Beyond Hybridity to the Politics of Scale: International Intervention and 'Local' Politics

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ABSTRACT

The evident failures of international peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions (PSBIs) have recently prompted a focus on the interaction between interventions and target societies and states. Especially popular has been the 'hybridity' approach, which understands forms of peace and governance emerging through the mixing of local and international agendas and institutions. This article argues that hybridity is a highly problematic optic. Despite contrary claims, hybridity scholarship falsely dichotomizes 'local' and 'international' ideal-typical assemblages, and incorrectly presents outcomes as stemming from conflict and accommodation between them. Scholarship in political geography and state theory provides better tools for explaining PSBIs' outcomes as reflecting socio-political contestation over power and resources. We theorize PSBIs as involving a politics of scale, where different social forces promote and resist alternative scales and modes of governance, depending on their interests and agendas. Contestation between these forces, which may be located at different scales and involved in complex, tactical, multi-scalar alliances, explains the uneven outcomes of international intervention. We demonstrate this using a case study of East Timor, focusing on decentralization and land policy.

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s, international peace-promotion efforts have increasingly involved international 'peacebuilding' interventions. These have encompassed diverse activities, including military intervention, public administration and economic reform, transitional justice and even the promotion of psychological healing. In the 1990s, Western governments and international organizations operated largely within a 'liberal peace' paradigm, assuming that stabilizing 'fragile' and post-conflict states required rapid democratization and marketization (Paris, 2004). However, since the 2000s,

as failures of implementation and outcome abounded, peacebuilding has increasingly been delivered through 'statebuilding'. Statebuilding denotes a 'broad range of programmes and projects designed to build or strengthen the capacity of institutions, organizations and agencies — not all of which are necessarily part of the state apparatus — to effectively perform the functions associated with modern statehood' (Hameiri, 2010: 2). Peacebuilding is thus frequently combined with statebuilding to reshape target societies, polities and economies towards more peaceful outcomes. These efforts, despite their often technocratic presentation, are inherently political, seeking to (re)allocate power and resources and shift political outcomes. Accordingly, they are frequently contested, as are their associated modes of governance.

In many prominent cases, this contestation has led peacebuilding or statebuilding interventions (PSBIs) to fail to attain their governance objectives, or even to pacify target societies, prompting critical reflection among scholars and practitioners. In the 2000s, some began arguing that these failures reflected incompatibility between the liberal institutions interveners were promoting and target societies' culture, norms and institutions, with resistance to defend local customs and authority undermining PSBIs (Richmond, 2005). This generated early recommendations for interveners to respect and incorporate local 'paradigms' into their projects (Chopra and Hohe, 2004). Policy makers have increasingly adopted this perspective, reflected in the turn to counterinsurgency strategies in Iraq and Afghanistan, which involve cultivating alliances with tribal leaders to combat Islamist insurgents. Practitioners now prescribe modes of intervention that are more compatible with local values and institutions (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2015). This 'local turn' has spurred closer scholarly attention to how interactions between international interventions and target societies shape PSBI outcomes.

The core concept used here is hybridity. This essentially denotes the mixing of international/liberal and local/non-liberal agendas, ideas, institutions and authority structures. Reflecting different usages in peace studies, IR and development, the concept is used diversely, with both proscriptive and descriptive applications (Millar, 2014: 1). For many peacebuilding scholars, hybridity is a normative project, used to critique 'top-down' interventions and advocate engagement with 'local', 'everyday', non-state-based identities, traditions and practices to achieve more 'emancipatory' outcomes (e.g. Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2015). For many statebuilding scholars, hybridity is used more descriptively, to explain the emergence of hybridized political orders through often conflictual encounters between international interveners and local populations (e.g. Wallis, 2012).

This shift towards studying the crucial nexus between international intervention and local politics and governance was essential, since this is obviously where PSBI outcomes are determined. However, we argue that this scholarship, whether peace-based or state-based, has been constrained by the hybridity concept. Hybridity does not adequately describe the effects of international interventions on local politics, nor does it properly

explain their uneven outcomes.[1] Despite recent efforts at nuance, hybridity ultimately dichotomizes and reifies local-traditional and international-liberal ideal-typical assemblages of institutions, actors and practices. Conflicts between these binary assemblages are seen to generate hybrid orders. This approach is descriptively inaccurate insofar as some 'locals' support some 'international' PSBI agendas, while others resist. Nor do internationals always promote liberal agendas while locals favour traditional ones. Although recognized by some hybridity scholars, these complex realities are impossible to address coherently within an inherently dichotomizing framework. Moreover, merely locating PSBI outcomes on a local–international spectrum, as hybridity scholars do, does not explain why particular modes of governance emerge or whose interests they serve.

