

Conflict and Global Operations of Power

Vivienne Jabri

King's College London

One of the major shifts that have taken place in the recent past relates to international responses to conflict, away from practices of 'conflict resolution' to those of 'peacebuilding' or 'statebuilding'. The former might be said to have largely retained a political understanding of conflict and contested identities, the latter focus on the social terrain and its government, being largely aimed at the policing of societies. Drawing on arguments developed in my recent book, *War and the Transformation of Global Politics*, the aim of the keynote address is to highlight the theoretical and conceptual trajectories in Conflict and Peace Research that such a shift implies. The choice might be framed, on the one hand, in terms of a Habermasian aspiration towards a juridical cosmopolitanism, and on the other, a Foucaultian inspired understanding of the operations of power globally. If wars are no longer fought in the name of the 'sovereign' and responses to conflict are no longer 'political', but variously invoke humanity, human rights, democracy, and even 'civilisation', then the debate must centre on how power operates in the landscape of global conflict. From the humanitarian interventions of the 1990s to contemporary wars and statebuilding operations, the so-called 'liberal wars' are hailed by their advocates as emancipatory, and by their critics as late modern articulations of empire. Where the former see the potential emergence of cosmopolitan law, the latter interpret our contemporary era in terms of the emergence of a global sovereign. Both interpretations point to monumental change in the structure of the international and have profound implications for our understandings of political conflict, subjectivity, and global discursive and institutional practices geared at the redesign of populations.