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Leonardsson, H. (2023). Peace Through Violence and Violence Through Peace: Peacebuilding Practices and a Conflictual Peace in Lebanon. *Geopolitics*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2023.2270936>

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**To cite this article:** Hanna Leonardsson (02 Nov 2023): Peace Through Violence and Violence Through Peace: Peacebuilding Practices and a Conflictual Peace in Lebanon, *Geopolitics*, DOI: [10.1080/14650045.2023.2270936](https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2023.2270936)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2023.2270936>



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Published online: 02 Nov 2023.



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# Peace Through Violence and Violence Through Peace: Peacebuilding Practices and a Conflictual Peace in Lebanon

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## ABSTRACT

The literature on peace has been filled with notions of peacebuilding in crisis or creating more problems than it solves. However, as peacebuilding is critiqued for not fulfilling its promises, the nuances of peace and violence present in peacebuilding practices are often left ignored. Arguing that peace is a continuum of peace and violence seen by understanding peace as embodied, spatial, and political, the article analyses peacebuilding practices creating a conflictual Lebanese peace. The article looks closer at three such practices: service provision, local interactions, and Lebanese local governance. Through empirical material, the article illustrates how service provision, local interactions and local governance are performed through power relations sustaining a continuum of peace and violence. As such, the article argues that rather than a continuum between peace and violence, Lebanese peacebuilding is a simultaneous process of peace and violence. This questions the assumed opposition between violence and peace and claims that by emphasising peace as embodied, situated, and political we can discern different peace(s) more peaceful for some than others.

## Introduction

Since the signing of the 1989 Ta'if peace agreement,<sup>1</sup> peace and violence have continued to run in tandem in Lebanon. On the one hand, post-war developments have included the opening of political space, economic success, and the growth of a Lebanese middle class with the Lebanese society considered a phoenix of coexistence, resilience, and joy of life. On the other hand, Lebanon has experienced political assassinations, inter- and intra-state hostilities, as well as fatal political ignorance, massive public protests and an economic decline rarely seen in modern times (Harb and Fawaz 2020; Khalaf 2012; World Bank 2021; Zahar 2009). The uncertainties in Lebanon are often attributed to sectarianism and clientelism, sustaining the political power and personal gain of elites and institutionalised within state structures

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through power-sharing arrangements (Hanf 1993; Khalaf 2002, 290). At the same time, sectarianism and clientelism provide a basis for group identities, welfare services and livelihoods for the Lebanese (Egan and Tabar 2016; Hamzeh 2001; Majed 2016). As such, Lebanon's continuous tale of national unity, divided consensus and the reproduction of conflictual divides makes it a compelling example of how peace and violence coexist in contexts of non-war.

In this article I depart from the notion of peace as something more than 'not war' and the building of peace as more than building legitimate civic order and the management of conflict through peaceful means (True 2020). This builds on scholarly thinking emphasising peace as a continuum, the complexity of peace, and peace existing amidst violence (Davenport, Melander, and Regan 2018; Millar 2020; Öjendal et al. 2021; True 2020). As post-conflict contexts continue to struggle for peace, the question of where violence ends, and peace begins is still elusive (Väyrynen 2019). The local turn in peacebuilding emerged as a response to the seemingly incessant struggle for building peace, emphasising the local as an effective space for peacebuilding, or local agency and emancipation as key to building peace (Leonardsson and Rudd 2015). However, while writings on local peacebuilding have studied peace(s) through a consciousness of context, contestations, and politics (Björkdahl and Kappler 2017; Björkdahl et al. 2016; Hameiri, Hughes, and Scarpello 2017), it is often critiqued for localising but not challenging the hierarchical, interventionist and gendered premises of peacebuilding (FitzGerald 2023; Rigual 2018; Väyrynen 2019). In this article, I scrutinise local peacebuilding practices and what they bring 'to the ground' from the perspective of conflictual peace, arguing that by analysing local peacebuilding practices that are assumed to build peace<sup>2</sup> we can start to discern how peacebuilding practices create violence, and how violent structures are part of building peace.

The peacebuilding practices analysed emanate from the literature on local peacebuilding arguing that local service delivery, local interactions and local governance have peacebuilding potential (Brinkerhoff and Johnson 2009; Leonardsson 2023; Leonardsson and Rudd 2015; Mcloughlin 2015). These, in turn, originate from a realisation that national peacebuilding processes often lack knowledge of, neglect and alienate the population living the peace built (Leonardsson 2023, 16) and that peace must be grounded in local legitimacy and implemented by actual people (Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo 2023; Roberts 2011). Specifically, scholars on service delivery and peace argue that service provision strengthens a legitimate and sustainable peace by meeting the population's needs, enabling acceptance of policies and hindering contestations. Local service delivery of, for example, basic health-care, education, electricity, water and sanitation, offer an opportunity to adapt and respond to local needs grounding peacebuilding practices (Arandel, Brinkerhoff, and Bell 2015; Krampe 2016; Mcloughlin 2015). In addition,

those who research local interactions emphasise interactions between inhabitants and their local government as well as interactions between local communities. These are claimed to promote peace through the expression of local agencies and opportunities to contest elites and build trust (Donais 2012; Jackson 2013; Kappler 2012). Finally, scholars interested in local governance argue that decentralisation is essential for a well-functioning democracy and governance, giving local actors a role as agents in processes that build peace (Brancati 2006; Brinkerhoff 2011; Donais 2012). However, studies have also shown the double nature of local service delivery, interactions, and local governance, pointing to the many pitfalls, interconnections with existing power structures and contextual circumstances (Björkdahl and Gusic 2015; Booth and Cammack 2013; Leonardsson 2020; McLoughlin 2019).