Our alternative explanatory framework reconceptualizes the interaction between intervention and local politics as a politics of scale. Scale, in political geography, refers to hierarchized social, political and economic territorial spaces, each denoting 'the arena and moment, both discursively and materially, where socio-spatial power relations are contested and compromises are negotiated and regulated' (Swyngedouw, 1997: 140). Scale matters in PSBIs because interveners inevitably seek to reallocate power and resources among different scales, for example, embedding international disciplines into a centralized national state (Hameiri, 2010), or decentralizing power to subnational, state-based or 'traditional' agencies (Hirblinger and Simons, 2015). Scales like 'local', 'subnational', 'national' or 'global' are not neutral; they involve particular configurations of actors, resources and political opportunity structures that always favour some forces and agendas over others (Gough, 2004). Thus, PSBIs are not contested simply because locals reject international actors' 'liberal' and 'modern' agendas, but because social groups favour different scalar arrangements in line with their interests and agendas (Smith, 2003). What emerges is not simply to be described as a local–international hybrid, but must be explained as stemming from contestation over scaled modes of governance by socio-political forces located at diverse scales, potentially in tactical, multi-scalar alliances.

The remainder of this article describes and critiques the hybridity literature; outlines our alternative framework; and applies this framework to a case study of East Timor.

THE LIMITS OF HYBRIDITY

This section describes and critiques the hybridity literature. We focus on its inherent tendency to dichotomize the local and international and see hybrid PSBI outcomes as accommodations between these poles. We argue that this

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1. Similar criticisms apply to the literature on 'friction' in international–local relations. Given space constraints, we focus only on hybridity.

approach cannot accurately describe the politics of international intervention in target societies, nor can it explain which institutions actually emerge or to whose benefit.

In the peacebuilding literature, hybridity denotes how: 'local actors attempt to respond to, resist and ultimately reshape peace initiatives through interactions with international actors and institutions ... hybrid forms of peace arise when the strategies, institutions and norms of international, largely liberal–democratic peacebuilding interventions collide with the everyday practices and agencies of local actors affected by conflict' (Richmond and Mitchell, 2012: 8, 33).

Hybridity is thus 'a state of affairs in which liberal and illiberal norms, institutions and actors coexist' (Belloni, 2012: 22; see also Boege et al., 2009; Mac Ginty, 2011). It emerges because of a 'gap' (Belloni, 2012: 23), or 'agonism' (Richmond and Mitchell, 2012: 26) between the agendas of 'liberal' international interveners and those of 'non-liberal' target societies.

Scholars often suggest that hybrid outcomes, being more locally legitimate, create greater stability (Belloni, 2012: 35; Boege et al., 2009; Chopra and Hohe, 2004; Kumar and De la Haye, 2012). For some, hybridity is even potentially 'emancipatory', though critical scholars doubt that interveners can simply harness local agency towards predictable or desirable ends (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2015; Millar, 2014; Visoka, 2012).

Before its adoption in peacebuilding, hybridity was already widely used, especially in cultural and post-colonial studies, where it eventually prompted an 'anti-hybridity backlash' (Pieterse, 2001). Peacebuilding scholars therefore attempted to avoid well-recognized pitfalls, particularly accusations that hybridity depends upon, and thus reifies, prior, pure social categories and identities. They strongly deny that hybridity essentializes or dichotomizes the international/local distinction, or romanticizes local institutions and norms. For example, Mac Ginty (2011: 8) argues that, rather than denoting the grafting together of two separate entities, hybridity is a process resting on 'prior hybridity' — 'a long history of interaction, fusion, competition, resistance and coalescence'. The liberal peace project and its advocates, themselves products of prior hybridization, attempt to influence 'already hybridised environments that have experienced civil war or authoritarianism. Further hybridization ensues as (the already hybrid) local and international interact, conflict and cooperate' (Mac Ginty, 2011: 8). Likewise, Boege et al. (2009: 15) state: 'there are no clear-cut boundaries between the realm of the exogenous "modern" and the endogenous "customary"; instead processes of assimilation, articulation, transformation and/or adoption are at the interface of the global/exogenous and the local/indigenous'. Hybridity scholars thus repeatedly disavow binaries like local/international, western/non-western, or modern/customary, emphasizing their interaction instead (Mac Ginty, 2010: 397 also Peterson, 2012: 12). Similarly, they claim that the 'local' is 'neither

monolithic nor necessarily incompatible with liberal norms' (Belloni, 2012: 23; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013; Richmond and Mitchell, 2012: 11).

However, as Heathershaw (2013: 277) rightly notes, despite thus being 'caveated to the point of defensiveness', in practice, hybridity accounts *still* rely 'on the bifurcation between ideal-types of local-indigenous and international–liberal' (see also Hirblinger and Simons, 2015: 424). Thus, the above-quoted rejection of some binaries by Boege et al. (2009: 15) is immediately undermined by the presentation of another binary: the global/exogenous and the local/indigenous. Moreover, they follow their caveat by stating that, 'Nevertheless, the use of the terms "custom", "customary institutions", and so on is helpful because they expose specific local indigenous characteristics that distinguish them from introduced institutions that belong to the realm of the state and civil society' (ibid.). Similarly, Mac Ginty (2010: 397) states that 'hybridity move[s] us away from the binary combinations . . . [like] modern versus traditional, Western versus non-Western, legal-rational versus ritualistic-irrational', yet immediately reinstates the international/local binary in defining 'Hybrid peace [as] the result of the interplay of . . . the compliance [and] incentivizing powers of liberal peace agents, networks and structures; [and] the ability of local actors to resist, ignore or adapt liberal peace interventions . . . [and to] present and maintain alternative forms of peacemaking' (Mac Ginty, 2010: 392).

