Framing Post-Conflict Societies: An Analysis of the International Pathologisation of Cambodia and the Post-Yugoslav States

By Caroline Hughes and Vanessa Pupavac

A final proofed version of this article was published as follows: Caroline Hughes and Vanessa Pupavac (2005) 'Framing Post-Conflict Societies: International Pathologisation of Cambodia and the Post-Yugoslav States.' *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26 (6), pp. 873-889.

Abstract: The article examines the pathologisation of post-conflict societies through a comparison of the framing of the Cambodian and post-Yugoslav states. The notion of failed states fixes culpability for war on societies in question, rendering the domestic populations dysfunational while casting international rescue interventions as functional. The article suggests that the discourse of pathologisation can be understood not as a means of explaining state crisis so much as legitimising an indefinite international presence and deferring self-government.

Introduction

> From Haiti in the Western Hemisphere to the remnants of Yugoslavia in Europe, from Somalia, Sudan and Libera in Africa to Cambodia in Southeast Asia, a disturbing new phenomenon is emerging: the failed nation-state, utterly incapable of sustaining itself as a member of the international community.[1]

Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner's conceptualisation of "failed states" posits the origins of state failure as congenital, inherent in the "vast proliferation of nation-states" with decolonization.[2] They cast doubts not only upon the capacity of post-colonial states, but also the capacities of post-colonial populations for self-government. Drawing parallels between these populations and the insane, they propose forms of international trusteeship as the only viable solution for these societies:

> In domestic systems, when the polity confronts persons who are utterly incapable of functioning on their own, the law often provides some regime whereby the community itself manages the affairs of the victim. Forms of guardianship or trusteeship are a common response to broken families, serious mental or physical illness, or economic destitution. The hapless individual is placed under the responsibility of a trustee or guardian, who is charged to look out for the best interests of that person.[3]

In the decade since these comments, international supervision of so-called failed states has expanded, although these states are formally recognized as sovereign, and are not under formal trusteeship arrangements. While some parallels can be drawn, the contemporary mode of regulating these states is distinct from colonial rule. Formal colonial government

---

[1] Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner, "Saving Failed States," *Foreign Policy* (Winter 1992-3), 3.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.* 12.

was based upon the manipulation of local communities via their elites. Contemporary international government, by contrast, seeks the transformation of individual attitudes, via programmes of training and discipline. In the technologies of knowledge of contemporary international governance, we can see a shift from anthropological approaches to the government of indigenous societies, to social risk management approaches to the government of individuals, informed by social psychology perspectives.[4]

This shift towards "therapeutic governance"[5] goes hand in hand with the victory of free market economics as the governing ideology of the 1990s. Perspectives on conflict emerging from psychosocial foundations frame out of analysis questions of political or economic structure; they also downplay the significance of the state as the institutional expression of self-determination on the part of the political community. The complexity of inter-relations between the state, society and trans/international forces in a globalizing world is subordinated to the simple metric of the rationality of individual agency. Conflict is represented as a series of individual experiences of violence. States are portrayed as failed service providers run amok, separate from victimized and oppressed populations, even while preying upon them. Societies are viewed as formed of violated or violating individuals, whose actions spring in a hopeless cycle of conflict from psychological processes rather than from political beliefs or economic needs. This elision of political processes from the depiction of problems of conflict, oppression and poverty has opened the way for therapeutic approaches to intervention.

This chapter uses two case studies –Cambodia and the post-Yugoslav states – to illustrate the elision of politics from "failed state" rhetoric and to indicate the implications of this for interventionary policy. It is argued that the language of state failure and social victimhood forms a discourse that writes out sophisticated analyses of conflict. The complexity of politics, social and economic imperatives that both render conflict and violence an option for ordinary people, and determine responses to it, are ignored in favour of a view of conflict as causeless ("the confiscation of memory") and responses as traumatized ("the pathologization of populations"). In adopting this approach, contradictions between the universal imperative of liberal humanitarianism and the exclusionary imperative of territorial democracy are elegantly solved through the denial of capacities for autonomy to populations. Echoing colonial discourses which awarded rights only to "mature" populations, this discursive strategy delegitimates local politics and gives the green light for the disciplinary and rationalizing intervention of outside forces. By this means, the international discourse of failed states legitimizes perpetual international supervision.

This discourse has taken a populist and militarist turn since the events of September 11th. This turn is notable for the lack of self-consciousness with which it attributes irrational action to "barbarians at the gates" whose psychotic natures are assumed, rather than explained with reference to psychosocial models of conflict. However, similar consequences emerge from both the flamboyant militarism of the Bush Administration and from the sympathetic therapy offered by liberal accounts. In both cases, the distinction between empowered and disempowered is legitimised by obliterating the notion of the self-determining subject as the

[4] Mark Duffield, "Governing the Borderlands: Decoding the Power of Aid," *Disasters* 25.4 (2001).

[5] Vanessa Pupavac, "Therapeutic Governance: Psychosocial Intervention and Trauma Risk Management," *Disasters*, 25.4 (2001).

basis for government, denying the possibility of either liberalism or democracy for people in post-conflict societies.

Myths of Origin and the Confiscation of Memory

The spatial, temporal and theoretical framing of conflict by intervenors and analysts represents a significant exercise of power in the politics of post-conflict societies. Framing historical events in contingent understandings of relevant time and space puts particular actors "in the frame" while others remain outside it. In the case of both the former Yugoslavia and Cambodia, the notion of the failed state as the causeless cause of conflict has been promoted, in a manner which foregrounds, and renders inexplicable, the horrors of war. The international and local political and economic context for the initial descent into violence are framed out of analysis. Media, policy, and many academic reports of conflict in these two countries have focused narrowly on atrocities rather than on the causes of war. By reducing analysis of war to an unexplained spectacle of horror, the way is cleared for a redefinition of war itself, as a series of psychotic actions by individuals. The site of conflict becomes the irrational individual, and their acts are not the continuation of politics but of psychology. Pathological psychoses are central to the explanation of conflict, while reference to the coping strategies of survivors in these situations are fleeting and rare.

