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The 'Hybrid Turn': Approaches and Potentials

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Introduction

Hybridity, the hybrid turn and hybrid political orders have become increasingly common as terms in debates around peacebuilding, state formation, governance and, to some extent, counter-insurgency and security in postcolonial states. While circulating in scholarly debate, where they are best exemplified in the work of Oliver Richmond,[1] Volker Boege, Roger Mac Ginty and others, these terms, or approaches associated with them, now also appear regularly in policy and practice arenas,[2] where they have emerged as part of a response to what is seen as the relative failure of many international postwar reconstruction, statebuilding and security interventions to establish stable, relatively peaceful and well-governed states in many postcolonial regions.[3] As the word implies, hybridity in the first instance is concerned with interaction and change across significant difference—in the context of these debates, the difference in question relates to the making and experience of political community, in the fullest

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1   There is an extensive opus of work by Oliver Richmond, including, for example, 'Resistance and the Post-liberal Peace' and *A Post-liberal Peace*.
2   OECD-DAC, *OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform*, 17; World Bank, *World Development Report 2011*.
3   Ramsbotham et al., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*.

sense of that term, across time and always engaging questions of power. Hybridity offers a way of bringing focus to the struggles, entanglements, patterns of occlusion and exclusion, processes of reworking, and ways of doing things engendered by the interaction of sometimes profoundly different logics of social and political order, sources of legitimacy and patterns of collective meaning.

How sociopolitical orders approach significant difference is a longstanding and ongoing challenge which has been understood and managed very differently across changing historical and sociocultural contexts. This discussion of hybridity is part of these wideranging and fundamental debates about how we collectively live, and more specifically about the desired nature of the state, and it carries implications for these debates. Nevertheless, as the later discussion of the emergence of the current exchange regarding hybridity indicates, the use of hybridity here has a more particular focus and purpose. Here hybridity is a response to the standardising drive dominating statebuilding and associated governance agendas in international development and peacebuilding contexts.

Varied family trees can be traced for hybridity, from biology to postcolonial studies.[4] At the same time, 'hybridity' is an everyday word with all the mutability that common usage brings; in scholarly and policy contexts there can be sharply different uses and meanings at work.[5] This chapter is not endeavouring to patrol the boundaries of a word at play in such a range of contexts. Nevertheless, the expression has become significant in a spectrum of interrelated debates and practices because references to hybridity enable certain kinds of discursive work to occur; they make possible certain conceptual insights, linkages and moves; and they open the way for particular practices. In the context of international peacebuilding, statebuilding and development, there is arguably a desperate need to recognise the reality of profound difference both between the sociopolitical models predominantly carried by such international endeavours and the lived reality of the recipient populations but also within the recipient states, to understand and give weight to that difference in new ways, and to craft ways of working creatively with and across it. Hybridity could thus open the potential for new ways of thinking about relations within states, but also across political communities within and among states.

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4   See, for example, Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders'.
5   See, for example, Mac Ginty and Richmond, 'The Fallacy of Constructing Hybrid Political Orders', for a discussion of different approaches.

The contexts in which references to hybridity and the hybrid turn have again gained prominence (touched on later) cast light on some of these moves and practices. It is also important to reflect critically on the significantly different ways that hybridity can be used, and therefore the different kinds of work that the term can be undertaking and the different trajectories that work is embedded within. A reference to hybridity does not automatically bear the same potential or significance from one use to another. This is not only a matter of conceptual clarity, but also of following the threads of practical, political and ethical potential and effect.

As a phenomenon, hybridity is not new. There is nothing novel in complex, dynamic enmeshments across difference, including friction and transformation across struggles for power. Negotiating profound difference seems likely to be a fundamental and potentially creative part of collective human experience and activity, across millennia of migrations, trade, wars, occupations and marriages; it is also often deeply challenging, frequently unchosen and repeatedly violent. All sociopolitical formations could be understood as 'hybrid' in this very general use of the term. As a broadly theoretical term, postcolonial studies then bring to this generic insight a more particular focus on the long history and deeply formative ongoing experience and legacy of colonialism, for all parties.[6] Many studies explore the long, complex and often self-contradictory collective and individual relations, identities and psyches shaped by centuries of colonial interaction. Even while recognising the deformations produced by deep structural violence, these accounts, often of resistances and radical reappropriations, offer critically important alternatives to analyses that produce simply oppressors and victims.[7]