By examining the peacebuilding practices of local service delivery, local interactions, and decentralisation we can start to discern peace not as a state which lacks frictions, but as an ‘unstable equilibrium among several contradictory forces’ (Väyrynen et al. 2021, 4). To do so I build an analytical framework for seeing a conflictual peace, building on the notions of peace as embodied, situated, and political. In all three notions, daily practices of peace are not merely understood as based on solidarity but also framed by practices of power and violence, sustained by a ‘social totality’ of power relations (Väyrynen 2019; Cockburn 2012, 32, see further below). Thus, as I aim to show in this article, practices meant to build peace construct and reaffirm power structures that normalise a conflictual peace through the violent conditions of the everyday, building a peace that is more for some and less for others (Cockburn 2012; Laurie and Shaw 2018).

The empirical analysis of a conflictual peace in Lebanon builds on 45 semi-structured interviews conducted during 2014 and 2015. The interviews were with municipal councillors, municipal and state employees, and local civil society actors in Saida, Bourj Hammoud and Tyre. Saida, Bourj Hammoud and Tyre are three larger municipalities and capture Lebanon’s sectarian diversity in heterogeneous spaces.<sup>3</sup> The interviews focused on local practices to build local peace, capturing local government approaches to service delivery, local interactions, and governance, as well as civil society interpretations of these approaches. In addition, I build on secondary material on Lebanon through news articles, policy analyses, reports, and scholarly literature. Thus, the empirical material emphasises localised processes and perspectives on Lebanese peace, based on local politics and experienced by the ones living the peace built. The difficult, and ethically dubious, task of analysing local peacebuilding through a lens of conflictual peace is that it tends to reemphasise negative perceptions of those ‘other’, post-war (but not necessarily post-conflict) spaces ‘far-away’. Of this I am painfully aware. However, my analysis of conflictual peace through peacebuilding practices in Lebanon is not an analysis of Lebanon as a violent place. On the contrary, I intend to shed light

on how assumedly peaceful peacebuilding practices can harbour violence and reproduce violent structures at the same time as such practices build, a kind of, peace. This, I argue, is at large more a critique of peacebuilding and peacebuilding practices framed by imperial and neo-colonial assumptions of what peace is (Öjendal et al. 2021). And, by scrutinising peace as conflictual we may start to question the violence present in places assumedly living in peace (see Maiangwa, Essombe, and Byrne 2022; Wibben et al. 2019). As such the purpose of the article is twofold: To empirically scrutinise peacebuilding practices as both peaceful and violent through the examples of service delivery, local interactions, and decentralisation in Lebanon. And, to use a framework of conflictual peace to see the contestations present in the mundane, linked to and created by assumedly peaceful peacebuilding practices.

The article proceeds with a reflection on peace and its relation to violence. Then, the article creates a conceptual framework on how to see a conflictual peace by identifying peace as embodied, situated and political, sustained through a social totality of power relations. In the empirical section, the article analyses a conflictual peace in Lebanon through the peacebuilding practices of local service delivery, local inclusion and exclusion, and local governance. The article concludes with a reflection on what seeing a conflictual peace means for societal change in Lebanon and elsewhere.

### **Peace and Violence – a Dance on Thorny Roses**

Our understanding of peace is intrinsically linked to our understanding of violence. Since the early days of peace research, peace has been defined as the absence of violence. Violence, Galtung argues, is ‘the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is’ (Galtung 1969, 168). Thus, peace, is when nothing stands in the way of people’s and societies’ potential, or what could be. The view of peace and violence as opposites has inspired a dichotomous understanding of peace and violence and the idea that peace is built through models that remove the cause of direct violence and move societies towards a promised peace (Öjendal et al. 2021, 272). With armed conflicts often evolving around state power – who has it and how it is used – negotiations of who is to access state power and how it should be exercised is an essential part of peacebuilding measures. Thus, the default approach to upholding negotiated peace rests upon building functioning and stable states (Davenport, Melander, and Regan 2018; Jarstad and Sisk 2008, 3). Nevertheless, research has shown that the peaceful state of peaceful states varies to a great extent, leading to an emerging discussion in the field of peace and conflict studies on ‘peace’ as insufficiently understood and theorised beyond the absence of war (Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo 2023).