Framing war in this way omits two significant matrices of activity – those of society and of international relations – without which war becomes inexplicable and hence irrational. Omitting analysis of society precludes attention to the intertwined processes of identity formation and economic distribution, which constitute group allegiances and perceptions of survival imperatives. This prevents analysis of how group strategies for satisfying perceived basic needs are formulated. International relations are similarly framed out of analysis, as state failure is seen to arise purely from within national boundaries. For example, a joint report by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies and the Association of the US Army recently suggested that "failed states – *if left to their own devices* – can provide a safe haven for a diverse array of transnational threats… As such failed states can pose a direct threat to the national security of the United States and to the stability of entire regions."[6]

Instead, conflict and state failure are blamed upon imputed cultural and historical "legacies," offering an explanatory framework within which individual's actions appear as unthinking responses to cultural stimuli. Here, the cultural iconography of political rhetoric is mistaken for the substance of political motivation, so that the individual appears trapped in the thrall of a distant past, motivated by the concerns of previous centuries – a pre-citizen left behind by modernity, rather than a citizen responding to an imperfect modern world.

The significance of temporal framing to understanding the causes of warfare is evident in policy approaches to post-conflict rebuilding in Cambodia. Cambodia's history has long been framed in terms of two opposing points. The first is a supposed zenith from the tenth to the fifteenth century, when the Khmer Empire based at Angkor dominated mainland Southeast Asia, and created irrigation projects and temple networks commonly regarded as engineering and artistic masterpieces. The second is the nadir of the Democratic Kampuchea

[6] Centre for Strategic and International Studies and Association of the US Army, *Play to Win, Final Report of the Bi-Partisan Commission on Post-Conflict Reconstruction,* (Washington: CSIS and AUSA, 2003), 1, emphasis added.

regime of 1975-8, when a radical communist regime implemented social engineering projects that directly caused the deaths of millions.

For Western journalists the romantic juxtaposition of a lost civilization and a contemporary holocaust continues to dominate media portrayals of Cambodia. Frequently, the achievements of Angkor and the disaster of the DK are represented as intimately linked, even by international policy analysts. For example, Brown and Timberman in 1998 saw continued political turbulence in Cambodia as evidence for a cultural legacy illustrated in the depictions of ancient warfare carved in bas-relief at the ruins of Angkor:

> One can glimpse the tragic predicament of Cambodia in 1998 reflected in the history of the Khmer Empire in the ninth century as well as in the authoritarian habits of a civilization that flourished almost a millennium ago.[7]

Of the period between Angkor and the start of the civil war that brought the "Khmer Rouge" to power, relatively little has been written, permitting the assumption of cultural stasis informing Brown and Timberman's remark.[8] The era has been broadly portrayed as one of political, economic and military eclipse, temporarily arrested by the establishment of a French "protectorate" in 1863, a discourse energetically promulgated by the French themselves.[9] The fall from Angkor to DK is regarded locally and internationally as a "tragedy" of Cambodian history, briefly arrested by colonialism, suggesting an inevitability that separates Cambodian society from any sense of rational political agency in response to contingent events. This view has been challenged by David Chandler, the leading historian of Cambodia's so-called "dark ages." Chandler argues that the abandonment of Angkor's glories in favour of a more prosaic capital at Phnom Penh from the 15th century resulted from increasing involvement in regional commerce, prompting diversion of economic surpluses into more practical enterprises than temple-building.[10]

Significnatly, this "tragic" approach has enjoyed a resurgence in writings on Cambodia in the 1990s, as compared to the 1970s – the era of greatest destruction. For example, the US role in prompting Cambodia's disastrous entry into the Vietnam War in 1970s was examined critically in William Shawcross's 1979 study, *Sideshow: Nixon, Kissinger and the Destruction of Cambodia.* Shawcross introduces his book as "a look at the foreign policy side of Watergate," indicating the connection between this detailed exposure of international intervention in Cambodia and the decline in confidence in American institutions in the mid to late-1970s.

In the 1990s, with the United States back in the ascendant, the impact of international politics on the Cambodia conflict has been less emphasized and the discourse of "state failure" has prevailed. This is particularly evident in studies focusing on the United Nations' operation in

---

[7] Frederick Z. Brown and David G. Timberman, eds. Cambodia and the International Community: the Quest for Peace, Development and Democracy, (New York: Asia Books, 1998), 25.

[8] David Chandler, *AHistory of Cambodia,* 2nd ed., (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 1993), 271.

[9] Chandler, *op. cit.* 79, rejects this view, regarding "genuine decline" as occurring only from the late eighteenth century to the establishment of colonialism.

[10] Chandler, *op. cit.*, 79, 86/7, 98.

