

## Meaning of the term 'Local' & Misconceptions around 'Local Turn' in Peacebuilding

Boutros Ghali, the former U.N. Secretary-General, is hugely credited for introducing the concept of peacebuilding in the 1992 ['Agenda for Peace'](#) as

*"an action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict, rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife, and tackling the deepest causes of conflict: economic despair, social justice, and political oppression"*

The landscape of peacebuilding, since the definition's inception, [evolved from](#) a 'one size fits all' interventionist policy to the one that is more inclusive; giving way to the 'locals' in ownership and participation, creating a manifold peacebuilding process. The major challenge, however, persists in setting clear boundaries as to what 'local' means. This is because consideration of localized identity and rights is seen as anti-developmental, particularist, violating youth and women's rights. Moreover, [the local turn is perceived](#) as a betrayal to Marxist-understanding of social justice and abrogation of North's right to engage in the political developments of the South.

Roger Mac Ginty & Oliver P Richmond acknowledge the term 'local' as a concept that separates from the definitions of national and international, constantly evolving between localized and non-localized ideas, practices, and norms. The authors' highlight that the 'local' tends to be seen more in terms of a conceptual, identity or geographical group, also includes the presence of local based agencies in a conflict or post-conflict environment. It is important to note here, that decolonization of knowledge between peacebuilding and peacemaking is a mandate to answer questions like, for whose interests do the international organizations operate? Where does the legitimacy arise from? How is the institution's authority connected to the representation of its subjects? [Practitioners and Scholars from the Global South](#) deserve credits for raising such questions; are the first ones to burst the bubbles of 'North rule' and divert attention towards the significance of 'local turn' in peacebuilding.



Image source: United Nations Peacekeeping

## The Critical School of Peace and Conflict Studies

The Cold War-era mostly dismissed the Peace Scholars as marginal for a long time. It is only after the end of the Cold War that policymakers sought to understand the role of civil war in international peace support interventions. Nevertheless, there is a tendency to focus on quick fixes or superficial issues with little heed to local dynamics of peace, a vibrant force that keeps the critical project within the study of peace and conflict.

Back in the 1990s, this 'local turn' was merely utilized in the fields of conflict resolution and mediation. [John Paul Lederach's work](#) highlights that involving the locals in conflicts, at that time, was driven by the idea that empowering local actors is the fundamental way to ensure peace and stability in any region. Even so, the recent 'local turn' came in a very different context. It now represents a critical response to UN peacekeeping operations. The new approach perhaps stems from the post-colonial perspective, where the focus is not on reconciliation but on local resistance against Western models. Ginty & Richmond, in this respect, claim that the term 'local' is miles apart from international definition and that the 'local turn' contests the idea of universal liberal peace, further rejecting the problem-solving characteristic of institutional approaches to peacebuilding.

A critical contestation in the debate arises from the idea of *'hybrid peace.'* The authors say hybrid peace is a disruption in the liberal order due to the tensions imposed by international actors in retaliation to local resistance. In my perspective, it is not always crucial for peacebuilding to follow liberal peace, but a harmonious interaction between the international and local actors is a mandate, whose absence defeats the whole purpose. That said, the *'local-local'* dynamics are equally important. The micro-level alliances between artists, religious groupings, and villages constitute a place where several forms of agencies take birth. Local actors are lastly, powerful enough to co-define the applicability of peacebuilding in the short and long terms respectively.



Image source: United Nations

## **The prominence of Local Turn in Peacebuilding**

International peace initiatives received recognition since the U.N. Secretary-General, Boutros Ghali, announced peacebuilding as a priority hotspot in 1992. [Peace is only sustainable](#) when locals take over the pedal, and judge what measures may or may not work in the long term. The declaration acts as firm evidence to the fact that local peace-building is not a new phenomenon; has always been present. The only recent change is that the local agency has gained prominence. Ginty & Richmond pinpoint four reasons behind this shift.

The liberal peace 'crisis' has opened up a clear road for other perspectives on peacebuilding, the majority of which arise from local thinking and practices. This does not only arise from the failure of Iraq and Afghanistan interventions, but also a series of *'mission civilsatrices'* that encapsulated the overspill of North's structural power, identity, and

interests into state architecture and local peace. Rwanda, Cambodia, South Sudan, Tajikistan are amongst the [most highlighted recipients](#) of international peace support assistance, who are also ranked 'not free' by Freedom House in 2012.

The second reason relates to the methodologies and epistemologies used to examine conflict, peace, and international intervention. It is now that more academicians are willing to 'examine' the role of locals and prescribe more sophisticated understandings of conflict. The authors put forth an exemplary observation as to how [World Bank](#), a state-centric, the conservative and neo-liberal institution has gradually begun to see the merit of strategies operating with the local consent.