One attempt to challenge the dichotomous conception of peace as the negation of violence is put forward by Davenport, Melander and Regan

suggesting a peace continuum (Davenport, Melander, and Regan 2018). The peace continuum, they argue, captures varieties of peace on a scale between the absence of (direct) violence and a sense of security and mutual respect for all major actors. According to Davenport, Melander, and Regan (2018, 2), seeing peace as a continuum allows us to measure the quality of peace also in settings where overt political violence has been absent in modern times. In this regard, Davenport et al. open the possibility of analysing peace in places of no war. However, measuring the quality of peace on a scale does not capture how peace and violence are co-constitutive and part of a continuous reconfiguration of peace.

For this I turn to feminist peace research and Cynthia Cockburn's (2012) work on the continuum of war highlighting how war does not end when fighting stops. In her view, war is constantly present through a continuum of war. The continuum can be seen through militarism (as a mindset and an ideology), militarisation (as a preparation for war through the economy and society) as well as through outbursts of violent clashes, ceasefires, and after, the continued possibility of war through military investments (Cockburn 2012, 28). As such, the continuum of war is an ongoing spiral, part of periods considered peaceful as well as full-fledged war. Jacqui True (2020) highlights this interrelation between peace and war, suggesting that we can only know peace through the continuums of violence and peace from the home to the public sphere. True argues that collective institutions and socialisation of individuals normalise and accept certain violence in society while making some violence unacceptable. This also frames what is perceived as peace and peacebuilding, focusing our attention on peace agreements, state institutions and governance to hinder a particular type of (political) violence but leave little room for seeing the violence that continues in the everyday (True 2020, 86; Väyrynen 2019). This questions the linearity of peace and peacebuilding that sees peace as moving towards more peacefulness, and it also questions the very possibility of reaching peace as an end goal. Instead, if we argue for seeing peace and violence as a continuum, we understand that peace is not a 'linear event but a process with multiple contestations and challenges' (Väyrynen et al. 2021, 4). It is in line with this thinking that I argue that peace and violence co-construct each other, creating a conflictual peace where power relations and normalised violence become part of peacebuilding practices. Below, I construct a framework for seeing a conflictual peace drawing from feminist peace research (Väyrynen et al., 2021; Wibben et al. 2019), geographies of peace (Koopman 2011; Macaspac and Moore 2022) and critical peacebuilding scholars (Hameiri, Hughes, and Scarpello 2017; Leonardsson 2023).

## Seeing a Conflictual Peace

In this article, I construct a framework for seeing a conflictual peace by drawing on feminist peace research as well as scholars on geographies of peace and critical peacebuilding. The three perspectives I highlight, peace as embodied, peace as situated and peace as politics, build on similar epistemologies and ontologies and bring fruitful perspectives on agency, time, place, space, and power into conversation. The first perspective, peace as embodied, includes an understanding that ‘peace is an event that comes into being through mundane and corporeal encounters’ (Väyrynen 2019, 148). This emphasises the daily practices of peace but also how they are connected to experiences and feelings. In this perspective, peace is ‘a matter of creating relationships in which people feel that they are respected’ (Väyrynen 2019, 152) involving the shaping and reshaping of ‘understandings and behaviours to adapt to a constantly changing world and sustain well-being for all’ (Väyrynen 2019, 152). Secondly, peace, as situated, includes the idea that peace is situated and materialised through the spatiality of peace. What peace becomes is materially grounded and connected to mundane practices in different spaces (Björkdahl and Kappler 2017). This also highlights the notion of peace(s), meaning that peace exists in the plural, or as Koopman argues, ‘peace means different things at different scales, as well as to different groups, and at different times and places’ (Koopman 2011, 194). In this way, peace should be understood as ‘situated knowledges’ embedded in a particular time and space (Macaspac and Moore 2022, 2). Finally, I include the perspective of peace as political meaning that peace draws on a range of political practices, including, but not limited to, arenas for decision-making, institutions, and power relations. In addition, political practices are potentially contested, and while some practices confront hegemonic power, others build on hegemonic power to further (a type of) peace (Macaspac and Moore 2022; Väyrynen 2019). By analysing peace as embodied, situated, and political we can start to discern how peace (as built, experienced, felt) becomes more for some and less for others. However, to tease out how these different aspects of peace highlight a conflictual peace, we need to take a closer look at how power relations and the reproduction of violence keep ‘pushing the wheel around’ (Cockburn 2012, 29). Or, as I argue, pushing the wheel of peace around.

In her analysis of the power relations that push the wheel of war around, Cockburn highlights three dimensions of power: economic power, ethnic or national power, and gender power (Cockburn 2012, 42). These power relations are incorporated into ‘systems that traverse the entire social horizon and intersect at multiple points’ (Cockburn 2012, 32) and together, although not exclusively, they make up a ‘social totality’ of power perpetuating war and militarisation. By highlighting the relations of power, Cockburn illustrates how violence continues, even after a peace agreement is signed or

peacebuilding institutions are installed. As argued by Laurie and Shaw (2018), such power relations (economic, ethnic or gendered) condition what potentiality becomes realised. Remembering Galtung's definition of violence as 'the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual', power institutionalises violence into our daily lives by regulating, habituating and normalising what comes into being. This is what Laurie and Shaw have termed the violent conditions that 'limit who and what is actualized in the world, and how' (Laurie and Shaw 2018, 12). At the same time, with repetitions and continued exposure to power relations, the violence inherent in such relations becomes mundane and part of everyday life. This often makes experiences of violence feel less violent (Laurie and Shaw 2018).

