

Beyond the Neoliberal Peace

Ronnie D. Lipschutz and Susanne Jonas

AS THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF *SOCIAL JUSTICE* WAS IN THE FINAL STAGES OF PREPARATION, the world's attention was focused on the Aspen Institute's Wye Plantation in Maryland, where a marathon negotiation between Israel and Palestinian representatives was grinding toward an end, midwived, among others, by President Bill Clinton and Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet. The result, trumpeted as a great step forward toward peace in the Middle East, was, in fact, only a reiteration of what had already been required of the two parties by the Oslo Accords of 1994. That Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could, upon disembarking from his plane at Ben Gurion Airport in Israel, practically disavow what he had signed not more than 12 hours earlier only emphasized how fragile such an agreement can be.

Political "realists" have long cast aspersions on international treaties that propose "idealistic" goals without the military power to back them up. Here, however, was a truly paradoxical situation: military power was a worthless currency. The leader of the more powerful (by far) of the two signatories was proclaiming that his country was too weak to accept, let alone, fulfill, the promises made, and that his opposite number must demonstrate its strength by promulgating and implementing all of those steps that it was, demonstrably, too weak to fulfill completely. Consequently, the agreement was almost certain not to be worth the paper on which it was printed.

To be sure, not all of the peace negotiations and settlements of intrastate violence and war during the 1990s have been emptied of content and promise quite so soon or so egregiously, but the number of sustained successes can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Nevertheless, external involvement in internal wars continues, often out of fear that violence could spill across borders (as in Central Africa) and spread, pulling in even those with few or no interests at stake. A good deal of ink has been spilled describing these wars and, in some instances, how peace settlements have been brokered; likewise, the number of books and articles analyzing "ethnic" and "sectarian" conflict and proposing what "Great Powers" might do about them has grown like Topsy. In most of those publications, however, little is said about what comes after — after the war, after the negotiations, after the signing.

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The articles in this issue of *Social Justice* attempt to address these questions. They originate from a certain skepticism about what is called here a “neoliberal peace,” that is, one designed to put in place the institutional forms of a peaceful society without bothering about the question of social justice. They also stem from a desire to examine more carefully the possibilities of social reconciliation as a solution to organized violence within societies. Early versions of these articles were presented at an interdisciplinary workshop held at the University of California, Santa Cruz, February 27–28, 1997, and were subsequently developed by the authors. The workshop and project as a whole were supported by funds from several sources, including the University of California systemwide Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, based at U.C.-San Diego and the Center for Global, International and Regional Studies at U.C.-Santa Cruz.

The first article, “Beyond the Neoliberal Peace: From Conflict Resolution to Social Reconciliation,” is by Ronnie Lipschutz, who lays out the parameters of the neoliberal peace and discusses the causes of internal warfare during the 1990s. In particular, Lipschutz seeks an explanation for the apparent paradox of global “peace in our time” while violence continues in, at last count, over 30 sites worldwide *along with* so-called peace processes and agreements in some of the more visible and strategically sensitive locations. He argues that “peace settlements” largely represent more of an effort by economic and political elites to get into the game of the world economy through neoliberal practices than an attempt to address the deeper and more intractable causes of violence.

In the second article, “Palestine and Israel: Perils of a Neoliberal Repressive *Pax Americana*,” Joel Beinen shows why a neoliberal peace is so problematic. The original impetus for the Middle East “peace process” grew out of exhaustion with the *intifada* in the Occupied Territories and the hope that a new flow of foreign investment into Israel and the region might foster economic growth and prosperity. A rising tide would “lift all ships” and, some hoped, the new environment of opportunities would weaken the territorial demands of the Jewish Right and Palestinian Left. Alas! The assassination of Rabin and the defeat of Peres meant that this always-tenuous hope for a neoliberal peace came to rest on the shoulders of Benjamin Netanyahu, whose Knesset coalition continues, at this writing, to hang by a revanchist thread. What the future will bring is anybody’s guess, but it is not likely to make anyone very happy.

The third article, “Can Peace Bring Democracy and Social Justice? The Case of Guatemala,” by Susanne Jonas, describes the long and tortuous road to a settlement of the 40 years of war in Guatemala. While she notes the numerous flaws in the process, many of which threaten to scuttle the fragile peace, she is relatively optimistic that, in the long run, Guatemala will prove to be a success story.

In the fourth article, “Beyond Neoliberalism: Peacemaking in Northern Ireland,” Elizabeth Crighton argues that the accords covering Northern Ireland are

not based on neoliberalism but, to the contrary, have succeeded only because of heavy involvement and investment by the governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom. It is the pull of social and political change and the push of governmental policy initiatives that have created endogenous incentives for accommodation. Although it is too early to predict whether the cease-fire and constitutional agreement now in place will hold, Crighton sees encouraging signs of new efforts at compromise among Northern Irish leaders from every political tradition.

In the fifth article, “The Social Construction of Conflict and Reconciliation in the Former Yugoslavia,” Franke Wilmer provides an account of the Yugoslav conflict and an analysis of its cognitive implications, employing some of the strategies associated with a social constructivist orientation. She critiques the limits of a conflict resolution perspective by engaging it with the way in which conflict, and the structural context of conflict, are cognitively constructed by practitioners and participants. She also raises questions about the basis and breakdown of civility by referring to the construction and movement of group moral boundaries, arguing that the main weakness of conflict resolution *without* a reconciliation perspective is its failure to account for the cognitive construction of civility and conflict. Wilmer concludes by considering the potential for international and domestic interventions to facilitate reconciliation processes aimed at achieving a stable peace.

The sixth article, “Undoing: Social Suffering and the Politics of Remorse in the New South Africa,” is by Nancy Scheper-Hughes. Based on an extended 1993 trip to South Africa, during which she observed and, to some degree, participated, she offers an *anthropological reflection* on social suffering, remorse, forgiveness, and reconciliation, focusing on a single ethnographic instance: violence and recovery in the context of the new, post-apartheid, post-police state, democratic South Africa. Scheper-Hughes provides a reflection on the morally ambiguous task of “making sense” of suffering: one’s own and the suffering of others. Among other questions, she asks: How are memories and emotions structured and deployed in the various processes of recovery, especially in the personal narratives of those who suffered the violence and those who were the direct agents or passive collaborators in the violence?

Finally, in the last contribution, “Transcommunality: From the Politics of Conversion to the Ethics of Respect in the Context of Cultural Diversity,” John Brown Childs utilizes the practices of the Iroquois Confederacy to describe the process of “transcommunality.” This is, according to Childs, a way to maintain particularistic, rooted affiliations and to create broad constellations of inclusive cooperation that draw from multitudes of distinctly rooted perspectives. Transcommunality emphasizes an ethic of respect in which mutual recognition and acceptance of diverse, and even divergent, perspectives occur among partners. This ethics of respect can lead to transformation of interacting participants as they learn more about one another and so alter their outlooks.

What these articles, taken together, suggest is a very real need to reexamine the conventional assumptions about the causes of intra-societal, intercommunal conflict and violence and the standard methods of intervening to bring these wars to an end. Peace, as many have pointed out, is more than just the absence of violence, and justice is more than merely a surfeit of material goods. People prefer to be safe, secure, and prosperous, but this is sufficient only if they also feel that justice has been done. Going beyond neoliberal solutions will require ethnographic and cognitive approaches to war and peace, as well as a detailed understanding of why societies implode and what it will take to put them back together. The violent 20th century is just about over; let us try to do better with the 21st.