Contexts of emergence

The uses of hybridity discussed in this chapter emerged more specifically in the context of debates around statebuilding, state-strengthening, governance and peacebuilding efforts undertaken by international and external state agencies. In such debates, the state is not surprisingly taken to be the fundamental vehicle for political life, and so for stability, governance and prosperity.[8] A distinguishing factor in this current usage

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6   Appiah, *In My Father's House*; Braithwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*.
7   Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*.
8   Paris and Sisk, *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding*.

of the term, then, is a focus on how the state and political community take shape, change and consolidate (or not),[9] whether or not 'the state' features prominently in any particular analysis. The hybrid turn, however, arguably marks a shift towards more complex, but perhaps also more grounded, notions of what in fact constitutes a working state, in contrast to the more technocratic models favoured by statebuilding interventions. Hybridity as an analytical approach brings a focus on the state not solely from the more common perspective of state institutions, but rather in terms of the dense layering of interactions, relations and institutions that make up political community and constitute the basis of state formation, in which state institutions play key roles.[10]

Indeed, the hybrid turn more often engages with community, customary or more generally societal efforts regarding security, justice, peace, welfare, conflict resolution or governance—dynamics that are rarely centre stage in international statebuilding agendas. Nor is 'the state' assumed to exist according to the narrative of the secular, legal-institutional architecture forged for it in statebuilding exercises. The world of the unseen—of the dead, the sacred, of spirits, ghosts and the powers of nature—can be and often is a fundamental part of political community, including of its play of power.[11] Whether 'the state' is understood as the institutional and legal framework for regulation, however, or whether it is understood more broadly as potentially encompassing the political communities across an entire population (living and perhaps also the dead), this complex, multivalenced world of sociopolitical life is what the state is part of and what it must work with, across and for. For many people in postcolonial states, who are both inevitably building on but also struggling with the colonial legacy, the encounter with the state is the ongoing effort to craft their own working political order, perhaps simply to continue cultivating their own place, but in effect to contribute to shaping their own state in the context of a dynamic, dangerous and interconnected world. This effort involves not only matters of self-rule, security and wellbeing but also identity and meaning, and it is always fought out across and as part of the power dynamics in play.

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9   That is, the hybrid turn focuses on broader processes of 'state formation' rather than the narrower, more technical focus of 'statebuilding' which relies on the essentially technical processes of institutional transfer and 'capacity building' over short time frames.

10   Grenfell et al., *Understanding Community*; Wiuff Moe, 'Hybrid and "Everyday" Political Ordering'.

11   Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds of Power*; Grenfell, 'Remembering the Dead'.

Hybridity in this context then refers to the complex co-existence, exchange and entanglement between often incommensurate logics of social, political and sacred order in the ongoing process of state formation and shaping political community: between, on one hand, the various prevailing values and practices of particular peoples and, on the other hand, the various norms and practices embedded in the dominant legal-institutional models of state operation, neoliberal modes of economic rationality and what could loosely be called 'modern' social formations and constructions of the person. Notions of hybridity thus begin as a pointer to, and a lens on, the need to take profound difference as fundamental in the dynamic of political order and as embedded in the very structure and working life of most postcolonial states (and perhaps increasingly, in all states). In this case, difference is not simply a matter of competing interests or antagonistic ethnic or religious identities, but refers to what are often profoundly different ways of knowing and being in the world. As well as some anthropologists and ethnographers, theorists of radical indigeneity point to this depth of difference well.[12] Nevertheless, this is a difference of logics or of ways of knowing—actual empirical institutions, groups and even individuals can be deeply shaped by both: hence hybridity. A working chief in Ghana might have a masters degree from a British or United States university; the head of a government department in Vanuatu can be deeply embedded in very traditionally operating kinship networks from a remote island; a community and customary leader from Bougainville might be trying to forge viable responses to contemporary political dilemmas, drawing on customary and parliamentary political dynamics, and so forth. While some groups live overwhelmingly in one 'world' or another, and many activities circulate within one set of meanings, many interweave different domains on a daily basis. Identity is never uniform or homogenous, and is perhaps always marked by difference with itself.[13] Despite this interweaving, however, negotiating profound difference in the context of forging political community or state formation throws down fundamental political, practical and ethical dilemmas. It intensifies the questions of how we live together across difference, questions that are arguably one of the drivers of the enterprise of the modern state, but takes them into another register altogether.[14] These questions are also relevant to a wide range of national contexts.