Although Cockburn, as well as Laurie and Shaw, focus on violence, I argue that the same power relations, and normalisation of power relations, shape what peace is actualised, conditioning peace as conflictual. To study how conflictual peace is actualised I emphasise peacebuilding practices in which 'the daily "doing" of peace is fundamental' (Väyrynen 2019, 152). This emphasises peace as a process and an ongoing deliberation (Mitchell 2010, 663f). In this article, I analyse the building of a conflictual peace through local service delivery, local interactions and decentralisation in Lebanon. These three emphasise peace as embodied, situated and political by engaging with place-specific peace(s), based on local needs and experiences, produced through local agency and local legitimacy (Leonardsson 2023, 16; Macaspac and Moore 2022; Väyrynen 2019).

### **Basic Services Performed Through Sectarian Divides**

One of the essential perils of Lebanese citizens is the lack of basic service provision. For many years, deficiencies in public provision of services in sectors such as water, electricity, education, health, and sanitation have been complemented by private initiatives available to those with the means to pay. In post-war Lebanon, private initiatives have often been tainted by sectarianism prompting a sectarian political economy incentivising people to favour sectarianism for their well-being while hindering accountability, transparency, and freedom of thought (LCPS 2017; Paler, Marshall, and Atallah 2018). In addition to the lack of democratic practices, the current economic crisis and crippling state finances are further decreasing the public's access to basic services in two ways: first, by relying on imports, costs of publicly provided services have increased and revenues decreased. Second, with staggering poverty rates, the share of the Lebanese population able to pay for private alternatives has decreased (World Bank 2021, 41).

However, where national initiatives have failed, locally run service delivery has provided the Lebanese, in some areas, with basic services. In local peacebuilding literature, local service delivery is often put forward as an

essential function for improving livelihoods and building peace (McLoughlin 2015). In essence, it is argued that when locally determined needs and priorities are responded to, it legitimises ongoing processes of peacebuilding and sustains peace (Roberts 2011). Service provision is both an everyday manifestation of the social contract and vital to securing people's livelihoods and well-being (McLoughlin 2019). As such, responsive service delivery contributes towards reducing dissatisfaction with the state, which might lead to frustrations and direct violence, hindering everyday insecurities and experiences of violence as threats to people's livelihoods and well-being (Dalby 2013; McLoughlin 2015).

One such example is the waste management plant in Saida. In 2015, when garbage was piling up on the streets of Beirut in what became known as 'the waste crisis' (Kraidy 2016), the municipal council in Saida prided itself on a newly opened waste management plant. As one interviewee claimed: In Lebanon, there are a lot of problems with rubbish, and we don't have this problem because we worked for it. We have a lot of problems with the ministry, but we are strong enough to get what we need. We are proud of what we have done during this time. (Int. 35, municipal councillor, November 2015)

The feeling of positive developments was shared by civil society actors, as one explained: We used to have the garbage problem, the Garbage Mountain which was smelly and caused health problems. They were able to fix this problem and to install the plant that treats the garbage. [...] Instead of the mountain, now we have a big garden. [...] and you can feel the good atmosphere in the city. (Int. 42, civil society actor, November 2015)

As such, the unpleasant memories of the trash mountain, felt through the bodily experiences of smell and health problems have now been replaced by feelings of pride and a pleasant atmosphere in the city, illustrating the connection to peace as embodied.

However, in Lebanon, where national politics are divided along sectarian lines and influenced by geopolitical divisions in the Middle East (Dakroub 2014; Geukjian 2014), the waste management plant also illustrates how national divisions penetrate local politics and developments. Answering the question of why Saida was able to succeed, one municipal councillor answered: 'Because I have good relations with the gentlemen (laughter) [...] I have to say I have very good support from the politicians' (Int. 18, municipal councillor, June 2015).

As such, the waste management plant is not just an essential service promoting peace, but its realisation is part of the political game that has ruled Lebanon since the end of the war, ingrained in a continuation of power relations in and beyond the local space, as one interviewee explained:

[...] the factory should have been established a long time ago, during the presence of Dr Abdul Rahman el Bizri [former Mayor 2004–2010]. Prince Walid [of Saudi Arabia] granted 5 million USD to the municipality to establish it, but no decree. The law that says

that you can start was passed during the presence of the last municipality. They want to do this law during the presence of the municipality who is affiliated to the Hariri political party. (Int. 38CiviSocietyty, November 2015)

The emphasis on ‘the gentlemen’ and the political party of Hariri illustrates how embodied peace is situated in the particular context of Saida, the hometown of former Prime Ministers Rafiq Hariri and his son Saad Hariri, as well as former parliamentarian Bahia Hariri. As such, the embodied peace is made possible through power relations relating to particular identities and economic players (Cockburn 2012), in Lebanon contextualised as sectarian groups, influential families and political parties. Thus, the building of peace through waste management depends on violent conditions that determine what and how service delivery is actualised (Laurie and Shaw 2018). This illustrates how peacebuilding practices build a conflictual peace.

