

Autesserre, Séverine. *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Séverine Autesserre's insightful book explores the challenge of peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). She outlines what she believes to be the primary shortcomings in the methods used by peacebuilders to help transition the DRC from a warzone to a stable democracy, including a premature emphasis on democratic elections and the overuse of raw aid materials in place of comprehensive development programs.

This gives Autesserre a foundation from which to launch her critique, and enables her to avoid many of the common generalisations she chastises the United Nations and other peacebuilding organisations for committing, including the belief that aid packages can resolve the situation. She argues that these generalisations, and the oversimplification of the nature of the conflict in the DRC, created wrongful assumptions of the Congolese as inherently violent (31), together with the improper qualification of the conflict as one that is based solely on foreign military forces and callous elites who are attempting to plunder national resources; these depictions later contributed to further misinterpretations, such as the labeling of the DRC as a 'post-conflict' zone while hostilities still persisted (66-67).

Autesserre sees this as a symptom of the top-down approach relied on by peacebuilding organisations, which has resulted in conflict-related barriers to programming that could have been avoided through policymaking that was more inclusive of local knowledge in a bottom-up manner. She accepts, however, that programs, such as the *Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo* (MONUC), could not operate effectively using a strictly bottom-up approach. She advocates instead for a combination of the two, where decisions from the top receive more critical and reliable information from qualified grassroots sources (270-272). This re-evaluation, according to Autesserre, would be the difference between a military force used to end conflicts and suppress threats, and aid programs that could be used to build infrastructure in order to establish a stable transitional economy.

Autesserre provides an informative and engaging critique, yet there are areas that she leaves underexplored and issues she seems to oversimplify. For instance she offers few concrete suggestions regarding the methods that should be adopted to give local people access to the land they so desperately need, or how the traumatic

events that the Congolese experienced should be dealt with in order for them to carry on with their lives peacefully. Moreover, while she argues that the DRC was not ready for elections in 2006, she fails to fully explain how exactly the Congolese prepared for these elections, and who would be best suited to participate in these preparations once the timing was appropriate (241).

Despite this, Autesserre's extensive study provides a crucial window into the blunders of international peacebuilding efforts and paves the way for a potentially more successful method of operation through a hybrid top-down and bottom-up organisational strategy. As a tool for understanding the shortcomings of peacebuilding efforts, Autesserre's work remains a unique and valuable contribution to the field of study, not only specific to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but to international peacebuilding efforts as a whole. This work, although far from resolving the 'trouble with the Congo', provides unprecedented insight into the conflict by drawing directly from the Congolese perspective.

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Barnett, Michael. *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011.

L'humanitarisme est une créature morale complexe, façonnée par les jeux de pouvoir et les passions de son époque alors même qu'elle essaie de s'élever au-dessus de ceux-ci pour affirmer des valeurs universelles » (Barnett 7, traduction libre). À partir de ce constat, Michael Barnett parvient à écrire une histoire de l'humanitarisme qui met l'accent sur les rapports compliqués et parfois tordus que les organisations humanitaires entretiennent avec le monde politique, sans pour autant oublier que le mouvement humanitaire est aussi mû par des acteurs ayant le plus souvent des intentions nobles.

Un passage intéressant du livre concerne les liens entre administrateurs coloniaux et missionnaires à l'époque coloniale. On considère souvent, à juste titre, que les militants pour l'abolition de l'esclavage ont été des précurseurs de l'humanitarisme. Barnett rappelle que nombre d'entre eux étaient également proches du mouvement missionnaire, qui soutenait activement le colonialisme, y voyant un moyen d'apporter la civilisation et le christianisme à des peuples sous-développés. Par le fait même, les missionnaires, qui dépendaient des États coloniaux pour leur sécurité et pour l'accès aux territoires à évangéliser, légitimaient l'idée de *mission civilisatrice*.

Aujourd'hui, les organisations humanitaires ont largement abandonné le discours civilisateur pour se tourner vers un discours centré sur les besoins. Barnett souligne néanmoins qu'à notre époque, l'intervention humanitaire n'est pas dénuée de paternalisme. Dans les années 1990, l'émergence du concept de « *peacebuilding* » amène une convergence du discours humanitaire et du discours sur les droits de la personne et le développement. En souhaitant s'attaquer aux racines des problèmes, de nombreuses organisations humanitaires s'orientent vers une action à long terme touchant toutes les sphères de la société. Parallèlement, en réaction à l'échec de certaines interventions humanitaires et aux problèmes de coordination vécus lors de plusieurs crises, des organisations se professionnalisent et ont de plus en plus recours au savoir d'expertise. Bien que cette intention soit louable et réponde à des préoccupations légitimes, cela risque d'accentuer la distance qui sépare les travailleurs humanitaires des bénéficiaires de l'aide. Il pourrait en résulter une gouvernance humanitaire de plus en plus centrée sur ses propres objectifs – sauver des vies et atténuer la souffrance humaine – mais de moins en moins sensible

aux aspirations et aux désirs des populations locales.