Cambodia from 1991-3 as a "new dawn" for a country whose civil war had become detached from international imperatives – and hence incomprehensible - following the Cold War's end. A key UN role in Cambodia was to verify the withdrawal of "foreign forces" from Cambodian territory. The successful achievement of this goal was noted in a Security Council resolution as "restoring to the Cambodian people and their democratically elected leaders their primary responsibility for peace, stability, national reconciliation and reconstruction in their country."[11] This assertion of re-established Cambodian sovereignty and responsibility was substituted, in a number of commentaries of post-intervention Cambodia, for a careful analysis of the effects of previous decades of intervention and occupation on social and political attitudes and structures. A number of accounts of the "new Cambodia"[12] have adopted a simplistic opposition between the failure of state/society and the rationality of international plans for rescue and redevelopment. This model eschews detailed analysis of the political and economic, local and international dynamics of politics in the 1970s and 1980s, or of the complexity of global-local relations in Cambodia in the 1990s. Rather, a tendency has emerged to return to analytical frameworks common in the 1950s and 1960s, focusing upon the emotionally-charged policy decisions of charismatic leaders,[13] in contention with rational international experts, set against an amorphous, passive, culturally static and "damaged" population.[14]

---

[11] Security Council Resolution on Transitional Period in Cambodia following the Withdrawal of UNTAC, S/RES/880 (1993), Preamble, pub. in United Nations, *The United Nations and Cambodia 1991-1995,* (New York: UN, 1995), Doc. 108.

[12] Reference to the "new Cambodia" harks back to UN Special Representative Yakushi Akashi's interpretation of the UN's mandate as "To Build A New Country, The Task of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia," *Harvard International Review*15 (1992/3): 34-5, 68-9.

[13] This was a discourse significantly promoted by Cambodia's post-independence leader, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, see John P. Armstrong, *Sihanouk Speaks,* (New York: Walker and Co, 1964). This conception of Cambodian politics was criticized by, among others, Michael Leifer, "The Cambodian Opposition," *Asian Survey* 2.2 (1962): 12; J.L.S. Girling, *Cambodia and the Sihanouk Myths,* Occasional Paper no. 7, (Singapore: ISEAS, 1971); Milton Osborne, *Politics and Power in Cambodia: The Sihanouk Years,* (Camberwell: Longman, 1973), 2. For contemporary examples of similar approaches, see David Roberts, *Political Transition in Cambodia 1991-9,* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 63; McAllister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloff, *Cambodia Confounds the Peacemakers 1979-1998,* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998), 104, 213-5; 297; Jarat Chopra, J. Mackinlay and L. Minear, "Report on the Cambodian Peace Process," Research Report no. 165 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 1993), 16; Mats Berdal and Michael Leifer, "Cambodia," in James Mayall ed. *The New Interventionism: the United Nations Peacekeeping in Cambodia, Former Yugoslavia and Somalia* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 39; Trevor Findlay, *The Legacy and Lessons of UNTAC,* (New York: OUP, 195), 87, 91, 92, 159.

[14] See for example, Jamie Metzl, "The Vietnamese of Cambodia," *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 8 (1995): 275; Grant Curtis, *Cambodia Reborn? The Transition to Democracy and Development,* (Washington: Brookings, 1998), 113; David Roberts, *op. cit.,* 42, 52, 62, 74, 147, 166; Brown and Zasloff, *op. cit.,* 21. 94, 104; David Ashley, in Brown and Timberman *op. cit.* 74.

In writing out a systematic analysis of international and local dimensions of the conflict, and the impact of these upon conceptions of politics and community prevailing in everyday life, this framing of Cambodian politics also writes out any conception of contemporary political agency on the part of ordinary Cambodians themselves. Thus anthropologist Judy Ledgerwood notes that, "in most discussions of Cambodian political and economic development, the vast peasant majority, living at subsistence level, is generally invisible and silent."[15] This echoes the situation in the 1950s and 60s. Historians David Chandler and Ben Kiernan wrote in 1983:

> We know a good deal… about 'politics at the top' in the Sihanouk era…; but how did the economic and social changes that swept over Kampuchea in these years affect the majority of its people? We know very little about local-level politics.[16]

A view of Cambodian politics as essentially the machinations of a tiny elite foisted onto a servile population is evident in the attitudes of many international policy-makers. For example, a long-running debate over an international tribunal to try former DK leaders has focused extensively on the political imperatives of different current leaders in supporting or obstructing the initiative, but there has been little attempt to survey the Cambodian population on the issue. Similarly, despite long-standing evidence that the commission of atrocities was widespread among party cadre across the country, the tribunal's international proponents have focused myopically on the prosecution of a handful of leaders, rather than a truth-telling exercise to promote wider reconciliation. Perhaps most tellingly, a group of experts commissioned to make recommendations on the scope of a tribunal recommended that this be limited to crimes committed between April 17 1975 – the date the DK came to power, five days after the evacuation of the US embassy in Phnom Penh – and 7 January 1978 – the date on which the Vietnamese army arrived there.[17] This limitation both decontextualises the crimes that took place as explicable with reference to the contemporary history and international relations of Cambodia and effectively exculpates foreigners from any responsibility.

In the case of the post-Yugoslav states, year zero for the origins of conflict appears to be lost in the mists of time. Following Duffield[18], accounts may be divided into "New Barbarian" and "multiculturalist" perspectives. The first group consists of those that see ethnic conflict as an endemic feature of the region.[19] History is portrayed as having a particular hold over the

---

[15] Judy Ledgerwood, "Rural Development in Cambodia: the View from the Village," in Brown and Timberman eds., *op. cit.*, 128.

[16] David Chandler and Ben Kiernan, "Introduction," in Chandler and Kiernan eds., *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea, Eight Essays*, Monograph Series no. 25 (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1983), 6.

[17] Ninian Stephen, Rajsoomer Lallah, Steven R. Ratner, "Introduction," *Report of the Group of Experts for Cambodia Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 52/125*, United Nations, 18 Feb. 1999, online at http://www.camnet.com.kh/ngoforum/un-report.html.

[18] Mark Duffield, 'The Symphony of the Damned: Racial Discourse, Complex Emergencies and Humanitarian Aid', *Disasters* 20.3 (1996): 173-193.