A similar pattern appears with the provision of electricity in the city of Zahle. Until 2020, the local power company Electricité de Zahle (EDZ) managed to provide reliable, high-quality electricity to the residents in Zahle 24/7.<sup>4</sup> In the rest of Lebanon, consumers have for long had to pay one bill for electricity provided by the governmental Electricité du Liban (EDL) and another bill to private electricity providers to cover the many hours of electricity cuts in EDL provision. Asking how EDZ manages to navigate an energy sector known to be tainted by corruption and sweetened deals on fuel imports (Leenders 2012), Ahmad et al. (2020) conclude that EDZ’s success was the fruit of a ‘functional corruption’. As they claim:

The EDZ innovation was not the result of an upwelling of popular opposition to the concession system. It was the result of the deft use of the system by EDZ, building on local people’s sense of identity to garner political support while ensuring that opposing factions were either marginalised or suitably compensated. While this reform was unquestionably beneficial to the people of Zahle, it was designed, driven, and controlled by local elite actors. (Ahmad et al. 2020, 42)

Similar to service provision in Saida, the use of the elitist and sectarian system by some may matter less considering the feelings of well-being it brings to the population, as one man claimed: ‘We know that he (Nakad<sup>5</sup>) has enough money for his children and his children’s children, but we don’t care – we have 24/7 power!’ (Cited in Ahmad et al. 2020, 43).

The use of conflictual dividing lines in Lebanese governance is well-known and has been studied in relation to Lebanese state-building through corruption (Leenders 2012), service provision through clientelism (Cammatt and Issar 2010), or post-war reconstruction to promote legitimacy for certain militant actors (Bou Akar 2018; Hamieh and Mac Ginty 2010). However, the examples from Saida and Zahle show that national political divides are infused into local contexts, essential for local actors to be able to promote local gains, or what could be understood as a locally

situated peace. While local elections were hailed as a way to get away from national dividing lines when they were reinstated in 1998 (Harb and Atallah 2015), local governance is still part of the national political game, designed to keep a fragile peace between elites (Khalaf 2002), simultaneously contributing to a conflictual local peace.

As the services of waste management and electricity provision are essential in the local spaces of Saida and Zahle they promote a situated and embodied peace by giving inhabitants a sense of dignity and a feeling of development away from the war years and the lack of service provision that has followed. At the same time, the reliance on corrupt alliances to make services work illustrates peace as political and related to institutionalised decision-making practices that reinforce power relations. For the people living the peace built, the politics of peace does not go unnoticed, and interviewees often reflect on political bickering attending to one part of the country while leaving the rest of the country bleeding. A woman from a nearby village described the experience: It hurts when I go to my grandparents' house [in an area served by EDZ] and see what electricity they have and what we have; it also hurts as I drive back to the village through Zahle and see shops and houses lit up and get to my village to see it in the dark. (Ahmad et al. 2020, 39) In Saida, an interviewee similarly reflected on the effects of local development through particular political interactions: 'On the ground, he [the mayor] is doing good work together with the civil society, a well-selected municipal council. But in the end, they are representing a certain political party' (Int. 44, Civil Society, November 2015).

Arguing that peace is felt and experienced in the everyday (Väyrynen 2019), access to services as mundane as waste management and electricity are intrinsic to peace as they constitute human dignity and feelings of development. This illustrates how service delivery can be seen as a legitimising factor through the meeting of local needs (Brinkerhoff, Wetterberg, and Dunn 2012; Mcloughlin 2015) and emphasises the corporeal experiences of peace (Väyrynen 2019). Through the provision of electricity 24/7 in Zahle, the local population saw improvements and felt valued by the ruling elite. Similarly, in Saida, municipal engagement to remove the waste mountain, which had spread its distinct smell and toxic fumes for 40 years, was a real accomplishment appreciated by the local population. These acts emphasise the mundane experiences of peacebuilding practices as embodied peace, emphasising that 'peace is a matter of creating relationships in which people feel that they are respected' (Väyrynen 2019, 152). At the same time, the lighting up of one town and not the next, as well as the national neglect of waste management needs when success would be attributed to political opposition, illustrates the continuation of a social totality of power relations emphasising a very political peace, situated within contextualised power relations. As power relations continue to restrict the

potential of some in favour of the realisation of others, it creates the violent conditions that underpin a conflictual peace.

### Local Inclusion or Each One for Oneself

In peacebuilding, there is a thin line between local ownership, autonomy, the emancipation of local agencies and isolation or exclusion. Some scholars, like Brinkerhoff (2011) and Brancati (2006), argue that multiple and more localised arenas of state authority enable increased political contestation over resources, where minorities have greater possibilities to influence and address their needs. This possibility to influence the responsiveness of local governments towards local needs is one important conflict mitigating potential as it counteracts feelings of social exclusion, commonly expressed by minorities that cannot make their voice heard in a national context. At the same time, writings on local inclusion and participation emphasise that inclusion occurs along hierarchical lines, making participation favourable only to a few (Horst 2017; Leino and Puumala 2020).