Essentializing binaries abound when hybridity is used to explain particular cases, with careful caveats frequently discarded. In East Timor, for example, Hohe (2002) describes a 'clash of paradigms' between the 'Western-style paradigm of statebuilding' and 'resilient traditional structures' (also Chopra and Hohe, 2004: 289); Wallis (2012) charts the merging of the liberal with the local; Grenfell (2008: 90; also Hicks, 2012) distinguishes between the donor-dominated 'state, as a modern institutional form of governance' and 'tribal-traditional' governance; and Freire and Lopes (2013) dichotomize local dynamics and external intervention.

This misleading reliance on false dichotomies is intrinsic to the hybridity concept. As Visoka (2012: 25, quoting Canclini) states, hybridization is 'a process whereby "discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects and practices"'. Notwithstanding protestations to the contrary, then, hybridity as a concept is inherently 'based on the existence of two oppositional and apparently dialectically related forces' (Heathershaw, 2013: 277). This is why, despite being constantly disclaimed, binaries are always reinstated.

This dichotomizing approach generates weak descriptions and explanations of PSBI outcomes. Contrary to commonplace discussions of clashing local and international paradigms, Henrizi (2015) shows how local Iraqi women's NGOs co-opted international spaces to resist attempts by other locals to reimpose strict patriarchy. Similarly, in Burundi, international state builders promoted the decentralization of conflict-resolution to traditional, local institutions, but this was resisted by the national government which

instead promoted local 'hill councils' (Hirblinger and Simons, 2015: 430–4). Likewise, as our case study shows, local East Timorese society was neither devoid of liberal or democratic practices nor characterized by uniform adherence to mysticism and tribal authorities. It is highly variegated and conflict-ridden, with certain social groups supporting, and others opposing, the restoration of local and traditional values and structures. Some villagers, particularly youths and women, enthusiastically allied with internationals to seize resources and authority from local patriarchs (Ospina and Hohe, 2001: 115, 109, 16, 93, 138–42, 153, 117–20). Similarly, despite protesting UN disregard of local wishes, the Timorese leaders of the Conselho Nacional da Resistencia Timorense (CNRT) willingly joined a cabinet-style 'co-governance model' (Chopra, 2000: 31–3), using it as a launch pad to create a highly centralized national state, angering many sub-national elites. Clearly, the dynamics shaping PSBIs' outcomes are not reducible to local resistance to international projects. Rather, actors located at diverse territorial scales forge alliances to pursue their interests and normative agendas. Resorting to awkward categorizations of 'local locals' and 'international locals', as some hybridity scholars do (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013), does not explain these alliances or PSBI outcomes; it merely recycles (supposedly discarded) dichotomies.

Another, related drawback of hybridity's dichotomizing approach is the tendency merely to categorize PSBI outcomes as accommodations between the local and international. For instance, Mac Ginty (2011), arguably hybridity's most sophisticated proponent, argues that the 'degree of hybridity' reflects the 'balance' between two forces: liberal peace actors' compulsory and inducement powers, and local actors' capacities to resist, subvert or substitute alternative projects. The trend is towards ever-more detailed categorizations of outcomes along this binary spectrum, by developing taxonomies (e.g. Belloni, 2012; Mac Ginty, 2010; Mac Ginty, 2011; Richmond and Mitchell, 2012), and/or identifying processes, types, levels and degrees of hybridization (Mac Ginty, 2010; Millar, 2014; Visoka, 2012; Wallis, 2012). Yet such descriptions tell us very little about the institutions established. Why did particular institutions emerge, and not others? How do they actually function, and to whose benefit? Hybridity cannot answer these questions. As some proponents admit, hybrid outcomes may be positive or negative for subalterns (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2015), yet the hybridity framework cannot explain why.

BEYOND HYBRIDITY: THE POLITICS OF SCALE

This section outlines an alternative framework for explaining the institutional outcomes of PSBIs. We argue that these outcomes are determined by struggles for power and resources between coalitions of socio-political forces. Crucially, this includes a politics of scale: a struggle to define the

authority and resources distributed across and controlled at different territorial tiers. From this perspective, claims about 'local' customs and practices do not simply reflect deeply entrenched traditional values that conflict with liberal-international ones. They express the mobilization of ideological discourses of locality and tradition intended to promote scalar arrangements favourable to particular societal groups. Nor do these claims necessarily involve local actors confronting international ones. Just as international interveners seek local allies, indigenous actors based in villages all the way up to the national capital can also pursue principled or tactical alliances with international actors to advance or resist governance projects, in line with their interests and values. What emerges in practice, then, is not simply to be described as a local–international hybrid, but is explained as a product of conflict between social groups struggling to determine order in target states, including by constructing scales and modes of governance where their interests will prevail.

