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Jekyll or Hyde: what is statebuilding creating? Evidence from the 'field'

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Abstract

As a response to the dynamics of state formation, statebuilding has not created model states in the last twenty years as was intended. Instead, the states that have emerged around the world are heavily contextually contingent. This is despite international attempts to shape them according to a common pattern, dominated by neoliberal models of statehood. This raises the question of what kind of hybrid states are actually forming as a result of the encounter between international statebuilding and local political dynamics? This article argues that international statebuilding aims to create neoliberal states and treats local political dynamics as dysfunctional. Yet from a local perspective the limitations of the statebuilding model are also apparent, as is the need for any locally legitimate state to be grounded in its context.

Notes

Thanks to Jasmin Ramovic and David Chandler, as well as several anonymous reviewers, for their constructive comments.

[1] This is a reference to the novel The strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson (1866), which famously investigated the phenomenon of a London doctor's ‘split personality’, between good (Jekyll) and evil (Hyde).

[2] Confidential source 1, personal interview, World Bank, Washington, 2 February; confidential source 2, personal interview, UNDP, 8 February.

[3] For a good discussion of the manifold dynamics of neoliberalism in Cambodia, see Springer (2010).

[4] Address by President Taur Matan Ruak on the commemoration of the thirteenth anniversary of the referendum for the self-determination of the people of Timor-Leste, Dili, 30 August 2012.

[5] Confidential source 3, personal interviews, UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), New York, 6 February.

[6] Confidential source 1.

[7] Confidential source 2.

[8] See Confidential source 2.

Additional information

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