[19] Larry Diamond, *Promoting Democracy in the 1990s: Actors and Instruments, Issues and Imperatives*

population. 'For them, history is alive today', argues the historian Dennis Hupchick.[20] The protagonists are often characterised as being locked in ancient feuds.[21] The idea of South Slav atavism is reflected in book titles, for example, Robert Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*. The second group consists of those that characterise the war as Serbian aggression,[22] and to a lesser extent (since 1993) as Croatian aggression as well. In the second group, the culture of the Serbs is singled out as intolerant and atavistic. Historical memory is considered to have a peculiar hold over the Serbs and account after account seeks to analyse Serbian nationalism through the prism of the Battle of Kosovo of 1389.

Although accounts single out history, what is striking is the lack of analysis of the history of the Yugoslav state itself. While the first group regards Yugoslavia as a 'prison of nations' or a 'Balkans powder keg', the second group by-passes discussion of Yugoslavia as a multicultural state and instead elevates Bosnia as an embodiment of multiculturalism, although the inter-ethnic harmony of the latter was contingent upon the harmony of wider South Slav relations. The existence of the Yugoslav state is treated as artificial, the product of "traumatised nationalisms" and framed out of analysis. For example, Eric Hobsbawm writes of Yugoslavia as a failed state from its inception because of history:

> The explosive issues of 1988-92 were those created in 1918-21. […] Czechs were yoked to Slovaks for the first time, and Slovenes (formerly Austrian) with Croats and [...] across a millennium of divergent history, with the Serbs who belonged to Orthodoxy and the Ottoman empire.[23]

The one commonly cited reference point is the period of the Second World War when again Yugoslavia did not exist as a state and was under Nazi occupation. Symptomatic of this

---

(Washington, Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1995); Dennis P. Hupchick, *Culture and History in Eastern Europe* (New York, St Martins Press, 1994); Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York, St Martins Press, 1993); Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Pandemonium: Ethnicity in International Politics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993); David Owen, *Balkan Odyssey* (London, Indigo, 1996).

[20] Hupchick, *op. cit*., in note 8, 5.

[21] Carl Bildt, 'Response to Dr Henry Kissinger's Article in the Washington Post of September entitled, "In the Eye of the Hurricane"', OHR (14 September 1996), http://www.ohr.int/articles/a960914a.htm; Moynihan, *op. cit.*, in note 8, viii; Richard West, *Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1996), 339.

[22] Branimir Anzulovi□, *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide* (London: Hurst & Co., 1999); Roy Gutman, *Witness to Genocide* (New York: Macmillan, 1993); Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997); Branka Maga©, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracing the Break-up 1980-1992* (London: Verso, 1993); Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (London: Papermac, 1996); Stjepan Me©trovi□, Slaven Letica and Miroslav Goreta, *Habits of the Balkan Heart: Social Character and the Fall of Communism* (College Station: Texas A&M UP, 1993); Michael Sells, *The Bridge Portrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* (Berkeley,:University of California Press, 1996); Ed Vuilliamy, *Seasons in Hell: Understanding Bosnia's War* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

[23] Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 167.

marginalisation of the experiences under the Yugoslav state, there has been more reference to the 600-year-old Battle of Kosovo than, for example, analysis of problems with SFR Yugoslavia's sophisticated ethnic rights approach.[24] Ironically in this denial of Yugoslavia, or what the Croatian writer Dubravka Ugre©i has characterised 'The Confiscation of Memory',[25] contemporary Western historiography is following the approach of ethnic nationalists. Such is this denial of Yugoslavia, that a collection of essays by young people from former Yugoslav is entitled *Children of Atlantis*, invoking the lost city of the Greek myths.[26] One quotation evokes this experience of denial:

> Where do you come from?
>
> From Yugoslavia.
>
> Is there any such country?
>
> No, but that's still where I come from.

These framings of conflicts conspire not only to place responsibility for the conflict firmly upon the local populations themselves, but also to claim that the motivations for such conflict – motivations which cannot be understood in isolation from a broader international and regional context – emerge from the innate predisposition toward violence of the respective societies. The careful screening out of factors that might render the causes of war understandable leaves damaged individuals, communally comprising a sick society, firmly in the frame.

Pathologised Populations

The therapeutic paradigm goes beyond state failure to pathologise whole populations as irrational, by contending that individuals, communities and whole societies are traumatized from war, and trapped in cycles of violence perpetuated from generation to generation. This approached has emerged particularly from studies of refugees in a medicalised setting. Aihwa Ong's study of the reception of Khmer refugees in the US indicates that these were viewed by American professionals in health and social services as threatening and unruly bodies, bearing a "backward" and "antiquated" culture, requiring discipline by US institutions and treatment according to US therapeutic models.[27]

---

[24] See Robert M. Hayden, *Blueprints for a House Divided: The Constitutional Logic of the Yugoslav Conflicts* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Vanessa Pupavac, 'Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's Multiethnic Rights Approach and the Politicisation of Ethnicity', *Human Rights Law Review* 5.2 (2000), 3-8; Dennison Rusinow (ed.) *Yugoslavia: A Fractured Federalism* (Washington DC: Wilson Center Press, 1990) for discussion of SFR Yugoslavia's ethnic key approach.

[25] Dubravka Ugre©i, *The Culture of Lies* (London: Phoenix House, 1998), 217.

[26] Zdenko Le©i (ed.) *Children of Atlantis: Voices from the Former Yugoslavia* (Budapest: Central UP, 1995).

[27] Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding, Refugees, Citizenship and the New America,* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003), 84-9.

