

Resistance as a Constructive Source of Change in a Post-War Environment?

Assessing the Integration of Resistance by the United Nations Intervention in Liberia

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Abstract

Peace operations intervene in contexts, in which the state is highly fragile and its ability to provide basic services has failed. Government and administration are weak or non-existent. International organizations, such as the UN, often find themselves de-facto “taking over” the work of government and public administration even though their mandate is only to “support the government”. It is no big surprise that such international dominance provokes resistance. The aim of this paper is to include an analysis of the disparate forms of resistance in post-conflict intervention settings into the study of peacebuilding along the case of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). We differentiate between rule abiding (disobedience and obstruction) and rule breaking (informal parallel structures and violence), and between constructive (informal parallel structures and disobedience) and destructive (obstruction and violence) forms of resistance. Our findings indicate that international dominance tends to provoke and react on destructive forms of resistance. Constructive forms of resistance, such as public protest, are rarely acknowledged, as long as they do not break the rules and threaten the security of the country and the mission. Shaping politics in the intervention state often prevails in informal bargaining processes within the bureaucratic structures of the intervening organizations and the government. The set-up of the international intervention, intended to build a liberal democracy, fails to build an environment conducive to such a condition. The peacekeeping environment in Liberia provides few structures to take resistance into account and use it as constructive force of change.