynamics. Of course, it might be possible for analysts to justify the need to categorise, and thus essentialise, a particular subject based on the need to bring a particular area to light – perhaps in line with Spivak’s notion of ‘strategic essentialisms’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2000, 79). However, as seen above, there are problems associated with doing so which must be weighed in relation to ethics and research aims.
At the geopolitical level as well, one must question whether issues of power and injustice are properly integrated, or could be, in analyses focused on hybridity. While there are, of course, problems with homogenising actors from the global South (for example, there are great differences between Brazil and Uganda in terms of their ability to influence the global aid agenda), there remain wider structural inequalities of wealth and power between the global North and South, between large international organisations and small civil society groups. Where do these global power differentials fit in the employment of hybridity? In relation to this concern regarding power, one must reflect back on the argument that one of the perceived strengths of this lens is that it has provided commentators with a clear tool through which to respond to critiques that the critics of liberal peace and development programming have unfairly homogenised the international aid industry and its varied modes of intervention. One must in turn question whether the critics of liberalism have become too sensitive to this critique directed against them. Is it not right to maintain the focus on the overall political, military and economic imbalances that allow for particular models of intervention to remain dominant? Just as there are concerns that hybridity as used in post-colonial studies perhaps glosses over the injustices of colonialism, does not a turn to hybridity threaten a sustained critique against liberal modes of intervention that have led to policies such as structural adjustment programmes and flawed and violent interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq? By explaining these systems as being partly a result of hybridity and interfacing with ‘the local’, by suggesting that local actors are willingly involved, is there not a concomitant risk of partially blaming the victim or possibly suggesting that local participation justifies continuing along the same track? This problem will be further explored below in relation to the progress narrative that often accompanies analysis that adopts a hybrid lens.

These reflections suggest that when utilising hybridity as an analytical frame, there is a balance to be struck in terms of focusing solely on agency on the one hand and more structural analyses of power on the other. Mac Ginty’s work (2010, 2011) provides a useful tool for managing this tension by offering insights into how to understand the conditions under which hybridity might take one form or another (i.e. more progressive and perhaps liberating modes of hybridity). Such forms would include investigating the compliance and incentivising power of the liberal peace agents as well as the ability of local actors to resist, ignore or adapt liberal peace and to install and maintain an alternative system.

**Methodological constraints and considerations**

In exploring the analytical utility of hybridity in relation to peace and development programming, there are numerous methodological considerations to be made, a comprehensive review of which is beyond the scope of this article. However, one of the dominant critiques coming out of post-colonial studies is worthy of a brief discussion. Regarding the creation and analysis of narratives surrounding colonial subjects, the subaltern and those dominated by colonial or neo-colonial structures of power, there is a concern that stories continue to be told and interpreted through the eyes and mouths of elite intellectuals. This has led to substantial ‘suspicion toward the high priests of hybridity – expatriate, Western-based intellectuals’ (Kraidy 2005, 66; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002; Spivak 1988). Although linked to much wider debates regarding the production of knowledge, this concern is particularly worthy of note given the focus of studies of hybridity in attempting to understand and expose ‘the local’. Many researchers are cognisant of this problem already. For example, Mac Ginty (2011) explicitly raises the issue of research on hybridity being undertaken primarily by privileged, northern intellectuals (on balance, men) noting that
this is more than a matter of translators and gatekeepers; it relates to the ways in which knowledge is collected, expressed, and legitimated… immense quantities of social, political, cultural and economic phenomena – many of them doubtless highly significant – pass unnoticed (Mac Ginty 2011, 4).

This concern resonates with Spivak’s famous piece, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988), a foundational (though often misunderstood) piece of the post-colonial studies canon:

Spivak’s essay is not an assertion of the inability of the subaltern voice to be accessed or given agency, but only a warning to avoid the idea that the subaltern can ever be isolated in some absolute, essentialist way from the play of discourses and institutional practices that give it its voice (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2000, 79).

While this concern over the legitimacy of the northern intellectuals’ voice and finding the authentic voice of ‘the local’ does not equate to a devaluing of hybridity research, it does pose an open challenge to those engaged in this research to (re)consider their methodologies, collaborations and avenues for publication in respect to the goals of accurate and ethical data collection, production and dissemination.