Our starting point is to recognize that, since they typically seek to (re)build institutions, PSBIs usually involve considerable socio-political contestation. Institutions — especially those connected to state power — (re)allocate power, resources and political opportunity structures. Consequently, social forces — classes and class fractions, distributional coalitions, state-based, ethnic, confessional and other groupings — typically seek to shape them in ways favourable to their own interests and agendas (Jessop, 2008; Poulantzas, 1976).

This contestation typically involves a strong scalar dimension. In political geography, 'scale' denotes a territorial space in which social, political and economic relations are contested. Scales may reflect existing political tiers within a state — a village, a province, or 'the nation' — or cut across them, like 'bio-regions', 'transgovernmental networks' or 'the global'. Scales, including the national territorial scale, are not natural; they are (re)produced through strategic agency and socio-political contestation. The scalar arrangement of political life is contested because, much like institutions, different scales involve different configurations of actors, power, resources and political opportunity structures. Shifting scales — rescaling — changes these configurations, potentially changing political outcomes (Gough, 2004). For example, Gibson (2013) shows how authoritarian subnational elites strive to keep issues 'local', since at this scale their interests prevail. Conversely, their local opponents often try to transform issues into 'national' matters, since they can find more allies and resources at this scale to defeat local strongmen. Both of these are subnational groups, but their scalar strategies and the alliances they pursue differ markedly because of their diverging interests. Similarly, 'scale jumping' to a regional or global scale is used by many socio-political groups. 'Territorial politics' is a common and intrinsic part of political life, even if actors do not think explicitly in terms of scale (Brenner and Elden, 2009).

As Hirblinger and Simons (2015: 425–6) argue, scalar politics are particularly apparent in the contestation of PSBIs because the institutions being created always involve a scalar (re)allocation of authority and resources. Interventions aiming to regulate budgetary processes to prevent corruption by political and bureaucratic elites, for example, may undermine the capacity of elites dominating the national scale to use these resources to support their power. However, such intervention could well be supported by these elites' local rivals. Likewise, efforts to support local courts or customary peace-making processes have an important scalar dimension, because they allocate resources and power to particular actors at a subnational scale, such as villages or districts. This could be resisted by actors at these scales, or the national scale, fearing the empowerment of rival groups.

In analysing this contestation, crucially, political geographers do not reify or dichotomize scales and associated sets of actors. This contrasts with the hybridity scholarship, which draws stark divisions between 'local' and 'international' actors, assuming locals will resist international agendas given their intrinsically illiberal or traditional preferences for 'local' modes of governance. For political geographers, whether actors support governance projects at the level of a village, district, province, nation, region or the planet is not simply determined by their physical or cultural location. More important are the implications of differently-scaled governance arrangements for actors' power, resources, interests and ideological agendas. Where a given scaled mode of governance is potentially favourable to a particular group, we would expect it to support the intervention or seek to adapt it for their purposes; where it is deleterious, we would anticipate resistance.

Accordingly, different 'locals', even those co-located in a given spatial setting, will potentially have very different attitudes to specific PSBI projects, generating complex, multi-scalar alliances and contestation. For example, a 'local' male village elder may favour moves by international state builders to restore the traditional powers of rural community leaders. However, 'local' youths and women in the same village, fearing renewed repression, may resist this and instead favour the emergence of strong national-scale powers more favourable to their own liberation. They may be supported by national-level political elites seeking to strengthen their authority against subnational challengers, who may in turn solicit other PSBI projects that will achieve this end (for examples, see case study below and Henrizi, 2015; Hirblinger and Simons, 2015; Visoka, 2012).

Thus, a politics of scale approach does not simply substitute a local/international contest for a struggle between scales, because scales — and the actors, institutions, identities and so on often depicted as entrenched at them — are not fixed. Rather, PSBI outcomes are shaped by a struggle *about* scale: they involve conflict over how power, resources and authority should be allocated to (prospective) institutions at different territorial tiers. From this perspective, claims about the value or otherwise of 'local' or 'traditional' governance arrangements are just that — claims, mobilized

as part of a 'purposeful' struggle to advance 'specific political agendas' (Hirblinger and Simons, 2015: 425, 423). This clearly includes hybridity scholars promoting 'positive hybridizations' that emancipate 'subalterns' while constraining 'elites' (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2015; see Randazzo, 2016).

Explaining PSBI outcomes — what institutions emerge, why, and to whose benefit — thus involves three analytical steps. First, we identify the main social forces contesting state power in a given territory, including the interveners. We need to understand the dominant axes of conflict between these groups, and the interests, resources, agendas and strategies they have at the time of the intervention. Note that it is these concrete groups of human actors, situated in particular political economy and social power relationships, that contest PSBIs by trying to (re)produce particular scales and scalar modes of governance. Scales are contested; they are structures of political space, not actors; thus scales in themselves cannot contest anything — only actors can contest, construct or undermine scales and associated modes of governance. Secondly, we focus on a particular PSBI project or area and identify how this relates to the interests and agendas of the main social groups. This relatively narrow focus is important because, as indicated above, a given group may simultaneously support one PSBI initiative yet resist another, depending on how it affects them or their allies. To reiterate, we must not presuppose that actors, whether located at the scale of a village, a province, a state, or an international organization, have any intrinsic preference for a given scale or mode of governance. It is categorically not the case that 'indigenous' people (or 'local locals' as Richmond and Mac Ginty call them) like traditional, village-scale governance while only 'internationals' (or 'international locals') favour 'national' and 'liberal' governance. Depending on their interests and ideologies, some villagers could support a strong national state, while certain international peace builders favour localized governance.

