

## INTRODUCTION

My first reaction when I started to digest the liberal peace theory was unfavorable, to say the least. It immediately brought the Washington Consensus to my memory as it is sold as a plain recipe to be followed no matter what.

The few theories that may offer an alternative do not provide me with a satisfactory answer, so I feel the need to step back and re-think what is peace and how to achieve it, even when the result doesn't deliver a solution in itself.

I will argue that the state efforts for peace making are indeed important, but it is the role of the society self-understanding and self-healing is at the cornerstone of what will eventually bring peace.

## THE VIOLENCE IN THE LIBERAL PEACE PARADIGM

The liberal peace theory seems to find comfort and support in a misguided and convenient interpretation of Immanuel Kant's 1795 *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay* where three definitive articles of perpetual peace are outlined: (1) The civil constitution of each state shall be republican, (2) The law of nations shall be founded on a federation of free states, and (3) The rights of men, as citizens of the world, shall be limited to the conditions of universal hospitality (Kant 1795: 117).

These articles are later manipulated and rewritten in a modern interpretation of "republican representation, ideological commitment to fundamental rights and transnational interdependence" (Doyle 2005: 463), also described as "the constitutional, international and cosmopolitan laws" (Doyle 2005: 463), which conform the three pillars in which the liberal peace paradigm rests.

The center of the argument is that an equilibrium exists between liberal states, also read as democratic regimes, and that any other type of constituency is excluded from this halo of glory: "liberal states do exercise peaceful restraint, and a separate peace exists among them. This separate peace provides a solid foundation for the United States' crucial alliances with the liberal powers, e.g., the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and our Japanese alliance." (Doyle 1986: 1156) and "The apparent absence of war between liberal states, whether adjacent or not, for almost 200 years thus may have significance. Similar claims cannot be made for feudal, fascist, communist, authoritarian or totalitarian forms of rule." (Doyle 1986: 1156), thus justifying actions of aggression against the other.

Doyle continues by stating "Liberal states are different. They are indeed peaceful, yet they are also prone to make war, as the U.S. and our 'freedom fighters' are now doing, not so covertly, against Nicaragua. Liberal states have created a separate peace, as Kant argued they would, and have also discovered liberal reasons for aggression, as he feared they might." (Doyle 1986: 1552). Interestingly, democracy as a value makes its appearance in the liberal peace theory even when such was never mentioned in Kant's aforementioned work. This comes embedded in "a commitment to a threefold set of rights forms the foundation of liberalism", namely the right to equality of opportunity, the right to private property and the right to democratic participation. (Doyle 1983: 206-207).

The thesis that democracies do not fight each other is backed by a narrow analysis of inter-state wars between 1850 and 1978 and by states considered (by Doyle) liberal. Beside the fact that all root causes of conflicts are absent in the analysis, Mearsheimer also explains that the historic record does not provide

solid evidence of peace-loving democracies for various reasons: first, the number of democratic states has remained relatively small throughout the past two centuries, thus there have been few cases where two democracies have been in a position to fight each other; second, there have been specific persuasive situations among these states that might have prevented them to go to war against another. Third, several democratic states have been at the brink of war with each other, which could very well be justified by mere chance, and last, "some would classify Wilhelmine Germany as a democracy, or at least a quasi-democracy; if so, World War I would become a war among democracies." (Mearsheimer 1990: 50-51).

The flawed thesis of peace-loving democracies represents a western one-sided view of how peace should be achieved with very elusive grounds, but more importantly, the root causes of a conflict simply are not being considered. It ironically entails a violent advice that ignores all underlying realities that produce a conflict in the first place and it never attempts to grasp the concerns of the ordinary citizens.

Furthermore, when taking a closer look into the three pillars that sustain the liberal peace theory, we see first that Kant's articles for perpetual peace are being used as platform for the theory but (mis)interpreted in a modern-western way that embraces liberalism and its dominant derivative – neo-liberalism. Salih argues that "the contention that democracy causes states to live in peace with each other refers to particular types of states, which have developed a long liberal tradition that goes beyond the bare existence of polyarchy and democratic institutions" (Salih 2009: 134), thus indicating a historic transition by which states develop democratic institutions.