The Progress Narrative Underlying the Hybridity Rhetoric

The above section has considered the utility of hybridity and hybridisation as analytical tools for exploring the realities of peace and development programming. In doing so, it has provided both scholars and practitioners who design, monitor and evaluate programming with a set of queries and problems to improve their research and reflection on their own practice. However, as alluded to in the above analysis, the rhetoric of hybridity suggests that the real utility of identifying and exploring hybridity lies in its potential to expose and perhaps unlock preferable alternatives to current modes of peace and development programming. This underlying belief in hybridity is again traced back to Bhabha, who, viewing examples of the interaction between the colonised and the coloniser, characterised hybridity as ‘unconscious, yet disturbing and interruptive. It renders colonial authority ambivalent, uncertain’ (Werbner 2001, 136). Bhabha ‘celebrates [hybridity] as a symptom of resistance by the colonised, as the contamination of imperial ideology’ (Kraidy 2005, 58).

The supposed transformative power of hybridity has likewise found much resonance in the fields of critical peace and development scholarship and practice, which has also at times hinted at or highlighted the revolutionary or emancipatory promise of hybridised forms of peace and development. In development studies, one perhaps sees this made explicit in the concepts and projects surrounding alternative and sustainable development. In peacebuilding policy, we also witness a belief that hybridity could lead to unique and innovative processes that Western liberalism would not have come up with on its own, or could not conceivably engage in without the ‘other’ (such as hybrid courts in Sierra Leone, gacaca courts in Rwanda or hybrid peace operations in tandem with the African Union or Arab League).

These notions of progress sit well with many of those in the critical camps of peace and development scholarship and practice. A ‘hybridity as progress’ rhetoric underlying some research imbues analysis with an aura of hope, suggesting that the phenomenon under consideration might represent a challenge to the hegemonic discourse of liberalism that allows one to imagine that an alternative is possible. It engenders a sense of hope that
liberal models are not ‘the only deal in town’ (Mac Ginty 2010, 399). Such utopian idealism is not absolute in current works of hybridity, but it is indeed present and possibly is motivating the shift to hybridity. For example, while one study gives much attention to the analytical utility of the concept, it is introduced with an implicit endorsement of hybridity as a form of progress, stating that ‘this book recommends the concepts of hybridity and hybridisation as a way of overcoming hegemonic narratives of conflict and internationally supported peace interventions’ (Mac Ginty 2011, 2). Other key works in this emerging field likewise allude directly and indirectly to notions of the inherent progress to be unleashed through hybridity. A key metaphor of the progress narrative – the idea of resistance – has likewise found its way into the works of hybridity as it relates to current peace and development programming (Bhabha 1985, 1994; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002, 217). For example, the introduction to one of the latest and largest comparative collections on hybridity includes the phrase ‘spaces of resistance in liberal peacebuilding’ as a key analytical category and purpose of analysis (Richmond and Mitchell 2011b, 4; see also Pugh 2011; Richmond 2010, 2011a, 2011b).

A belief in progress through hybridity needs to be carefully problematised for several reasons. Some of these have already been alluded to and are related to issues of power. As not all actors are able to hybridise and engage with external interventions in the same way, the ability for hybridity to be transformative and revolutionary might be limited to specific groups within the locale, creating new or augmenting old power imbalances. More problematic though is the aforementioned issue that by exposing hybridity and highlighting the role of ‘the local’, the colonised, the subaltern in creating or participating in specific modes of intervention, one is perhaps unwittingly signifying their responsibility for the shape and outcome of the programme or their tacit approval of the system. Indeed, external actors involved in interventions have historically employed language and technologies that imply that local actors are themselves central in their own underdevelopment and insecurity. Others argue that the concepts of self-reliance, self-management and personal resilience as the ultimate goals of development programming have long been used to mask the role of powerful global actors and inequalities in underdevelopment (Duffield 2001, 2007, 2008). Hybridity arguably runs the risk of providing a similar function in the realm of international aid provision. Pointing to hybridity could be used to justify the actions of the hegemon or to absolve it from blame when its best-laid plans are co-opted by its local partner. In this way, the concept of hybridity could lend itself to supporting hegemonic power rather than challenging it. Here we see that hybridity as a label suits the powerful quite well. While in practice it could open up new spaces and reveal alternative interactions and institutional arrangements, it is also possible that powerful institutions will recognise how the valorisation and acceptance of difference ‘sells well’ and could lend legitimacy to their projects (Hutnyk 2003). Is it possible that dominant liberal institutions will point to their use and acceptance of hybridity as a defence against some of the charges of neocolonialism and ideological self-interest directed against them? The constant refrain of the involvement and cooperation of Arab states in the Libya intervention by NATO and Western leaders suggests this as a possibility. The increased use of ‘hybrid peace operations’ and ‘hybrid courts’ and promises of ‘local partnership’ likewise hint at the trend towards hybridisation as a badge worn by those seeking greater legitimacy.