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12 See, for example, Alfred, 'What Is Radical Imagination?'; Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.
13 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*.
14 Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*.

One strong initial motivation for talking about hybridity and hybrid political orders was the effort to move away from a preoccupation with state failure as the framework for analysis of political instability and violence in postcolonial states.[15] Some of the relatively early uses of the term, for example, emerged through research and practice engagements in Bougainville, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Timor-Leste, where a focus on state failure or incapacity, while certainly yielding insights, failed to capture both the complexity, dynamism, broader resilience and capacity of political community and social order, but also significant underlying sources of disorder.[16] Stepping aside from frameworks of state failure is not a rejection of the idea that the architecture of state governance can fail (presuming it has ever actually operated) as such, but marks an effort to investigate more comprehensively the actual forms of authority, legitimacy, order and disorder in play. This involves a more complex and open-ended imagination of the state, and opens new perspectives on its 'failure'. At a simple but fundamental level, the reference to hybridity is a refusal to judge whole regions primarily in relation to their conformity or otherwise to an idealised version of the rational-legal state—to models of what those in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states might like to portray themselves officially as being. Such narrow grounds of assessment cannot be expected to yield a strong understanding of what is at stake in the region concerned, and only in very particular circumstances could be the basis for good policy.[17]

An emphasis on hybridity then entails taking seriously deeply held collective values, forms of knowledge and ways of life, in their dynamism, struggles and continuities, as part of a living political context. This enables sources of order that would in official terms be seen to lie outside state institutions to become more clearly visible and open to exploration—not predominantly as an anthropological engagement, but as a current political exchange. Such exploration does not imply endorsing or condemning those forms of order but, rather, requires paying full attention to them. In the countries or regions mentioned, everyday security, food security, social welfare, conflict management and justice provision are substantially underpinned by customary and community forms of order, which may

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15   See, for example, Wainwright, *Our Failing Neighbour*.

16   Boege, 'Bougainville and the Discovery of Slowness'; Boege et al., 'State Building Reconsidered'; Boege et al., 'States Emerging from Hybrid Political Orders'; Dinnen, 'The Solomon Islands Intervention'.

17   Brown, 'Security and Development'; Dinnen and Peake, 'More than Just Policing'.

themselves be understood as part of a larger cosmic order.[18] In many respects, the working sociopolitical order of 'the state' exists by virtue of villages and customary or kin patterns. Villages, and the political fabric which enables them to work, need, then, to come more fully into view, not as a signifier of what is parochial or of the past, but as a functioning way of contemporary life. Considering hybridity also, however, brings more clearly into focus the profound forms of disorder, alienation, manipulation and sociopolitical dysfunction that can be generated in the context of disjunction and deep ambiguity between prevailing social values and official state institutional systems and norms.[19]

A focus on state failure, by contrast, approaches questions of order and disorder through the lens not of the state as political community, but of a narrow conception of the state modelled around (in effect) the ideal forms of state institutions. This identification of the state with government and juridical institutions—an identification that to a significant extent conceptually underpins institutional transfer processes[20]—posits both a categorical distinction between state and society, and a fundamental uniformity between the values, life-worlds and political vocabulary of state and society, and across society. The idea of the state carried by much statebuilding embeds an assumption that the narrow, idealised forms of state institutions and of the notional public sphere of the liberal state are sufficiently grounded on universal reason to be beyond 'culture' and difference.[21] For this fundamental form of intervention and the powerful idea of the state that is associated with it, the ideal form of sociopolitical life has already been determined and simply awaits implementation. While such assumptions may work well enough where the structure and processes of state institutions substantially share underlying cultural understandings with a broadly homogenous population, they are considerably less effective for (the increasing number of) states where that is not the case.[22] Beyond programs of education and training, predominant statebuilding and peacebuilding narratives offer few tools for working with the relationship between government or international institutions and societal networks, or for exploring the complex interplay between prevailing cultural norms of obligation, accountability and appropriate behaviour with liberal