In the Lebanese municipality of Bourj Hammoud, municipal councillors describe a local arena with ample cooperation between local groups, contrasting the lack of cooperation between the municipality and the state (Int. 12, 15, 30, 31, municipal councillors in Bourj Hammoud). According to one municipal councillor, local cooperation includes representatives from all local communities, as the councillor explained:

Because there is all this variety within the municipal council, 21 members representing various groups, their own community, civil society, you become extremely transparent. The whole municipal council knows exactly what is going on and you have to explain; you have to justify your actions to the whole community. It must be acceptable to the whole community because it is based on consensus, not elections. (Int. 12, municipal councillor, Bourj Hammoud, May 2015)

In this sense, the politics of local peace in Bourj Hammoud connects situated knowledge of local actors to inclusion in local decision-making arenas. However, the local is never disconnected from national power relations or decision-making institutions. In Lebanon, where some local majorities are national minorities, also local inclusion becomes part of vertical entanglements in different spaces and can be used to make up for a national ignorance of the same group (Leonardsson 2023). In Bourj Hammoud, one of only two municipalities in Lebanon where Armenians are in power, local favouring of Armenians is described as part of life and what builds a situated peace in Bourj Hammoud. As one non-Armenian interviewee explained: When he [the mayor] is someone who is from the community, because he is Armenian and everyone around him is Armenian, it is normal for them to serve their people, before they serve other people. Ok, it's normal. I don't see that it's something bad. (Int. 29, civil society actor, Bourj Hammoud, November 2015)

At the same time, non-Armenian communities, like other communities in Lebanon, have their ways of attending to local needs. As the same interviewee continues to explain: [In our community] we have people from the government, we have people from the Ministry of Social work, they are here in our community, they help us to serve the people. (Civil society actor, Bourj Hammoud, November 2015) Thus, also within the municipality as a locally situated arena for building peace there are different situated knowledges that draw on institutions and power relations to promote well-being for their communities. Peace as situated and political illustrates how the inclusion of some means the exclusion of others, and how each community finds its ways of responding to local needs through divisive means.

However, the inclusion of some and exclusion of others on different levels and through different relations does not eliminate feelings of being ignored. One municipal councillor, reflecting on Bourj Hammoud as an Armenian space,<sup>6</sup> recounted the gradual decrease in influence by the Maronite community, parallel to the increased power of the Armenians in the municipality. As he claims: ‘10 to 15 years ago the Maronites used to have the vice presidency of the municipality. Now they don’t. We [the Maronites] belong here’. (Int. 31, municipal councillor, Bourj Hammoud, November 2015). This, again, demonstrates that even if present-day power relations have favoured the Armenians in the local space, current local peace is a continuation of frictions, contestations, and challenges of how to define the local space (Väyrynen et al. 2021, 4). Thus, even a locally situated peace, connected to particular practices of that space (Björkdahl and Kappler 2017), is set in relation to temporal and contested power relations.

Analysing inclusion and exclusion, and how different actors manage inclusion and exclusion in different ways emphasises conflictual peace as layered and meaning ‘different things at different scales’ (Koopman 2011, 194), but also within different scales. This complicates notions of ‘peace’ and propagates seeing the many entanglements that build a conflictual peace. By highlighting the nuances of local interactions as a peacebuilding practice in Bourj Hammoud, we can discern how power relations are reproduced and normalised to build different conflictual peace(s). This highlights the simultaneousness of peace and violence, creating a peace that is more for some and less for others in the local as well as across scales (Koopman 2011, 194).

### **Local Governance for Peace and Furthering Divides**

The discussion of local service delivery and local interactions both build on the overarching notion that localising peacebuilding creates space for more efficient and emancipatory peace (Leonardsson and Rudd 2015). As an institutionalised idea of what enables sustainable peace, local governance and decentralisation have made their way into peace negotiations and peace

agreements arguing that the local is an arena for participation, efficient service delivery, accountability, and legitimacy (Brinkerhoff 2011; Vélez-Torres et al. 2022). However, how well do these aspirations hold in Lebanese local governance?

In Lebanon, local governance dates back to the Ottoman period and has a history as an object of autonomy and political control, rather than local efficiency and transparency. The last revision of the municipal law was made in 1977 (Ministry of Interior and Municipalities 1977/2008). At that time, political elites, local laypersons, and international observers believed that the civil war that had besieged Beirut since 1975 was coming to an end. Within the then-present political landscape, local governance became one of the main points on the agenda to negotiate peace and promote different elites' influence over different local spaces (Abu-Rish 2016). As a result, the new municipal law gave municipalities wide jurisdiction over activities with a public character within their territory.<sup>7</sup> The municipal law, thus, laid the ground for different situated peace(s), emphasising different situated knowledges and practices, but at the same time building on institutionalising war time logics and power relations.