Local turn's synchronization with similar changes in the field of development is perhaps the third factor. The rise of drone phrases like 'participation,' 'partnership,' 'local ownership' is clearly evident by now. The growing popularity suggests something really important. Scholars have started bringing into the limelight that development restricted to national elites has a minute chance to sustain. And so, an [engagement with the local communities](#) will help to tailor the shortcomings of any project, ultimately guarantying success.

Fourth, there has been a substantial increase in the representation of Global South practitioners in international organizations. It has introduced greater historical and cultural awareness to the Westerners besides importing the rights of indigenous subjects that the Western hegemony made inherently invisible. Most importantly, the local actors have found a targeted and loud voice in the liberal peace framework. [The realization that NGO's and formal government structures do not accord with the local identity](#) is something that has inspired them to fall back on their own resources and get away with their day to day responsibilities.





Image source: Interpeace

## Case Study of Somaliland: Worth Appreciating...

[Somaliland](#), an autonomous region in north-western Somalia, continues to be a relatively peaceful society since 1997. It is quite remarkable in the sense that the state has strong democratic credentials and consolidated state institutions despite a turbulent history with Somalia and Puntland. What is even more interesting is that the state has been able to preserve peace solely under the tenure of local actors due to minimal international recognition. Moreover, the local funding of peace conferences appear to have incentivized participants who vouch for an acceptable consensus; fostering the sense of local ownership in the peace process, analysts claim.

## Obstacles to Local Turn in Peacebuilding

With the pile-up of empirical research on local peacebuilding, [its success story has started to be contested](#). Critics say that its view as [panacea](#) is now replaced with something to be

dealt with caution. While some scholars claim that ‘the failure of liberal peacebuilding’ is a sign of success for the ‘[local claims of autonomy](#)’, welcoming peacebuilding failures might take a [devastating face](#) in reality.

Ginty & Richmond layout four principal obstacles embedded in the fabric of liberal peace. First, there is a drift towards the standardisation of peacebuilding interventions. The authors’ justify the claim via increasing professionalization, the spread of technocracy, promotion of ‘best practice’ and the spread of ideal conflict analysis framework. They further state that many of these factors are influenced by [neoliberal management](#), who is highly ignorant of empathy or solidarity with the subjects.

Second, the local turn refutes the notion of ‘[universalism](#),’ that lives in the heart of liberal optimism. Put simply, the West sees its own rationality and universalism associated with the local peace, where any attempt to negotiate with the broad array of actors may prove to be catastrophic. [Rajiv Malhotra](#), in his book ‘*Being Different, An Indian Challenge to Western Universalism*’ states that Western universalism neglects the unique trajectories discovered by the members of other civilizations. He says, “*The unique experiences of different cultures are not always inter-changeable*” and so the tendency to superimpose Western paradigm undermines the role of locals in the process.

Third, the advocates of liberal peace claim that they find it difficult to capture local nuances in the fullest capacity. This is partly because of the reporting mechanisms used by INGO’s and international organizations. The other reason is that the [local dynamics are too complex](#) to be conveyed in a tick-box format, which is the general template for surveys.

Lastly, the local turn is co-opted by orthodox that is internationally designed and funded to promote the Western approach to peacebuilding. The worst part is that powerful global agencies like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have been unable to respond to the problem. What happens then is the local-international interaction that gives birth to *hybrid* forms of peace and politics where the locals are the final sufferers. While there is no denial that the local actors sometimes subvert and negotiate with the international, there is very little evidence to the ‘[say no to Western exploitation](#),’ set aside Somaliland.



Image source: OEF Research

## Conclusion

Ginty & Richmond's concluding remarks suggest that the local turn represents a crucial moment in the making of peace. It not only encourages the reassessment of the parameters to justify international interventions but also opens up the possibility of a more expansive epistemology that overcomes the boundaries imposed by state sovereignty. An important highlight, however, is that these [localized epistemologies](#) are different from Western modes in terms of 'Variance.' The heterogeneity in localized thinking and expression means that there is no precise framework that will tend to uncover any hidden injustices of international intervention.

Moreover, less than a decade after the authors' advanced the merits of local turn, Richmond & Ginty have now become leading scholars who are publicising the concept of *hybridity*. If nothing, this shows the [evolving nature of the discourse](#), which both Ginty & Richmond accept is conceptual. The local-hybrid-turn has indeed pushed liberal hegemony but failed to deracinate it and so conclusively, while local turn has contributed to the fundamental expression of peacebuilding, [practical alternatives and greater clarity to liberalism is yet to emerge](#).



## Subscribe to the International Relations Updates by The Kootneeti

\* indicates required

Full Name

Email Address \*

Subscribe

made with  mailchimp



**CERTIFICATE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

SIX-WEEK ONLINE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS BY THE KOOTNEETI

**JOIN TODAY!**

 [team@thekootneeti.com](mailto:team@thekootneeti.com)

 [courses.thekootneeti.in](https://courses.thekootneeti.in)

 (+91) 120 4565994

*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team*

Facebook Comments