In this therapeutic paradigm, war-affected populations are projected to be suffering from mass trauma and in need of mass therapeutic intervention. A much cited report on Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia contends, 'An estimate shows that about 700,000 people in the two countries have a severe trauma response condition and are in need of professional help. The consequences of lack of assistance will have a massive impact in the next generations, and can even ignite new wars.'[28] Thus, trauma is conceptualised not only as a consequence but a cause of war. Similarly, Bogdan Denitsch writes of 'the powerful reservoir of traumatic memory' transmitted from generation to generation as the cause of ethnic conflict in former Yugoslavia.[29]

The powerful invocation of a medical imperative has been important in the discursive justification of interventionary practices. Likewise Kevin Cahill speaks of expanding preventive diplomacy in medical terms of an "epidemiology of conflict,"[30] capable of giving rise to remedies and preventive medicines. The use of the medical metaphor has far-reaching implications for perceptions of appropriate roles for those cast as patients and doctors respectively. The international medical humanitarian organisation *Medecins sans Frontiers,* for example, has been a key proponent of the precedence of humanitarian intervention over the principle of national sovereignty, in line with the dictum that doctor knows best. To the extent that the diagnosis points to mental rather than merely physical illness, the delegitimation of local agency is completed. In the mid-1990s, foreign policy analysts made this shift explicit in their discussion of the potential to move from the "surgical" strikes of the late 1980s and early 1990s to a "psychiatric" approach to post-conflict societies, viewed as requiring long-term therapy rather than invasive treatment.[31] Both medical models deny political agency of the protagonists; while the surgical approach suggests radical curative invasion, the psychiatric approach suggests, instead, a potentially unending disciplinary intervention, similarly awarding power to the professional to define the limits of normality and to impose therapeutic regimes.

The framing as war as a pathological response to mental ill-health is limited to war-making in non-western states. There is a stark contrast between portrayals of war between Cambodians, former Yugsolavs, Afghans and Iraqis, and portrayals of war-making by western powers, which is invariably portrayed as "ethical" and "surgical", even when conducted in the same "theatre of operations." A pathological view of the Cambodian war has been imposed despite direct and overt connections between this war, the Vietnam War and the overarching Cold War pursued by the superpowers. Similarly there has been intimate external involvement in

---

[28] Inger Agger, *Theory and Practice of Psycho-Social Projects under War Conditions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia* (Zagreb: ECHO/ECTF1995), 9.

[29] Bogdan Denitisch, 'Dismembering Yugoslavia: Nationalist ideologies and the symbolic revival of genocide', *American Ethnologist* 21 (1994): 367.

[30] Kevin A. Cahill, 'Introduction', in Cahill (ed.), *Preventive Diplomacy: Stopping Wars Before they Start* (New York: Basic, 1996), 7.

[31] Michael Mandelbaum, 'The Reluctance to Intervene', *Foreign Policy* 95 (1994): 3-18.

the Yugoslav wars of succession, yet while the local protagonists in former Yugoslavia have been pathologised, outsiders continue to be treated as neutral arbiters.

In a move which brings the discourse around in an unbreakable circle of logic, the difference between those conducting pathological war, and those conducting ethical or surgical strikes, is promoted as being "trauma" itself. This is proposed not only as causing war in a cycle of violence reaching back to the Middle Ages, but as requiring open-ended international supervision in post-war situations to prevent war breaking out again. Trauma, particularly Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, is attributed to populations despite a lack of data regarding the actual prevalance of this neurological syndrome. Grant Curtis, for example, writes that

> "although there has been no systematic study, particularly within Cambodia, survivors of the Cambodian holocaust are widely reported to suffer [from a variety of symptoms of mental health problems… In the absence of hard data, it can only be assumed that Cambodia and its people continue to suffer the effects of mass post-traumatic stress syndrome."

Curtis further cited a UN Border Relief Operation report, which stated, "Many Khmer now stable in Site Two [border camp] will experience psychological collapse when they are resettled or repatriated." As evidence that this in fact occurred, Curtis goes on to cite a 1995 survey of the resettlement and reintegration of the returnee population revealing "up to 40 per cent of returnees were 'not coping' in an economic sense."[32] It is indicative that the failure to cope "in an economic sense" is regarded as evidence of problems in the mental health of the individual, rather than in the health of the Cambodian economy, where opportunities, particularly for the landless, are minimal. Faith in therapeutic studies becomes self-fulfilling when difficulty in coping with life in an impoverished Cambodia is regarded as evidence of "psychological collapse."

Likewise, psychosocial intervention involving 'activities that lead towards relying on their own work and independence from other people's help and support'[33] is a key international response to economic and social difficulties in the post-Yugoslav states. However, individuals have to demonstrate extraordinary entrepreneurial skills simply to secure basic welfare in circumstances of mass unemployment exceeding fifty percent in Bosnia. Where the psychological state of individuals is seen as the primary economic problem, the contribution of international policy to economic constraints is sidelined. For example, in the post-Yugoslav states local economies do not necessarily conform to internationally-recognised borders at the end of the 1990s. Attempts to create the *de jure* international borders of the post-Yugoslav states has undermined cross-border economic ties indirectly or directly (through sanctions), constraining economic opportunities.

Thus, the therapeutic paradigm becomes a cure-all and an apology for the inability of international actors to realise their blueprints for the countries. The responses of people in the Balkans, rather than international policies themselves, are singled out as defective. In Bosnia, the population is loudly denounced as dysfunctional for failing to endorse and implement internationally-imposed constitutional arrangements under the Dayton General Framework Agreement of 1995. Less widely reported are trenchant criticisms of Dayton,

---

[32] Curtis, *op. cit.*, 113.