The third step is to analyse the coalitions and contestations flowing from this configuration of interests and agendas. It is this contestation that, ultimately, determines what institutions emerge, how they function and to whose benefit. PSBI outcomes are thus a function of inter-scalar conflicts between actors endowed with different levels of power and resources. Again, this may involve complex, tactical, multi-scalar alliances between actors that may ostensibly share little in common. For example, Cambodia's highly corrupt ruling party has worked closely with foreign donors promoting 'good governance' to forge a national-international scale of governance in development policy, since this allows it to marginalize domestic opponents (Hameiri, 2010: 177–207). Meanwhile, in East Timor, World Bank state builders sought to construct 'local' and 'liberal' modes of governance that, while embraced by many women and younger men, are contested by traditional chiefs fearing a loss of power, by national-level elites favouring a centralization of authority, and by UN-based state builders (Ospina and Hohe, 2001).

We can identify three basic types of strategic responses to PSBIs by actors in target states. First, elites dominating the national scale might try to completely resist PSBI programmes. Because PSBIs do not usurp target states' formal sovereignty, they require recipient governments' cooperation. Accordingly, elites with access to national-level state agencies may invoke sovereignty and non-interference norms to reject interventions they dislike; they thus retain a key role as 'scale managers' (Peck, 2002: 340). However, the total rejection of foreign assistance is rare, since the resources interveners offer are typically attractive for embattled governments in poor countries. A second, more common response, then, is the attempted use of the state's scale management function to selectively admit or constrain donor programmes in ways that bolster national-scale elites' authority and control over resources. A third possibility is 'localization'. Subnational actors, or even weaker nationally based actors, seeking to contest the national scale's dominance may attempt to harness PSBI programmes — particularly if they involve attempts to fragment the national scale and curtail dominant national-level elites' authority — to shift authority and resources downwards. These efforts often emphasize the legitimacy of modes of governance based in 'organic', 'traditional' communities, in contrast to 'imported' institutions like the state, to support demands that 'the local' should enjoy increased autonomy and resource allocation. Whether these efforts succeed depends on the nature of the forces in struggle, their power, resources, organization and strategy. Our perspective does not disregard the agency of 'subaltern' or marginalized groups, but departs from the normative commitment to uncovering the 'everyday' found in some branches of the hybridity literature. Their agency matters for us to the extent these groups are able to affect the distribution of power and resources. Though we recognize that non-elite groups could, mainly through alliances with more powerful actors, sometimes successfully shape governance and political outcomes to their desired ends, given power imbalances it is likely their capacity to do so will be limited and their achievements rather modest.

EAST TIMOR

East Timor clearly demonstrates hybridity's shortcomings and the utility of a framework foregrounding social conflict and scalar politics. After 450 years of Portuguese colonialism and 25 years of brutal Indonesian occupation, East Timor voted for independence in 1999. The Indonesian army and its allied Timorese militias destroyed 70 per cent of the territory's buildings and infrastructure and forcibly displaced most of the population as they withdrew, precipitating a humanitarian crisis. International peacekeepers were deployed, followed by the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) statebuilding mission. UNTAET's failure to establish a stable liberal democracy was attributed to the clash between its liberal project and

local-traditional institutions, generating the earliest calls for hybridized governance. However, the politics of statebuilding in East Timor simply does not correspond to this analysis. Rather, post-conflict East Timor was a society in flux, with severe vertical and horizontal divisions revealed as groups struggled for power and resources. Different groups, located at different territorial scales, selectively embraced, contested or rejected international intervention depending on their interests and agendas. The outcome reflects these struggles. The Timorese state today expresses a contingent accommodation between elites dominating the national scale seeking to centralize power and resources in their hands, and village-level leaders who have received limited concessions binding them into a subordinate relationship to the national scale.