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18 Grenfell et al., *Understanding Community*; Hicks, *Tetum Ghosts and Kin*.
19 Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds of Power*.
20 Lamour, *Foreign Flowers*.
21 Eriksen, 'State Effects'; Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*.
22 Dodson, 'The Human Rights Situation of Indigenous Peoples'.

rights norms and legal-institutional models of behaviour, or for even understanding why such work might be important.[23] It is common for forms of sociopolitical order that are neither government nor civil society (often, although not solely, customary forms) to be seen as in competition with, undermining or corrupting state institutions, inherently exploitative or violent or simply as too fragmentary to act as viable sources of order. Often they are implicitly cast as the 'dark shadow' of the past from which modern life has progressed and against which it marks its progress. This is to rule them out from serious engagement from the start. It can be these institutions and networks, however, that actually enable key forms of sociopolitical life and in effect underpin the state.[24]

Notions of hybridity thus support a move away from taking the legal-institutional, broadly Weberian models of the state as the definitive standard of political community, and as the sole source or form of political goods such as accountability, participation, legitimacy, justice and ethics. They call for more complex understandings of what might constitute political order and political community and for processes for defining and achieving collective goods and shared understanding across profound difference.[25]

Terminologies and scales

The difference of sociopolitical logics to which hybridity refers is sometimes characterised as one between 'state' and 'society' and sometimes as the interaction of 'international' and 'local' (whether because exchanges between international agencies and local people in the context of international peacebuilding or statebuilding are the focus of analysis, or because the state itself is seen as an internationalising force). Or the difference might be understood as one between customary, modern or other possible social formations.[26] The first two of these characterisations, however, have a shorthand quality, and all are more relevant to certain situations than others. Categories of society, state, local, national, international are fundamental to how contemporary politics is thought; they situate each other in a network of constitutive references, arranged

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23   Hohe, 'The Clash of Paradigms'.
24   Grenfell et al., *Understanding Community*; McWilliam, 'Customary Governance in Timor-Leste'.
25   Mac Ginty and Richmond, 'The Fallacy of Constructing Hybrid Political Orders'.
26   For example, see Grenfell, this volume.

in vertical hierarchies.[27] Perhaps in part because of their fundamental nature, such categories are not so stable when pushed empirically or theoretically. A state is not simply a 'domestic' entity experienced (and to varying extents constructed) by those living within a defined territory and in principle subject to its laws, institutions and requirements—although it is certainly that. As a political and legal form the state is a globalised phenomenon and effectively enforced as such—for peoples wishing to exercise a particular level of self-rule and sovereignty, or even simply security from invasion or domination by violent others, there is as yet no alternative to being a state. Even when borders are in effect notional, the state is by definition the hinge point of articulation between domestic and international, 'inside' and 'outside', by virtue of which these spaces are constituted.[28] The encounter with the state, and the architecture of political, social and economic modes of practice it references, is (albeit to varying degrees) an encounter with a globalising drive as much as with a 'domestic' or national one. The 'local' is meanwhile saturated by, and interwoven with, international and global influences and forces.

A spectrum of approaches

This chapter distinguishes among three different ways of using notions of hybridity as a theoretical tool. A key distinction turns on the question of instrumentalisation and therefore on the nature of relationships between what could be called the subjects and the objects of the approach enabled by notions of hybridity.[29] As will become clearer, this focus on instrumentalisation and relationship has important epistemological, practical, political and ethical dimensions.

The first use of hybridity is as an analytical or descriptive category, broadly in line with the orientations set out above. That is, it is not in the first instance normative, does not point to something to be aimed for, and does not denote a good or a bad state of play in itself. In this usage, hybridity simply marks a recognition of the co-existence of diverse sources of order (and disorder) within the make-up of political community, without judging such co-existence to be inherently negative, and so opens a space to investigate the prevailing ecology of relationships.

