



International Norms and Local Agents in Peacebuilding.

Small Arms Control in Post-War Kosovo and Cambodia

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Ph.D. Thesis defence on 04 June, 2012

Abstract: Finding that existing meta-theories of International Relations have problems explaining why international Small Arms programmes succeed or fail, this thesis explores internationally driven micro-disarmament processes from a constructivist perspective. Through two contrasting case studies of the UNDP-led micro-disarmament programme in Kosovo and the EU Small Arms programme in Cambodia, the research considers ways in which local agency respond to ‘norm transfer’ by international organizations.

First, the thesis theoretically advances constructivist literature on norm diffusion so to apply to international peacebuilding in general, and Small Arms Control specifically. Treating peacebuilding as exercises in norm diffusion enables more subtle analyses of the political processes involved, taking seriously the politics of norms when international actors get involved in post-war societies. Bringing in dynamic processes of norm localization to the study of micro-disarmament enables better conceptions of agents, processes and mechanisms involved in the reconfiguration of power in peacebuilding contexts.

Second, based on extensive fieldwork the thesis provides comparative analyses of how local elites constructed national identity narratives in post-war Kosovo and Cambodia parallel to micro-disarmament processes. In the case of Cambodia, national elites successfully built a narrative of the Khmer nation as idle, peaceful and respectful of authority; an identity consistent with an idea of the state as the legitimate authority over the use of force. Due to enabling social and political structures, the EU Small Arms project supported this discourse of a collective, post-war security culture in Cambodia, and effectively eradicated the small arms problem. In Kosovo, conversely, political elites imbued the post-war nationbuilding process with identity narratives consistent with an individual security culture. This narrative pitted an autonomous, militant and traditional society against the state monopoly on legitimate use of force. The UNDP Small Arms project did not locate its activities in these discourses, and failed to significantly reduce the availability of small arms in society.

The empirical findings of this thesis point to a real need for international organizations to allow local conceptions of legitimacy to take centre stage when introducing democratic security models in post-war countries. Consistent with constructivist epistemology, it finds that norms, culture and identity are not secondary considerations, but effectively produce actors’ preferences and interests. International norm proponents must engage local rationalities when seeking to transfer norms – even in matters of ‘hard’ security.



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Bio: research deals with the transmission of international norms to local actors in the context of international peacebuilding processes. She is particularly interested in how idiosyncratic state-society configurations impacts international interventions in the security structures of post-conflict states, notably through Small Arms Control and Security Sector Reform. In her Ph.D. dissertation, she compares the cases of external post-conflict micro-disarmament in Cambodia and Kosovo, in order to shed light on the ideational dynamics that condition the outcome of such projects.