Pour appuyer les thèses de son ouvrage, Barnett décrit des crises humanitaires majeures (Biafra, Vietnam, Bosnie, etc.), raconte la création de plusieurs organisations humanitaires (Oxfam, Care, Médecins sans frontières, etc.), rend compte des débats internes qui ont marqué l'histoire de celles-ci et fait le portrait de quelques personnalités importantes du mouvement humanitaire, comme Eglantyne Jebb, fondatrice de *Save the Children*, et Henri Dunant, instigateur du comité international de la Croix-Rouge. En parallèle, il relate à grands traits les événements historiques qui ont eu un impact majeur sur le développement de l'humanitarisme. Malgré quelques redondances, ce va-et-vient entre la « petite » et la « grande » histoire permet de saisir la complexité des enjeux de l'humanitarisme.

La critique que fait Barnett de la technocratisation de l'aide humanitaire offre des pistes de recherche intéressantes et pose un certain défi aux organisations humanitaires. Pour éviter la gouvernance désincarnée que craint Barnett, elles devront faire preuve d'une grande capacité d'autoréflexion et d'adaptation. Quoiqu'il adienne, on assistera sans doute dans les prochaines années à la création de nouvelles organisations qui rejetteront les pratiques actuelles au profit d'un meilleur ancrage dans les communautés où elles interviennent. Enfin, face à l'ampleur de la tâche, Barnett a fait le choix compréhensible de traiter exclusivement de l'humanitarisme occidental. Il serait utile de soumettre les mouvements humanitaires du reste du monde, en particulier ceux de la Chine ou de la Russie, à une analyse similaire pour voir s'ils ont vécu des tensions et des transformations semblables.

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Pouliot, Vincent. *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

International Security in Practice (ISP) aims to counter the 'representational bias' in International Relations (IR) scholarship – the tendency to privilege formal modes of cognition (thought), over more intuitive modes of coping (know-how) – which author Vincent Pouliot claims makes for a detached, and hence inadequate, understanding of diplomacy. He sees this epitomised in the assumption that for behaviours like non-violence to 'take hold', a corresponding 'idea' must first be transmitted to and internalised by a critical mass of actors. For Pouliot, the problem here is that when we think in conventional terms of a subject that thinks before acting, we end up resorting to clumsy theories of motivation that treat broad transformations – like peace and war – as one-off events rather than intricate social behaviours. The positivists, however, are not the only culprits, and he locates the representational bias on the other end of theoretical spectrum as well, accusing post-positivists of lapsing into structural over-determination while ignoring the assemblage of practical dispositions that comprise the social fabric of diplomatic interactions.

Consequently, *ISP* puts forward an alternative approach centered on recovering the know-how of first-hand actors, treating concrete diplomatic practice as the site of international politics proper, rather than simply the effect of some prior cost-benefit analysis. Pouliot elaborates, "in everything that people do...there is always a practical substrate that does not derive from conscious deliberation or thoughtful reflection...practice is the result of inarticulate, practical knowledge that makes what is to be done appear self-evident or commonsensical" (12). Thus diplomacy forms a set of "skills...that constitute the social fabric of international politics, and are background dispositions acquired in and through practice" (Pouliot 12). Along these lines, *ISP* deploys a Bourdieu inspired 'subjective' methodology in the study of NATO-Russia relations, offering a third way between the theoretical clumsiness of the mainstream approach and the esoterism of the post-positivist camp.

While this practice turn offers a much-needed counterbalance to conventional understandings of behaviour, we should tread cautiously for two reasons. First, if we assume that the logic of peace can be localised in the immediate interaction of diplomatic actors, we end up privileging Track One as the pre-eminent site of world politics. Indeed, a wealth of recent IR scholarship has problematized the

assumption that the state should enjoy this kind of automatic causal priority. Even if one does take for granted that the state is the pre-eminent actor in world politics, we risk impoverishing this perspective by desegregating diplomatic practice from the broader network of behaviours, symbols and identities constitutive to the state as an imagined community. If for instance we want to make sense of the way that a state may be trying to save face or preserve its reputation, we would be remiss not to interrogate the particular gendered way that honour has operated historically; a consideration which takes us outside of diplomatic interaction in one sense, while penetrating to its very core in another.

Second, because the category of practice that informs Pouliot's approach is both intuitive and pre-linguistic, paradoxically both indescribable and always already known, at times it reads as a kind of *deus ex machina*. Hence, practice is treated as causally determinative when it comes to explaining cooperative or at least non-violent behaviour in terms of NATO-Russia relations, while at the same time it is invoked as a ubiquitous feature of all human interaction. The trouble here is that by presupposing a 'practical' field of perception that is ontologically prior to symbolic interaction, we end up treating language as simply another shadow on the cave wall, when, in fact, it is a practice just as intuitive as opening a car door. In sum, we should not simply reject Pouliot's argument by reversing the sequence of ontological priority that he puts forward, that which subjugates language to practice. Rather, we should acknowledge that we are better served as social scientists by taking these categories as two sides of the same coin.

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