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27   Escobar, *Territories of Difference*; Ferguson and Gupta, 'Spatializing States'.
28   Walker, *Inside/Outside*.
29   See also Mac Ginty and Richmond, 'The Fallacy of Constructing Hybrid Political Orders'.

Research informed by this approach—into questions of everyday security, for example—might explore with people in communities, towns and across an array of relevant institutions and community positions common sources of insecurity, who or what is seen to provide security or to counter insecurity and how they go about it, avenues for accountability, patterns of exclusion and inclusion, patterns of vulnerability, how providers of security might link outwards geographically or institutionally, and so on. The answers to such questions often concern social order generated by complex networks of groups; they often include customary networks as fundamental lines of connection and modes of practice, but can also include elements of state institutions and regional governments; they might include church or religious groups, but also community-based organisations and neighbourhood associations. Such work often focuses more on the everyday production of life and less on elites, whether these are elites claiming state platforms, or their rivals (e.g. warlords), although such figures are certainly key actors and might feature in the chain of connections. While the perspectives opened by hybridity as an approach can provide sharp insight into dysfunction and violence, one consequence of this line of enquiry is that it is possible to discover that rather more is working than often appears to be the case.[30]

This approach is somewhat different from an emphasis on political economy. While both might seek to drill deep into the nature of interactions among a wide range of players, an emphasis on hybridity might look not only at the complex dynamics of power, but also at profoundly different understandings of what constitutes power, of what its sources might be, and what might operate as checks upon it. Hybridity or the hybrid turn involves a much greater recognition of what is sweepingly and reductively called 'culture' in the generation and circulation of power. As it is understood here, the hybrid turn also carries quite particular implications for and orientations to practice, even if that is simply the comportment of self-reflective research.

While an emphasis on hybridity is not, in this first and fundamental approach, normative, it can have significant normative implications, as implied earlier. Moreover, these dimensions can be pushed far. The key element here is the importance of paying attention, of taking people's own values, beliefs, emotions, practices and self-understanding

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30 See, for example, Boege, 'Bougainville and the Discovery of Slowness'; Dinnen and Peake, 'More than Just Policing'.

seriously. After the manner of Simone Weil, attention may be what we fundamentally have to offer each other.[31] This does not mean accepting or endorsing those values, or preclude critiquing them, if that seems relevant, but it does require serious engagement. While this certainly has significance in a research context, it becomes even more pressing in a practice engagement. The critical question becomes one of mutuality and dialogic exchange with the normative point including the question of how might 'we', as researchers, practitioners or 'intervenors', engage? This shifts focus from being only on 'others' elsewhere to the nature of the exchange and perhaps the history of the exchange; it thus includes ourselves, as reflective researchers and practitioners.[32]

This shift thus involves self-reflection regarding the nature and impact of our individual but also collective agency and actions, including the history of actions that we, perhaps unwittingly, represent to those we are interacting with; it involves a move away from the 'delivery' mode that dominates development, and from imagining that 'our' work is technical and neutral, to an emphasis on participation and the quality of relationship. It involves recognising others as interlocutors, as co-creators of knowledge and action and demands a capacity to enter into difficult conversations and exchange. Perhaps most challenging, it involves stepping back from a demand to control. If we are seeking some form of change in others, not only do we need to understand (as well as we can) people's sources and forms of practice, we might also need to be open to change ourselves—even if that change is primarily in the ability to enter into more mutual forms of engagement.[33] In this, such modes of engagement echo the loosening of those discourses of the state, centralised to the sovereign point at which control ultimately resides and from which it radiates. The normativity of the hybrid turn in this iteration does not, therefore, concern how to achieve hybridity, but how to support the more familiar goals of wellbeing, reasonable safety, food security, reduction of violence, greater justice and so forth, but doing so in ways that place priority on paying attention to the people involved, their own goals, what is valued, by whom, the range of views on how it might be achieved, and the nature and quality of the exchange.

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31   Weil, *The First and Last Notebooks*.
32   Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*; Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner*.
33   Brown, *Human Rights and the Borders of Suffering*.