However, the war did not come to an end in 1977 and rather than dispersing power over local constituencies municipal power was further centralised. During the following 12 years of war, authority over municipal affairs fell under the jurisdiction of governmentally controlled districts (Qada) as no local elections were held to fill vacant posts when the mayor or council members either died or moved. Alternatively, control of municipal resources and management fell in the hands of parties to the war (Harb and Atallah 2015, 190f).

When the Ta'if peace agreement was reached in 1989, it included a list of guidelines to reassure Lebanon as a unitary state and stipulate a decentralisation reform institutionalising election at, and devolving power and responsibilities to, the district level (Harb and Atallah 2015, 191). At the time, the formulations on decentralisation were seen as an acceptable compromise by those who imagined Lebanon as a federal republic, and a mere administrative technicality by those who preferred a unitary state. A peaceful compromise, perhaps, but one with two conflictual goals highly dependent on political agendas and aspirations. As a result, decentralisation reform has not materialised until today (Baroud 2021).

Instead, in the wake of the civil war, the Lebanese parliament extended the mandate for existing municipal councils, hindering a resumption of local governance through elections and continuing centralised control of local affairs. In 1997, as the parliament was preparing to pass a second delay of municipal elections, a massive civil society campaign collected over 60,000 signatures and forced the government to change its policy. In 1998, the first post-war local elections were held and have been held every six years between

1998 and 2016 (Baroud 2004, 7; Harb and Atallah 2015, 191f). Through regular elections, Lebanese municipalities have avoided the political stalemate haunting the national political scene and allowed the population space to engage in politics closer to home (Baroud 2004, 8; LCPS 2012). This has created ground for a situated and political peace performed through localised arenas for decision-making (Leonardsson 2023). Nevertheless, despite municipal elections and the 1977 Decree-law 118, practical conditions of centralised governance deeply constrain the municipalities' abilities to act locally, particularly through a lack of funds, personnel, and close control by higher authorities (Harb and Atallah 2015; Salamey 2014, 152).<sup>8</sup> As seen in previous sections, and elaborated on by scholars on Lebanese municipalities (Bou Akar 2018; Nucho 2016) Lebanese local governance is a peacebuilding practice that evolves through power relations based on group identities and economic resources. At the same time, as we have seen, the local developments enabled through local governance, for example, waste management, electricity provision and contextualised inclusion matter for how the population experience their well-being, and thus, peace in the local (Väyrynen 2019, 152). This highlights the duality of peace, or as I argue, a conflictual peace whereby peacebuilding practices can enhance peace by promoting well-being, respect and situated knowledges for some, while building on political divides and power relations that reinforce continued inequalities.

Interviewees from the municipality of Tyre acknowledge the difficulties with Lebanese local governance. Asked what the municipality needs to manage the city and provide for citizens' developmental needs one municipal councillor answers:

Authority [...] The main challenge is the law. That it is allowed for [the municipality] to enter into such sectors as water and electricity.<sup>9</sup> It is not allowed. We have some agreements, we have friendship relations with all these administrations, but we don't have the authority to manage these things directly. In simple words, we don't have a decentralisation system. We are not asking for . . . What we really care about is to have a good management of the city. By us or with close cooperation with central administration. We are not asking to have a big influence over the administration, but we want, because everyone is asking the municipality [for help]. Because when they come here, we cannot do it for them. And they have the right to ask for those things. (Int 47, Municipal councillor, December 2014)

According to this interviewee, local governance would not necessarily challenge power relations and state hierarchies, but it requires sufficient capacity to enhance peacebuilding practices that promote a situated and embodied peace that improves the well-being of citizens by responding to local needs. At the same time, this municipal councillor does not challenge the politicalness in such peace(s), nor the need for political ties to establish a situated peace.

However, the political ties do create a conflictual peace that is more for some than for others, also in local spaces. Although the distance is not great,

the woman in Zahle points this out as she claims: 'It hurts as I drive back to the village through Zahle and see shops and houses lit up and get to my village to see it in the dark' (cited in Ahmad et al. 2020, 39). The differences between localities are also mentioned by a municipal union employee in Tyre: 'There is no thinking of cooperation between the municipalities. No cooperation between them at all. The thinking is just to bring physical things for their own community' (Int 9, Municipal Union employee, Tyre, June 2015). As such, municipalities are continuing a pattern of locally situated peace(s) dependent on power relations and national politics. The solution, the interviewee claims, is a decentralisation reform moving power, responsibility, and capacities to the district level, similar to the reforms proposed by the Ta'if peace agreement. At least in 2015 this brought some hope, as he states: 'Now everyone is waiting for decentralisation' (Int 9, municipal union employee, Tyre, June 2015). Whether that could potentially imply a less conflictual peace through Lebanese local governance remains to be seen.