The attempt to transplant liberal attributes represents itself an act of violence since it alienates an existing reality and commands to "nurture and integrate the ethos and core values of liberalism" (Salih 2009: 135). Contrary to achieving peace, the liberal peace paradigm "has the potential to expand economic policies that in the long-run will exacerbate economic marginalization among the poor, increase poverty and foment grievances and social justice(,) which could under certain circumstances(,) contribute to social and in some instances(,) violent conflicts". (Salih 2012: 173).

## LISTENING TO RE-THINK PEACE MAKING

Perpetrators, victims, civil society, governments and all actors that somehow interface with a conflict, also experience it in a different way and each will have their grievances and claims. A counterproposal to the liberal peace paradigm must begin by assessing all dimensions involved in a conflict. For a change, and for the limits of this essay, I will concentrate on the actors that are normally left behind in the analysis: those identified as the perpetrators.

This particular aspect is of great relevance in the context of criminal organizations (COs) that are active in Mexico. The prevailing war in which the different COs and the Mexican government fight against each other has proven hard to tackle but also, to diagnose its causes. The consequences to the civil society in terms of violence, insecurity, economy, public health; among others; is relatively simple to see and even to measure. Arguing that greed, ambition and power is the (sole) cause of this war seems insufficient.

Criminal organizations have a broad, dynamic and ever-expanding portfolio of lines of business, being the most documented: theft and trafficking of hydrocarbon products like oil and gas, human trafficking that include migrants, and/or women and children for prostitution and pornography, security services, natural resources extraction and trafficking, human organs harvesting and trafficking, extortion, kidnapping and

drugs trafficking (Correa-Cabrera 2017). But we can frame their activities as anything that is illicit and profitable. We can therefore define the criminal organizations as the antagonist force of the state.

A mixture of bribes and all levels of violence is the mechanism by which these organizations control all these lines of business and it is also the way they maintain and conquer the territories where these activities take place. These organizations are certainly at war with each other and with the state security forces, but also with the entire society who lives in a regime governed by fear.

When it comes to organized crime, the kingpin strategy has stubbornly remained as the governmental path to achieve peace for the last ~30 years. Basically, considers that if the key commanders of the criminal organizations are either incarcerated or killed, the organizations would be weakened and eventually collapse. Clear evidence (El País, 2016) shows a negative effect in such strategy where violence levels have sustainably escalated for decades and with high peaks right after a detention or killing of a leader.

While I disagree with the strategy, my argument here is about what we do with these suspects, when not killed, once they are in jail. Depending of the profile and ranking of the subject, they are normally used to obtain knowledge of the operations of their organizations and they are sometimes offered deals of reduced sentence and benefits if they provide relevant information to bring down colleagues or adversaries. It is true that this procedure has been useful to begin to understand the logic of these organizations, but I appeal to a more personal treatment of the suspect.

A recent investigation (Raphael 2019) had access to an alleged founder of one of the main Mexican COs. A journalist interviewed the suspect in prison on a weekly basis for over a year. This was conducted in high secrecy given the fact that this character was declared dead by Mexican authorities who stated he was killed in a clash with military forces in 2014 (Wilson 2014). These conversations go beyond the sole purpose of understanding of the structure, logistics, ideology and expansion plans of the organization: they also expose a significant degree of the humanity of the individual.

Whether this was intended or not, it opened a possibility that is rarely seen: an attempt to understand an individual who is responsible for hundreds of murders and an unimaginable pain inflicted to others by his actions and lifestyle.

Far from creating an icon of this person, the great insight is how his life experiences relate to all of us. Looking into his family figures, the neighborhood he grew up in and his academic and military training, does shed a bit of light about our failures in society. Through this I was able to break the image of an inhumane character I swallowed without questioning. I indeed have a perception of a despicable person, but I a person, nonetheless.