A second use of hybridity, which is more prominent in the peacebuilding literature, casts it as something to be aimed at. In practical terms this approach emerges from the very reasonable effort to encourage international agencies or national elites to give greater recognition or weight to widely prevalent forms of sociopolitical order. A subtle shift takes place, however, from working with communities' own approaches to (for example) achieve less violent everyday security provision to seeking to achieve 'hybridity'. This approach appears to be the result of setting up the argument as a chequerboard of moves in a narrative of development, shaped by the logic of the positive dialectic, from which synthesis ideally emerges. The emphasis shifts from the process of mutuality to an imagined outcome—a newly constructed hybridity. 'Hybridity' then becomes a conceptual space, and a prefigured, notional or narrative solution to a profound, ongoing set of concrete issues about how we live together. This is the design of hybrid institutions to which Gearoid Millar refers.[34] It appeals to the desire (or the bureaucratic need) for a 'form of words' or a repeatable 'place holder' able to stand in for concrete responses to particular conundrums. Instead of being an orientation and openness to complexity, it stands as a solution. Such a solution may be premature and reified, however, and so obscure more than it reveals. In practical terms it may endanger the challenge and potential of an emphasis on hybridity, as the need to recognise and (where relevant) work with the grain of complex, dynamic situations.

What I identify as the third approach is the effort to devise hybrid solutions, far from the mutuality of exchange, in the distant capitals of international agency such as New York or Geneva or even Kabul, in order to provide what is hoped will be predictability and uniformity. The focus here shifts to questions of control from abstract capitals and to finding more effective forms by which places and peoples can be managed so that they do not pose problems for those capitals. Hybrid sources of order and authority are recognised, but in terms of whether and how they might be manipulated. This approach represents a highly instrumentalised form of relationship, reminiscent of colonial mechanisms of 'indirect rule' whereby colonial administrations used local customary systems as a low-cost means 'to maintain order … enforce production of cash crops and collect taxes'.[35] As Richmond and Mac Ginty note, this approach is in line

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34 Millar, 'Disaggregating Hybridity'.
35 Aning and Aubyn, 'Challenging Conventional Understandings'; Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*, 54.

'with a post-Iraq and Afghanistan curtailed liberal interventionism, and is also in keeping with neoliberal mores of shifting responsibility and lowering intervention costs'.[36] Counter-insurgency also provides a developed arena of policy and practice that exemplifies this third approach to 'hybridity'. United States counter-insurgency efforts in Somalia, for example, have operated under a 'dual track' policy of engaging with a wide range of 'non-state actors' opposed to Al Shabaab.[37] Similar policies have been adopted in Afghanistan in the struggle against the Taliban, and elsewhere. This kind of approach to 'hybridity' has a very long history.

Instrumental approaches and logics are not in themselves a problem; there is no criticism intended here of the effort to achieve outcomes and the need for management of people and things in order to do so. Nor is any criticism intended of the effort to understand the power dynamics of others. The issues at stake in discussions of hybridity, however, entail working across, and in a context of, significant difference, often severe fragmentation, perhaps violence and highly unequal, coercive power dynamics. This establishes a very different context from one of managing others where a substantial political or social vocabulary and mechanisms of redress are already shared; the presence or otherwise of such contexts of exchange makes a significant difference to the nature of the instrumentalisation. The researcher or practitioner could ask how those involved at different points in the process are engaged—what is the scope for exchange, participation, accountability or even safety? How deeply are people objectified, or treated as interlocutors, and is this to engage only with the powerful, or with the spectrum of those involved in the issue at hand?

Whether or not there are reasons to argue for this instrumentalisation and objectification of people under conditions of violent insurgency, such an approach constitutes a radically different approach to hybridity. A highly instrumentalised use of hybridity may have tactical benefits, but is unlikely to be productive in situations where the international intervenors are trying to build or achieve something sustainable, such as forms of legitimacy that are not essentially coercive. Peacebuilding or statebuilding endeavours are often trying to do just this, however. A highly instrumentalised approach is unlikely to be able to build broadly based trust, or long-term relations which generate some levels of mutual respect,

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36   Mac Ginty and Richmond, 'The Fallacy of Constructing Hybrid Political Orders', 220.
37   US Department of State, 2010, in Wiuff Moe, 'The "Turn to the Local"', 132.

yet it may be in the context of such relations that change regarding violent social practices (such as female genital mutilation, for example) are most likely to become possible.[38]