## Conclusion

The literature on peace has been filled with notions of peacebuilding in crisis or creating more problems than it solves (Chandler 2017; Debiel, Held, and Schneckener 2016; Millar 2021), or proposals for different 'turns' mitigating peacebuilding flaws (Björkdahl and Kappler 2017; Bräuchler 2018; Leonardsson and Rudd 2015). However, as peacebuilding is critiqued for not fulfilling its promises, the nuances of peace and violence inherent in post-war contexts are often left ignored. Through an analysis of peacebuilding practices of service provision, local inclusion and local governance, this article analyses how peacebuilding practices and violent structures continue to reproduce each other, several decades after the end of the Lebanese civil war. As the article has shown, local service provision provides some possibilities for peace(s) related to well-being and responsiveness to needs. However, services are also provided through normalising power relations that limit what is made possible. Similarly, local inclusion creates a conflictual peace experienced through feelings of inclusion and exclusion that draw on horizontal and vertical divides in Lebanese society. In addition, local governance harbours a promise and potential for situated peace(s) which is co-opted by political divides and necessarily reproduces violent structures to be able to engage with promoting local peacebuilding. As such, the three peacebuilding practices analysed in this article illustrate a conflictual peace in Lebanon, seen through analysing a social totality of power relations and the normalisation and institutionalisation of violent conditions in the mundane. At the same time, emphasising that peace is embodied, situated and political the article reveals a conflictual peace that is more for some and less for others and experienced differently in different spaces and across layers of governance.

While the article has not dealt with the economic, humanitarian and accountability crises troubling Lebanon today (Harb and Fawaz 2020; World Bank 2021), this article gives context to how Lebanese developments have been part of building a conflictual peace, informing our understanding of present-day developments. Although the article offers little consolation to the present experiences of crisis in Lebanon, it offers insights into how small events are part of a ‘social totality’ of power relations, and how these co-exist in processes of continuity and change. Seeing peacebuilding practices as part of the power structures that normalise violent conditions in the everyday (Laurie and Shaw 2018) opens up possibilities of challenging the same power relations. For those mobilising against the Lebanese political establishment, seeing the everyday workings of power reveals the possibilities for everyday workings of resistance.

Having analysed conflictual peace in the case of post-war Lebanon, this article does not claim that these processes are unique to countries that have experienced war. In agreement with feminist peace research that argues that peace is a continuation of contestations and challenges, sometimes (often) taking place through slow violence unnoticeable at first sight (Väyrynen et al. 2021; Wibben et al. 2019), I argue that by analysing how power relations normalise and institutionalise particular peacebuilding practices we can start to see how peace is conflictual, also in places ‘that allegedly “live in peace”’ (Wibben et al. 2019, 99). Looking at peace as embodied, situated, and political the article argues for seeing a conflictual peace. While not proposing a different, less violent peacebuilding, the article spurs questions on the creation of peace(s), not just over time and space but in relation to whose peace counts and how.

## Notes

1. The Ta’if agreement ended the 15 yearlong Lebanese civil war. The agreement equally divided seats in the Parliament between Christians and Muslims. In addition, it reaffirmed the President as Christian Maronite, the Prime Minister as Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of Parliament as Shia Muslim. As such, the agreement ended the war through a continuation of Lebanese sectarian governance, which had contributed to sparking the war in 1975 (Khalaf 2002; Leonardsson 2023).
2. For a reflection on the role of assumptions in peacebuilding see Autesserre (2017).
3. As urban dwellings and larger towns Saida, Bourj Hammoud and Tyre all harbour the Lebanese sectarian diversity of different Muslim and Christian communities within their municipal borders. However, they also have their specific majorities: Saida predominantly Sunni Muslim, Bourj Hammoud predominantly Armenian Christian and Tyre predominantly Shia Muslim (Leonardsson 2023, 45–53)
4. This statement is based on publications from 2020 and does not take into consideration effects on EDZ by the lack of fuel in Lebanon since the summer of 2021 or globally fluctuating fuel prices due to the war in Ukraine (Kolaczkowski 2022; Sewell 2021).
5. Assad Nakad, CEO at EDZ.

6. The common story of Bourj Hammoud is a neighbourhood founded on marshland with the arrival of the Armenian diaspora to Lebanon in the 1920's. However, it has been, and is still, an inter-sectarian space harbouring Armenian, Maronite, Shia, and Palestinian communities, and it has been affected by demographic changes due to war and migration in Lebanon and the Middle East. Nevertheless, the Armenianness of the municipality remains strong, manifested by the Armenian protection of the area during the civil war, and more recently by settlements of Armenian refugees from Syria (Leonardsson 2019; Nucho 2016).
7. The law stipulated municipal responsibility over, for example, roads as well as managing projects such as building schools, hospitals, and public libraries (Ministry of Interior and Municipalities 1977/2008).
8. Restrictions include approval of expenses for material costs, projects, and events over 2,000 USD by a chief controller, employed by the municipality but in the larger municipalities appointed by the Council of Ministers. Furthermore, the district level (Qada) approves expenses above 13,000 USD, as well as supervises the municipal budget, and if expenses exceed 53,000 USD, either the region (Muhafazat), the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities or the central government must approve (Harb and Atallah 2015; Ministry of Interior and Municipalities 1977/2008). In addition, most local projects are still managed by central administration, mainly by the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities or through government agencies such as the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) (C. A.I.MED. 2004)
9. The capacity of EDZ in Zahle to provide electricity is based on a special concession agreement established during the last years of the Ottoman Empire (Ahmad et al. 2020, 19).

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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