   East Timor is a crucial test case for our argument because it is the case *par excellence* for the hybridity approach. Scholars widely assert that UNTAET's failures reflect a 'clash of paradigms' between liberal-international state builders and the 'tribal-traditional' Timorese, producing an 'empty shell' state (Grenfell, 2008; Hohe, 2002; Lemay-Hébert, 2011). This diagnosis, notwithstanding caveats like those discussed above, is strongly dichotomous. As one typical account puts it, there are 'two polities' in a 'disjunctive relationship': 'One model, based on Western values . . . is that of the nation-state. The other is that of the *adat* [customary law] and comprises indigenous values' (Cummins, 2015: 34; Hicks, 2012: 26; see also Brown, 2012: 54). The vast majority of Timorese are said to live simple lives in rural villages (*sucos*) where 'their only experience [is] of customary governance', that is, social organization based around 'sacred houses' (*uma lisan*) and rule by local kings (*liurai*) and/or traditional village elders, according to mythic principles and customary law (*adat/lisan*). By ignoring this, UNAET entrenched a 'major "gap" between government decision-makers and . . . people in the villages' (Cummins, 2015: 34, 38). This generated calls for hybridized international-liberal/local-traditional peacebuilding (Chopra and Hohe, 2004; Freire and Lopes, 2013; Hicks, 2012). Policy makers appear to have embraced these recommendations, leading some to identify East Timor as a paradigmatic case of successful hybrid peacebuilding (Richmond, 2011; Wallis, 2012).

   As we show, this is descriptively inaccurate and fails to explain the specific form taken by the Timorese state. Decentralization and other concessions to local-traditional governance remain modest compared to other Austronesian societies. There is, for example, no parallel to Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs or Papua New Guinea's village courts system, which *formally* entrench traditional authorities and laws in day-to-day governance. Nor are customary land claims legally recognized, as in the Solomon Islands. Merely emphasizing a hybridization process and describing the outcome as hybrid does not explain why East Timor has not developed such institutions, nor why it has developed others. Our framework can account for these outcomes.

We must first disaggregate the 'local' to identify the forces contesting state power. Such systematic analysis is absent in hybridity scholarship, which prefers to gloss over divisions and discuss attitudes 'in general'.[2] The most important social cleavages can be summarized as horizontal divisions within villages, and vertical, inter-scalar divisions between village-level and national-level Timorese elites.

Rather than being domains of universally accepted custom, many Timorese villages are deeply conflict-ridden. In many settlements, especially in urban and peri-urban areas and around agricultural plantations, colonialism and Catholicism have profoundly eroded the authority of *liurais* and other chiefs, with *adat* being entirely supplanted by state and clerical authority (Mearns, 2002: 53), and modern class relations emerging (Belun and TAF, 2013; da Costa Magno and Coa, 2012; Nixon, 2013: 165–6). Accordingly, far from a 'gap' between the state and villages, there is frequently a 'customary authority gap' *within* villages (Meitzner Yoder, 2007: 52), such that claims about elders' traditional authority are actually conscious efforts at the 'revitalization of custom and tradition', the 'reinstatement' of something long-since eroded (Palmer, 2011: 153). Elders are naturally interested in restoring their traditional powers over other community members, particularly in relation to the control of land. Traditionally, land in East Timor is claimed communally by *uma lulik*, with elders determining its distribution and use within *lulik* guidelines. This underpins one of the most important horizontal divisions within villages, between houses claiming to be 'original' settlers, and thereby authorized to determine land use, and 'newcomers', who — according to *lulik* — may only occupy and use land with the former's permission, even if they have lived there for centuries. Given the massive forced displacements under colonialism, and because most Timorese are subsistence farmers, this is a highly significant form of social power. In the extreme societal flux following Indonesia's departure, many local chiefs revived long-dormant traditional land claims as part of a widespread struggle for scarce resources, while newcomers have resisted (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012).

Other important horizontal divisions are gender and age-related. Although *uma lulik* are sometimes matrilineal, men typically predominate, with *lulik* assigning women a very subordinate role. Domestic violence is widespread. Unsurprisingly, ample evidence shows that many Timorese women resent their patriarchal subordination. They have invoked their active role in the

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2. Cummins (2015) is an excellent example. Despite an entire chapter recounting how Timorese village life was already 'hybridized' by 1999 by experiences of Portuguese and Indonesian colonialism, Catholicism and capitalism, Cummins nonetheless reverts to the dichotomous presentations already cited above. Similarly, despite occasional recognitions that certain groups — notably women, youths and national political leaders — reject traditional attitudes (ibid.: 48, 57, 85–91, 110–11), Cummins still insists that *lisan* is 'central to people's lives' (ibid.: 44), 'every' Timorese favours its retention (ibid.: 47), 'in general, customary authorities are well-respected and their roles are actively relied upon' (ibid.: 104), etc.

anti-Indonesian resistance and sought international allies to combat the re-traditionalization of gender relations (Braithwaite et al., 2012; Cummins, 2015: 85–91; Niner, 2011). Finally, *lulik* also subordinates young Timorese men. For some of them, independence and democracy offer an avenue for greater socio-political equality; conversely, 'many of the[m] . . . [regard] tradition as something that takes them backwards' (da Costa Magno and Coa, 2012: 174).