[33] Zdravo da ste, *Annual Report 1999* (Banja Luka, March 2000).

made even by those international officials who drafted and implemented the plan.[34] The dysfunctionality of Dayton, and the shifting of blame to the population, has been repeated in Kosovo, where the international community blames continuing inter-ethnic violence on the psychological legacy of "wartime traumas."[35] Framed out is the choice of a war strategy, by the international community, which militarized ethnic relations in Kosovo in 1998-9, effectively creating and training the Kosovo Liberation Army and precipitating the transformation of ethnic divisions into all-out war.

The pathologisation of populations as traumatized and brutalized, alongside the framing out of political processes – both local and international – in influencing national institutions of state permits the de facto denial of sovereignty, since it permits the population to be presumed incapable of sovereign acts. Ordinary people of both Cambodia and the post-Yugoslav states are portrayed on the one hand as passively awaiting deliverance at the hands of foreign intervenors, on the other hand as not to be trusted with the responsibilities of reconstructing their countries, even when authoritarian regimes have been overthrown. Denitsch argues, 'in a period of nationalist euphoria, it is extraordinarily dangerous to leave the questions of the national content of education to teachers. On the other hand, when one considers what demagogic games will be played with this type of question, can it be left to the politicians, albeit democratically elected?'[36] The conclusion drawn is that the people are unfit for self-government and need the protection of the international community. Restoring self-government requires nothing less than the radical transformation of individuals, cultures, and society as a whole. Thus the challenge is "to build a new country"[37] and to create 'a new set of values, new traditions.'[38] A British official in Sarajevo, Brian Hopkinson, describes the international community's attempts to implement Dayton as 'fighting a whole culture'.[39]

Implications for Intervention

The portrayal of populations as mentally and/or culturally trapped in destructive behaviour patterns has two effects. Firstly, it entails that leaders may be viewed as motivated, not by concern to finesse conflicting pressures emerging from society, but by their own greed, ambition and venality. This delegitimates their position, undermines their claim to represent society, and justifies open-ended and repeated international intervention on behalf of populations. Secondly, the powerlessness of ordinary people, manifested as passivity interspersed with bouts of destructive rage, entails that foreign intervention must act not only upon the state but upon society also, to create new individuals with the capacity for self-government. Both these presumptions justify the derogation of sovereignty and the substitution of international discipline for national politics.

---

[34] Haden, *op. cit.*, note 13; Carl Bildt, *Peace Journey: the Struggle for Peace in Bosnia*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1998), 145.

[35] Fabian Schmidt, "The Legacy of Violence in Kosova," *RFE/RL Balkan Report* 5.20, 16 March 2001.

[36] Bogdan Denitsch, *Ethnic Nationalism: The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, revised edition), 146.

[37] Akashi, *op. cit*.

[38] Hedges 1998.

[39] Interview, *File on Four*, BBC Radio 4, 30 May 1999.

Former UN High Representative in Bosnia Wolfgang Petrisch describes the need for Bosnian 'ownership' of the peace; yet his use of this term in a series of articles and press releases[40], shows that local ownership does not imply autonomy. Rather, Petrich means that the Bosnians should take responsibility for the past and must implement Dayton: 'Our new approach is "ownership". This implies local ownership not just of assets, but of the problems inherited from communism and war. Indeed, it implies the entire process of Dayton implementation, the very future of Bosnia-Herzegovina itself'.[41] Local enforcement of externally-devised policy does not equate to national self-determination. Indicatively, while Petrisch's pronouncements in English may use the language of 'ownership', those in Serbo-Croat tend to refer to 'odgovornost' ('responsibility').[42] As in Cambodia, international supervision over policy formation and implementation continues while 'responsibility' for failure is awarded exclusively to the national government and indigenous population.

Criticism of the failure of the populations to take responsibility is typical of the disavowal of external regulation within a discourse of intervention disguised in the language of emancipation. Thus policy programmes speak of "empowerment", "instilling in civil values," and "vigorously condemning and taking concerted action against events and individuals that contravene peace, human rights and democracy." The legitimacy of these exercises of external power is assumed and even expected, even though it conflicts directly with the stated objective of promoting self-government. For example, Brown and Timberman lament how in Cambodia, until shortly before the 1998 election, "no central authority, such as the UN, has assumed responsibility for certifying whether the elections are free and fair."[43] The characterization of the UN as a "central authority" is indicative of assumptions regarding international jurisdiction over Cambodia.

Although the avowed aim of the international presence remains to promote democracy, doubts about the capacity of the populations of Cambodia and former Yugoslavia for liberal citizenship prompt curtailment of their political rights. In both cases distrust of local populations has prompted strict policing of collective action and perceptions of the need to discipline damaged and culturally malprogrammed citizens into appropriate behavioural norms. Consequently, while responsibility for politics is to be placed back on the shoulders of local people, this is a disciplined politics, regulated by international norms. Debate over these norms is discouraged, producing 'choiceless democracies,' in which parties and

---

[40] Wolfgang Petrisch, 'The Future lies with its People', *The Wall Street Journal Europe* (17 September 1999) http://www.ohr.int/articles/a990917a.htm; Wolfgang Petrisch, 'Odgovornost is the key to returns, and Sarajevo, the capital, must lead', *Dani*, 1 October 1999, http://www.ohr.int/articles/a991001a.htm; Wolfgang Petrisch, 'What kinds of leaders Bosnia and Herzegovina needs: Removing Obstacles to Ownership', OHR, 1 December 1999, http://www.ohr.int/articles/a991201a.htm, accessed 17 December 1999.

[41] Petrisch, *op. cit*., note 36, 17 September 1999.

[42] In the article in the Bosnian journal *Dani* entitled 'Odgovornost is the key to returns, and Sarajevo, the capital, must lead', Petrisch states 'the principle of odgovornost or vlasni©tvo ("ownership," in English), by which they agreed that the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and their leaders, own and are primarily responsible for the future of their country' (Petrisch, op cit., note 36, 1 October 1999).