This research touched me significantly because I could see key elements of my own violence reflected in this character.

Part of our national identity is defined by our manhood; about the way we show off how manly and powerful we are. There is little or no room to express anything different and we all are educated to suppress any type of weakness. This is our societal cancer and it is one element that contributes to the violence we inflict on each other.

This gender toxicity has of course many angles, but I look now into the violence that men exercise over men. We experience this violence every day, in (apparently) meaningless situations where we mock and

discriminate each other. We are in constant need to express and reinforce our manhood and we idolize those who (succeed?).

Beside my personal experience, I reflect on the value of listening to the perpetrators of the violence we are victims of. Once these suspects are prosecuted and condemned, due to their high profile, they are locked down in maximum security prisons where they are totally out of reach for any research. They are simply dumped, and we lose much by that.

There is indeed a risk of creating headline-selling products in such approach. But these products are also possible since we are prone to enjoy the stories of all-powerful men and their lives of excess. The approach must be from a social study perspective, and with the premise that it was us as society who created these characters.

## CONCLUSION

There are important efforts that have outlined the necessary reforms (Buscaglia and Roemer 2006) that should take place in different levels of government to systematically and significantly reduce the participation of the criminal organizations in the political and governmental agencies. In contrast, my proposal of peace is to define a social agenda that would identify the obstacles we need to tackle on our own.

We cannot (should not) believe that the simple exercise of voting for a candidate will transform our reality. Even within a highly divided society, we can find common ground to work towards a better version of ourselves.

While I acknowledge the definitions of positive and negative peace, the whole idea of sustainable peace remains elusive, almost unreachable. The analogy I find is with happiness. I was taught to pursue it and I feel I'm not getting any closer. It's all about the ride, they say. Perhaps a conflict that progressively lowers its intensity can be more adequate and realistic situation than violent interventions.

## REFERENCES

- Correa-Cabrera, G. (2017). *Los Zetas Inc: Criminal Corporations, Energy and Civil War in Mexico*. University of Texas press.
- Doyle, M. (2005) 'Three Pillars of the Liberal Peace', *American Political Science Review* 99(3): 463–466.
- Doyle, M. (1986) 'Liberalism and World Politics', *The American Political Science Review* 80(4): 1151–1169.
- Doyle, M. (1983) 'Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12(3): 205–235.
- El País. (2016). 'Año 11 de la guerra contra el Narco' Accessed March 27, 2020. <<https://elpais.com/especiales/2016/guerra-narcotrafico-mexico/>>.
- Kant, I. and Buckland, J. H. (1927) *Kant's perpetual peace: a philosophical proposal; translated*. Translated by H. O'Brien. London: Sweet & Maxwell, Limited (The Grotius Society publications).

Texts for students of international relations, no. 7). Available at: INSERT-MISSING-URL (Accessed: March 27, 2020).

- Mearsheimer, J. (1990) 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War, *International Security* 15(1): 5-56.
- Raphael, R. (2019). *Hijo de la guerra*. Mexico City: Seix Barral
- Salih, M. (2009) 'A critique of the political economy of the liberal peace: Elements of an African experience', in E. Newman, R. Paris and P. Richmond (eds) *New perspectives on liberal peacebuilding*, pp. 133–158. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- Salih, M. (2012) 'Coming to Terms with Liberal Peacebuilding in Postwar Liberia and Sierra Leone', in D. Francis (ed) *When War Ends: Building Peace in Divided Communities*, pp. 167–183. London: Routledge.
- Wilson, S. (2014). 'Founder of ultra-violent Zetas drug cartel killed in Mexico' *The Telegraph*. 14 of May. Accessed March 27, 2020. <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/centralamericaandthecaribbean/10826461/Founder-of-ultra-violent-Zetas-drug-cartel-killed-in-Mexico.html>>.
- Buscaglia, E and Roemer, A (2006). *Terrorismo y delincuencia organizada: un enfoque de derecho y economía*. Mexico City: Legal Research Institute, UNAM.