**Contributions to a Research Agenda, or Hybridity – So What?**

It is clear from the above that while there are clear analytical advantages in employing a lens of hybridity in peace and development programming, they need to be balanced
against the potential analytical hurdles involving the defining of hybridising entities, local and global power dynamics and methodological realities. Likewise, the discussion suggests caution in relation to the progress narrative that tends to shadow the use of hybridity. None of this discussion is meant to critique or discourage the use of hybridity analytically or politically, but is offered as an attempt to tackle Kraidy’s (2005) concern regarding the ‘vexing ambiguity’ surrounding hybridity and to contribute to the debates that seek a more accurate understanding of the problems and processes of peace and development programming. In reflecting on the promises and pitfalls of using hybridity in post-colonial theory and peace and development studies, it appears that the analytical category of hybridity will persist. Such a research agenda should not be seen as useful only to academic researchers reflecting on what has been or is occurring in the aid arena, but also to policy makers and practitioners who create programming, who engage with local communities on a daily basis and who must post-facto evaluate practice to determine what has and has not worked. These reflections and categories will also assist in highlighting the problems of local-international interfaces and options for changing or altering programming based on such reflections. So in response to Pieterse’s (2001) challenging reflection, ‘Hybridity, So What?’, the following thoughts on advancing a research agenda on hybridity in relation to peace and development studies are put forward.

First, the question of what, or indeed who, is the appropriate analytical category emerges as a key debate. In relation to understanding peace and development issues, it appears that one of the main problems is that nearly all of the current analysis continues to put ‘the liberal’ or ‘the West’ at the centre of analysis. In critical peace studies, for example, the focus remains on juxtaposing ‘liberal peacebuilding’ with the ‘rest’. This is granting too much analytical power to the dominant liberal interventions and thus potentially missing some of the real potential to be found in the concept of hybridity (which is about identifying alternatives). To correct this, consider Moss’s evaluation of hybridity in Smith’s White Teeth, where she asks, ‘What happens when the centre has been moved?’ (2003, 12). For this reason, scholarship could perhaps incorporate the concepts of moving centres and the utility of placing alternative metropoles at the centre of analysis in regard to hybridity. The former would take into account the changing nature and institutions of liberalism, which have in the course of history and even in shortened modern time frames put forward a series of moving targets and desired institutions. In this sense, the temporality of hybridity could also become a focus (Drichel 2008), with scholars assessing whether and how major changes in regard to liberal institutionalism and other large historical shifts alter processes of hybridity. Incorporating the latter concept, alternative metropoles, could also move analysis away from the dangers of both reifying and justifying liberal discourses. With the emergence of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) in the fields of peace and development programming, could we expand our studies of hybridity to explore the interfaces between the external and the local where the external is not one of the ‘usual suspects’? If the goal is to understand alternatives, exploring forms of South-South hybridity emerges as extremely fruitful. Likewise, policy makers and practitioners could draw on the lessons from analyses of these alternative practices. More simply, policy makers could adapt and borrow from examples of best practice found within these alternative metropoles and moving centres. Assessing the ways in which a wider range of actors (both historically and geographically) have engaged with local communities might offer insights into new policy options. As the aid arena changes and new funding opportunities from the emerging powers become possible for
NGOs and their staff, exploring what those at alternative centres have to offer could be both programmatically and financially useful.

Second, studies could move towards a more nuanced understanding of hybridity by encouraging clearer thinking about the different types of hybridity and the paths and reactions to it. Practitioners could also seek to incorporate these different paths into their evaluations of programming – tracing more efficiently the different impacts that their engagement has had on different communities and groups within their operational field. This type of evaluation could improve future planning in terms of thinking about how to create more efficient or legitimate modes of local-external interaction. In relation to types of hybridity, Pieterse’s (2001) distinction between symmetric and asymmetric hybridity offers a starting point that could be built upon to ensure that power relations are integrated within analyses of hybridity. Werbner’s reflection, that ‘more than just celebrating hybridity, we need to ask whether cultural movements are critical and emancipatory or conservative and exclusive’ (2001, 149), is in line with this type of categorisation and could be used to protect against some of the problematic narratives of progress associated with the use of hybridity. Other movements towards exploring the different types of hybridity include Bakhtin’s (1981) differentiation between organic and intentional hybridity (see also Werbner 2001). The idea that some forms of hybridity emerge out of the practices of the everyday have found resonance in the post-colonial literature (Moss 2003), but also in the emerging peace and development literature on hybridity, with a focus on notions of the everyday peace (Richmond 2010, 2011).