[43] Brown and Timberman, *op. cit.*, 25.

electorates offer anodyne and identical policy platforms that accord with international principles.

To implement its mandate towards an integrated Bosnia lacking popular support, the international community's democratisation initiatives are taking on an increasingly coercive role to impose Dayton, calling into question the very democratic and legal rights the international organisations are mandated to uphold. The current international High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch outlines how his predecessor increasingly imposed decisions:

> The history so far has been that the high representative has increasingly had to impose the decisions on reforms.
>
> During his two-year term, my predecessor, Carlos Westerndorp, imposed over 45 decisions and laws on the country, dealing with everything from the design of banknotes to the establishment of the courts. He was also forced to remove 16 high-ranking officials from their positions, including the president of the ethnic Serb component, Republika Srpska, for obstructing the implementation of the peace.[44]

Petritsch himself has gone further than his predecessor in his dismissal of Bosnian officials, annulment of laws and readiness to impose laws in the face of any failure by the Bosnian Parliament to ratify the drafts presented to them by Petrisch's office.[45]

In response to the difficulties experienced in managing the polity in both Cambodia and the Balkans, international policy has adopted four key strategies: the international supervision and policing of the state; promotion of atomized forms of political participation, such as elections; attempts to police the collective action of civil society, and most intrusively, to reconstruct culture and the very personality of individuals through psychosocial intervention involving both formal and informal education from parenting to relationship counseling. Incrementally, over the last decade, international peacekeeping has shifted from the monitoring of cease-fires to the international administration and supervision of so-called failed states. What began as ad hoc programmes focusing on themes of civic education, conflict resolution, mutual respect and tolerance are becoming more systematic with the international community now involved in curriculum planning, health and social policy reform, and professional training.

At the same time, the scope of international intervention has widened. The early to mid 1990s saw a shift from the state sector to the NGO sector in line with the prevalent neoliberal view of the state as inherently inefficient and abusive compared to the private sector. In consequence, local individuals were engaged in internationally supervised, trained and funded NGOs, whose growing influence created a further shift of power away from locals to organisations accountable to foreign donors. Such NGOs, described by one United Nations Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia as "the children of the UN"[46] were promoted specifically as vehicles for the re-socialization of the population into internationally

---

[44] Petrisch, *op. cit*., 17 September 1999.

[45] OHR, *OBN News Review*, 13 January2000; OHR@LISTSERV.CC.KULEUVEN.AC.BE

[46] Michael Kirby, 'Oral Statement,' delivered to Third Committee of the General Assembly, 27 Nov. 1995, p. 2.

accepted values. International observers and participants in UNTAC's mission recall "paternalism"[47] and "colonialism"[48] in UNTAC's attitudes:

> During UNTAC ... there was a patronising attitude, they are like children, they can't stand on their own feet, they don't know what they are doing....[UNTAC] failed to think of the NGOs as independent, self-sustaining, domestic entities. It thought of them as outgrowths of the UN.[49]

The focus on international sponsorship of civil society continued after UNTAC's departure, and continued to include strong exhortations to Cambodian NGOs to focus upon international priorities and to use international methods. An international human rights worker leading an INGO set up to train Cambodian human rights NGOs stated:

> We had to work to give them this heavy re-orientation on what they were doing and what they were supposed to do. We had to say, 'No, no, no - as a human rights NGO, this is what you should do'. That takes time... the human rights NGOs are still struggling to learn themselves just exactly what human rights work is.[50]

In the late 1990s, a significant shift occurred in donor policy. Disillusioned with the performance of NGOs as "schools for democracy" producing enlightened leaders with appropriate attitudes, donors began to drift back towards the state, with a more penetrative programme of intervention which involved embedding international staff into state ministries. The rationale for retreat from support for NGOs was described by one donor official in Cambodia as a response to the fact that NGOs "crowd out the private sector" while failing to exert its salutory disciplinary effects.[51]

Both the promotion of sanctioned collective action, and the subsequent retreat from this as insufficiently amenable to the discipline of both donors and markets is indicative of a mistrust of spontaneous mobilization beyond the supervision of disciplinary intervenors. Thus, Michael Doyle writes that after the UN intervention in Cambodia in 1992-3, state policies failed to promote economic equality. While he locates this in a nuanced examination of regional and national economic and social factors, he writes: "Urban-rural inequality continued to heighten, engendering rural anger with ominous overtones."[52] Doyle does not describe the manifestation of this "anger," nor explain why it is "ominous." However, he reflects the view of many international intervenors in Cambodia who regard mobilization, of the rural population in particular, as likely to lead to outbreaks of dangerous violence, thus

---

[47] International human rights activist, personal interview, Aug. 1995, Washington DC.

[48] Former UNTAC employee and international human rights activist, name withheld upon request, personal interview, July 1996, Phnom Penh.

[49] United Nations Centre for Human Rights official, personal interview, Aug. 1996, Phnom Penh.

[50] International human rights activist, personal interview, Jan. 1996, Phnom Penh.

[51] GTZ Official, personal interview, Phnom Penh, February 2003.

[52] Michael W. Doyle, 'Peacebuilding in Cambodia: the Continuing Quest for Power and Legitimacy', in Brown and Timberman, *op. cit*., 90.

perpetuating the view of Cambodians as incapable of self-determined and self–determining action in response to political and economic questions. Even demonstrations by pensioners in Bosnia against internationally-imposed pension reforms were greeted with alarm by international officials.