While neglecting the aforementioned horizontal divisions, hybridity scholars frequently invoke the vertical division between village chiefs and national-level Timorese elites. Here there is a typical ambiguity: the local/international dichotomy sits uneasily with the fact that national-level Timorese elites — who are undeniably locals — were heavily involved in UNTAET's statebuilding project. Given the need to dichotomize within a hybridity framework, the tendency is to implicitly categorize them as 'international' by emphasizing that many were former exiles who shared UNTAET's 'misperception' of East Timor 'as a *tabula rasa*' (Braithwaite et al., 2012: 114), and shared its disregard for 'local' practices (Wallis, 2012: 752). This is unsatisfactory. Although high-profile exiles did ascend to leadership positions, many CNRT leaders had never left East Timor, and were as deeply rooted in local society as any village chief. The CNRT's leader and UNTAET's main collaborator, Xanana Gusmão, had led the armed resistance in Timor's forests for a decade. The CNRT was intimately linked to a territory-wide clandestine network that incorporated many village chiefs and became the main organizational base for the political party that won the first post-independence elections, FRETILIN (Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente) (Jones, 2010: 554–62). Rather than depicting Timorese national elites as naive outsiders, it is more persuasive to analyse them as groups struggling for power and resources, both amongst themselves (another horizontal division), and against rival claimants from lower territorial scales (vertical conflict). Indeed, this is a very longstanding conflict: FRETLIN's 1975 programme for independence involved stripping local elders — who were collaborators of the Portuguese colonial authorities — of their powers, causing many to side with FRETILIN's opponents. After 1999, *liurais* again sought to preserve their privileges, agitating for a 'Council of *Liurais*' to advise state officials (Wallis, 2012: 755). This idea was promoted by the KOTA and PPT parties, which were heavily based among village-level elites (Cummins, 2015: 37), and pushed again after East Timor was convulsed by political violence in 2006 (Trindade, 2008). Coupled with traditional leaders' claims to control land and natural resources, and their insistence that their role in the resistance is a 'blood debt' requiring repayment (Butterworth and Dale, 2011: 7), this comprises a significant bid for power and authority from below. It represents a challenge to national-scale elites whose legitimacy and power derive primarily from electoral, not traditional,

processes,[3] and who — most importantly — typically seek to centralize control over resources at the national scale to consolidate their own position. Revealingly, resistance to conceding significant power and authority to village leaders is shared across the political spectrum, as we shall see.

We can now investigate how these power struggles have shaped the results of international intervention in three periods: UNTAET (1999–2002); the FRETILIN government (2002–06); and the Alianca Maioria de Parlamentar (AMP) coalition government (2007–present). We focus on governmental decentralization and land policies to crystallize the politics of scale involved. A similar focus by Hirblinger and Simons (2015) in their African case studies generated strong findings.

UNTAET

Under UNTAET, CNRT elites dominating the national scale harnessed their emerging scale management function to ensure that international intervention centralized power and resources and promoted forms of decentralization that marginalized village chiefs (Hughes, 2012). UNTAET's statebuilding project favoured their centralizing vision, since it was a classic 'liberal peace' operation, seeking to construct a national state, hold elections and withdraw. UNTAET involved little decentralization: governance projects focused on the national, district and sub-district scales, neglecting the *sucos*. As UNTAET's main interlocutor, the CNRT leveraged demands for local participation to establish itself as the core of a cabinet. Gusmão, in particular, exploited this to pack the emerging security apparatus with his followers, while the CNRT's constituent parties positioned themselves to win the 2002 elections (Jones, 2010: 554–62). Importantly, the CNRT vetoed UN proposals to establish a land claims commission, thereby ensuring that land (re)distribution would be left for them to determine (Fitzpatrick, 2002: Ch. 1). This served national-level elites' purposes in general, and the specific interests of leaders who had acquired large landholdings under colonialism: the infrastructure minister who seized control of UNTAET's Land and Property Unit and then rendered it defunct was Joao Carrascalão, scion of East Timor's most powerful landed family (Braithwaite et al., 2012: 120).

The only significant decentralization initiative under UNTAET rule — the World Bank's Community Empowerment Project (CEP) — was shaped by both horizontal and vertical social conflicts. CEP involved holding *suco* elections for village development councils comprising one male and one female representative, which then formed sub-district-level CEP councils tasked with distributing US$ 10–20,000 (later US$ 25–75,000) for rehabilitation projects in their areas. CEP is widely regarded as a failure, including by the

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3. While some national politicians come from regionally-based, chiefly families, their claims to nationwide authority are electorally based.

World Bank, because local chiefs and elders were deliberately disqualified from election. Thus, the councils, apparently based on international-liberal principles, 'suffered from a lack of local legitimacy' and 'could not compete with the authority exercised by [customary] leaders' (Cummins, 2015: 35–6, see Ospina and Hohe, 2001).