Moreover, it seems likely to be this instrumental third approach to hybridity that is most vulnerable to becoming seriously compromised through 'going along' with deeply violent assertions of power that can pass themselves off as an expression of 'culture' or 'tradition'. A contemporary example might be the practice of 'boy play', where powerful men use young boys as sexual slaves in Afghanistan.[39] This practice has come to international media attention over the past few years, perhaps because it has occurred among Afghan military personnel on United States (US) bases in Afghanistan. The US military hierarchy, apparently seeking not to disrupt relations with its allies, has at best 'looked the other way' and at worst offered partial protection by sidelining or dismissing those US servicemen who have objected.[40] 'Boy play' emerged from, and has been shaped by, prevailing social relations in Afghanistan, as in different ways violent paedophilia is present, and frequently 'overlooked', in countries across Europe, the Anglosphere and elsewhere. It was and is also seen across Afghanistan as abhorrent; 'overlooking' it does not build good relations nor earn respect. The hybrid turn is not a rationale for collaboration with deeply violent practices. At its best, it might rather be an opportunity to collaboratively reflect on and work with the various forms of violence that mark all our cultures.

Dialogue and its implications

As Foucault has pointed out, the ways we understand and experience the knowing subject and the processes of knowing, and the ways we understand the state, are deeply enmeshed.[41] Both are shaped around the figure of the sovereign self, the central knower, who sees and shapes the world around him. The argument that is at least implicit in notions of hybridity is that we need increasingly to explore different practices of statehood

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38   On the basis of field research by the author in 2015, the work of the Carter Center on female genital mutilation in Liberia, for example, offers an instance of a long-term, respectful engagement that is seeking to shift this entrenched practice, with what appears some success. The Carter Center has already contributed to changes in the practice of trial by ordeal in Liberia.
39   Sahak, 'Afghanistan's Enslaved Children'.
40   Ibid.
41   Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

and open up richer ways of being a state—ways that cannot be generated by or assimilated into prevailing modes and practices of imagining and reproducing statehood.[42] This is not a matter of abandoning goals and principles of participation, accountability, justice, fairness, inclusion, safety, respect and so forth, but about acknowledging and working with the multiple ways that we are people in the world. Richer ways of talking and doing political community may come less from the texts of theorists, and more from experimentation and exchanges already taking place on the ground, as they are in regions around the world, where towns, villages and districts are often struggling to deal with the complex problems confronting them. Such exchanges, however, need to be taken seriously by national governments, international bodies and scholarship, and to be considered and weighed for what they might make possible or illuminate. Richer ways of understanding the state as political community (and the person as citizen) come also from supporting processes and habits of open-ended exchange that can emerge as people and institutions seek to deal with the challenges of co-existence across very different practices of political community. Such processes can emerge in the face of pressing problems communities or regions are facing. While crafting practical responses to problems can be extremely valuable, an equally valuable outcome of such processes can be the gradual creation of habits and networks of exchange and listening, the experience of being taken seriously, and the flexibility involved in sitting with profoundly different logics, cosmologies and ways of engaging in dialogue. For those representing state institutions or central elites, it requires letting go of the imperial habits of thought and practice[43] in which we have been trained, letting go of needing to know the outcome beforehand, and being prepared not always to try to control outcomes.

This need not constitute a revolution in institutional frameworks (although it might), as much as in processes and methods of engagement. Nevertheless, it would represent a major change in the ways we understand and enact the state, from a centralised 'empire of uniformity'[44] to perhaps a network of relations among and across overlapping institutions and communities, in which government has important and particular roles. This is far from a call for a 'good enough' state.[45] Rather, it represents the

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42 Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*, 43.
43 Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*. The literal quote is 'imperious habits of thought and behaviour', 19.
44 Ibid., 58.
45 World Bank, *World Development Report 2011*.

effort to gradually craft differently calibrated, more relational and mutual ways of knowing the person and political community.[46] The challenges of crafting linkages and constructive adaption across difference, adaption that enables exploring and giving substance to key political goods such as justice, accountability, participation and mutual respect, rest not only with the usual recipients of international statebuilding efforts, but with all of us.

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46   See Hunt, this volume, for further discussion of relational approaches.