International intervention has consistently worked to subordinate spontaneity in political relations to an internationally sponsored discipline enforced by the insistence on processes and procedures, prescribed in the name of "security." In conjunction with broader framings of the populations as mired in dangerous psychological and cultural predispositions, the implication is that the people must be disciplined to prevent unruly and harmful behaviour. This presumption lays the foundation for an open-ended intervention, the success of which is only amenable to the international intervenor, the local partners being inherently incapable of judging their own mental status. Far-reaching intervention to atomize and regiment societies is justified in the name of a long-term "cure" that is beyond the control of local actors, and may eventually be judged unattainable.

International Community on the Couch

What is the local response to this pathologisation? Among professionals in the post-Yugsolav states, there is receptivity to therapeutic approaches. Social atomisation arising from marketisation of relations has encouraged individualistic outlooks and psychological approaches. Lasch's description of politics in the West degenerating into a struggle for self-realisation captures developments in the post-Yugoslav states well.[53] The perspectives of the peace movement in the West and its emphasis on self-transformation have influenced the 1968 generation of Yugoslav youth. Young peoples have vacated the field of politics. Psychological approaches and studying psychology are growing in popularity with the younger generation as in the West, while structural approaches often smack to them of the failed policies of the discredited Communists. The status of psychologists is already higher in former Yugoslavia than in the US and Britain, and is rising.[54] Many schools already have their own psychologist, forming another important constituency where the new therapeutic approaches are being disseminated. Professional training in Bosnia is directly incorporating therapeutic approaches through seminars on education policy with staff from the Universities of Pittsburg, London and Munich to cite just three initiatives. Within Cambodia, where even the most basic health services are very poor, there has been a tendency to focus on cultural rather than psychological "remedies." Vigorous internal debate on the pathological nature of a collective Khmer "mentality"[55] has prompted a continued deferral to international experts and intervenors which some international aid officials in the 1990s came to regard as a worrying sign of "dependency."[56]

---

[53] Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 28.

[54] Bob Deacon, Michelle Hulse and Paul Stubbs, *Global Social Policy: International organizations and the future of welfare* (London: Sage, 1997), 181.

[55] See for example, Bit Seanglim, *The Warrior Heritage: A Psychological Perspective of Cambodian Trauma,* (El Cerrito: Bit Seanglim, 1991).

[56] Rosemary McCreery, Director, Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, personal interview, April 1999.

Nevertheless, there has been some disquiet expressed about the therapeutic paradigm, predominantly by writers, at least in the former Yugoslavia. Sarajevan author Miljenko Jergovi□, in his 1997 short story *A Diagnosis*, satirizes the pathologisation of the Balkan Wars in his account of a hero who is declared insane even though, as the narrator comments, his behaviour is no different from anybody else's in the world. Jergovi□'s hero acquiesces to incarceration in an asylum and subordination to its therapeutic regime, but he maintains a critical stance towards his treatment. When asked what he would do to the murderers of his family his reply is that he would either kill them or 'I would give them a pen and paper and tell them, as you tell me, to DRAW'.[57] In another of his stories, Jergovi□ describes the power of these discourses to limit resistance in the form of alternative imaginings of the nature of armed struggle. In *The Gravedigger*, the eponymous hero meets an American journalist whose view of Bosnia is steeped in preconceptions. The gravedigger recognises that, 'Whatever I say, he'll just think, 'Look at these mad people!' and eventually regrets his attempts to challenge this view:

> 'Later on, I regretted that I ever opened my big mouth to the American. Why didn't I just say that we are an unhappy and unarmed people who are being killed by Chetnik beasts, and that we've all gone crazy with bereavement and grief? He could have written that down, and I wouldn't have ended up looking ridiculous in his eyes or in my own'.[58]

Resistance is limited to the everyday victories to be gained from manipulating and subverting imposed discursive hegemonies – for example, in an interview in September 1998 a Croatian journalist boasted of how he had got to sleep with an unnamed famous Western female reporter at the Holiday Inn, by means of inventing a story about the death of a friend to elicit her sympathy. The importance of such boasts do not lie in their doubtful veracity, but in the fantasy of subverting the relationship of framer to framed. However, this subversion of the relationship remains in the world of fantasy and both Cambodia and the post-Yugoslav states continue to be shaped by external forces.

Four decades ago Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth*[59] condemned the pathologisation of the Third World, instead indicting colonialism itself as pathological. Fanon's critique, once fashionable in aid circles has been forgotten. Today, instead of pathologising states as failed and populations as dysfunctional, pathological international relations that create failed states should be subject to interrogation. Indeed Ugresic describes the war in Bosnia as bringing Europeans:

> an unexpected collective psychotherapeutic gift […] The liveshow, the war in Bosnia, quickens the collective metabolism, cleanses moral and intellectual attitudes, revives forgotten traumas, stimulates re-interpretations. The war in Bosnia is a collective healing seance, a grandiose spectacle of virtual reality, a live hallucination, a virtual encounter with forgotten evil.[60]

---

[57] Miljenko Jergovi□, *Sarajevo Marlborough* (London: Penguin, 1997), 111.

[58] *Ibid*., 84.

[59] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965).

[60] Ugre©i□, *op. cit*., note 14, 200.

Ugresic points the figure at the pathological needs of western society to intervene, that ultimately the impulse to pathologise other societies lies in the sense of crisis in the west, projected onto other societies. While the deleterious effects of conflict and violence on the individual and society are clear, the portrayal of conflict as emerging from the darkest realms of the psyche of the Other, who must be protected and healed by Western instrumental rationality and care, obliterates a political and economic analysis of the causes of conflict and their effects in favour of either military suppression or sympathetic smothering. Western power and rightfulness is reaffirmed, but at the expense of the aspirations for autonomy of entire populations.