Other notions of hybridity (especially those focused on resistance) suggest that hybridity is less a natural outcome of the interfacing of actors than a calculated or purposeful strategy. Future research could attempt to explore this potential difference in the type of hybridity and question whether there is a relationship between these and the various paths to hybridity or the reactions to it. Given that there appear to be numerous forms of hybridity, it would also be useful, both for the sake of analysis and for informing practice, to investigate the varied paths to or technologies of hybridity, and in doing so assess if there is a relationship between these and the varied types of hybridity. Post-colonial studies offer examples of various modalities of hybridity, including forced assimilation, social conformism, mimicry and creative transcendence (Moss 2003). Richmond and Mitchell’s comparative analysis of hybridity in the areas of peace and development programming is moving the debate forward in this regard, with some of their analysis exploring different logics and strategies of hybridity, including technologies such as co-optation, diversion, resistance and autonomous counter-organisation (2011b, 9–10). A greater comparative understanding of the outcomes of different technologies of hybridity would be particularly useful in the policy and practice arena as it would yield insights into the positive and negative outcomes of various approaches to engagement and perhaps aid in the selection of local initiatives that could be most useful to support the aims of a given institution.

Finally, more investigation into the varied reactions to hybridity by external actors would be useful in addressing the concerns regarding inherent progress narratives. Hybridity is in some cases seen as a threat. In literary studies, this manifests itself through the entrance of ‘cyborgs’ or ‘zombies’ in the narrative. In peace and development studies, however, one sees it in the guise of discomfort with the cultural or the religious, for example by keeping a separation between the church and state, or attempting to abolish local
patronage systems in new democratic institutions. Thus, in some cases one witnesses hybridity being strictly controlled and in others deliberately destroyed (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002; Childs and Williams 1997; Pieterse 2001; Hutnyk 2005). Future research into hybridity could explore the various reactions to hybridity and try to understand if there are triggers or tipping points at which hybridity is disallowed or destroyed. At what point does the currency of engaging in hybridity with the ‘other’ lose its value? Such findings could prove invaluable to external actors seeking to support local organisations, providing them with greater knowledge in relation to how powerful actors react to difference and challenges to the status quo. Such knowledge could facilitate strategic planning in terms of identifying options that enable more legitimate, effective and progressive engagement between actors.

Likewise, more nuanced investigations into the varied ways that local populations (in particular, different groups within local populations) experience processes of hybridisation could be undertaken. This requires analysts to recognise that the consumption of and reaction to hybridity by local actors can also be quite varied and largely depends on their points of view and complex histories. Understanding and creating categories of different outcomes of hybridity might be useful in both bringing clarity to analyses and preventing a slide into an automatic association between the hybrid form and progress. The case of Kosovo offered earlier is again illustrative. The hybridity experienced by citizens of Kosovo and the international peacebuilding mission there has undoubtedly been consumed and experienced differently along ethnic, class and even gender lines, with some viewing the interface with the international as emancipatory, others as politically expedient and yet others as regressive or debilitating. These varied experiences of the same ‘hybrid moment’ need to be taken into account insofar as they not only expose the varied impact of local-international interfaces, but can also be used engage in more nuanced programme evaluation and in turn help practitioners in planning by considering and pre-empting the varied ways in which their interventions might be experienced by host communities.

As the article has shown, the utility of hybridity for exploring the interface between externally driven peace and development projects and local practices rests primarily in its ability to allow for more nuanced and context-specific explorations of the everyday practices of aid as they are experienced by both the intervening actors and the recipients of intervention. It could counter what is seen as a weakness of critical assessments in these fields – namely unhelpful homogenisations and generalisations related to processes and actors. Ethically, attempts to include or privilege the voice and actions of ‘the local’ are seen as countering a previous focus on the formal, national and international institutions at the expense of those who actually engage in the everyday and lived practices of peace and development. The article has put forward a series of problems, questions and challenges to researchers investigating hybridity with the aim of building on these analytical and ethical utilities. By extending analysis to consider the different forms, processes, outcomes and power dynamics of hybridities, an even greater understanding of interfaces of aid could be achieved. In turn, this would contribute not just to analytical clarity, but also to the goal of many critical scholars and practitioners, that of uncovering more just forms of peace and development.
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References