However, CEP actually resists neat categorization as 'international'. The project engaged directly with 'local' governance; recruited 'local' participants, many highly enthusiastic; was advised by 'national' CNRT elites; and experienced strong opposition from the 'international' UNTAET (Totilo, 2009: 76–83). The decision to exclude traditional elders from CEP elections was taken because CNRT leaders insisted that village chiefs should not be re-empowered (Totilo, 2009: 80). Thus, East Timor's emerging inter-scalar power struggle is fundamental to explaining the form taken by decentralization. Furthermore, CEP's outcomes cannot be understood without considering horizontal power struggles. Understandably, given the resources at stake in conditions of extreme scarcity, 'original' and 'newcomer' settlements contested the definition of village boundaries for electoral purposes (Ospina and Hohe, 2001: 120). Where newcomers controlled CEP councils and directed resources into projects benefiting their community, their neighbours sabotaged their work (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012: Ch. 6). Conversely, where original groups seized control, tribal elders could influence them to prosecute land disputes against their neighbours, reasserting their 'traditional' rights (Ospina and Hohe, 2001: 117–20). Where traditional governance had been eroded, election to CEP structures also provided an avenue for women's representation, and 'a tool for the young people to express their wishes and revolt against the traditional powers' (Ospina and Hohe, 2001: 115, also Cummins, 2015: 51). Unsurprisingly, customary leaders fought back, often managing to dominate the councils informally (Ospina and Hohe, 2001: 127–42). Notwithstanding their invocations of tradition, this was not a clash between the local and the liberal, but rather a mobilization of ideological discourse to uphold particular social power relations. As Hicks (2012: 36) inadvertently notes, village chiefs defended 'an *adat* in which women and young men have less status' precisely because under the 'new order' these groups' positions are 'radicalized . . . they [can] now take their seats at the heart of *suku* authority'. Where elders have managed to capture democratic institutions, their complaints about violations of tradition are, correspondingly, far more muted (da Costa Magno and Coa, 2012: 170).

FRETILIN Rule

Under FRETILIN, statebuilding was predominantly shaped by horizontal struggles among elites at the national scale, following the CNRT's dissolution into its constituent parties, and vertical conflict between national and traditional village authorities, which continued to produce highly constrained

forms of decentralization. After winning the 2002 elections, FRETILIN moved rapidly to consolidate power and control over resources at the national scale. The FRETILIN-dominated constitutional assembly created a centralized parliamentary regime, merging FRETILIN party symbols into the state, and instituted a proportional representation system that gave national leaders control over candidate selection in subnational elections. FRETILIN also made Portuguese East Timor's official language, a move broadly supported by Timor's Lusophone, national-level elites, but resented by youths speaking Indonesian and rural leaders speaking indigenous languages (Jones, 2010: 560–1). Far from an irrational act, as often suggested, this was a deliberate move to coalesce state power in the hands of older elites at the national scale (Braithwaite et al., 2012: 114).

FRETILIN's cautious moves towards decentralization after 2003 were shaped by a desire to extend the party and state's functional reach without ceding power to traditional village authorities. Again violating local/international distinctions, it pursued this agenda with the UN through a joint Local Development Programme (LDP) from 2004. This reflected a general shift in external statebuilding agendas away from merely establishing liberal national institutions towards promoting the decentralization of governance and economic opportunities. But again, national-scale elites adapted this thrust for their own ends. FRETILIN instituted elections for *aldeia* chiefs and for *suco* chiefs and councils. These essentially adapted the CEP model — controversial among traditional elders — by requiring *suco* councils to include two women and two youths alongside the *suco* and *aldeia* chiefs. However, the councils' role was limited to planning, implementing and monitoring development projects (Butterworth and Dale, 2011: 1, 7–8). Real governmental authority and, crucially, budget control was allocated to the sub-districts, which were to be converted into elected municipal councils, while the districts would be abolished. The municipalities would be immune from capture by traditional elites, whose influence was limited to individual villages. Conversely, as the country's best-organized political party below the national level (Kingsbury, 2014: 194), FRETILIN could expect reasonable success in municipal elections. This mode of decentralization thus deliberately left elites at the village scale dependent on resource disbursements from higher governmental tiers, whose personnel would be elected from party lists determined in Dili. Unsurprisingly, in the 2005–06 *suco* elections, many candidates aligned themselves with FRETILIN, seeing this as the best way to get resources for their villages (Cummins and Leach, 2012: 176).

FRETILIN's land policy was similarly concerned to centralize resource control and prevent the revitalization of customary authorities, including through using the state's scale management function to selectively embrace international initiatives. In 2003, parliament passed Law 1/2003 on the regulation of state and abandoned land, which asserted state ownership of all land except where private title could be proven. The law recognized no customary

land rights and empowered the national Land and Property Directorate to adjudicate claims. In 2005, USAID drafted a law on private land that proposed a more restitutionary approach, recognized customary claims and permitted the use of traditional procedures to resolve land disputes. While welcomed by many elites at the village scale, the draft law was resisted by nationally dominant elites. It not only risked re-empowering sub-national leaders at their expense, but might also unleash a wave of evictions as traditional land-holders reasserted their rights over newcomers. Given the massive population displacement and subsequent land and property grabs that had only recently occurred, this could foment serious social unrest. Exercising the state's scale management function, the Ministry of Justice rejected USAID's proposals. It instead commissioned Brazilian legal advisors to produce a new draft, which excised all discussion of custom, providing for communal land use only with state approval. 'Traditional institutions' were given the right to participate in, but not veto, natural resource exploitation, decisions over which were reserved for the central government (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012: Ch. 5).

AMP Rule

The AMP government's decentralization and land policies reflected the same underlying power struggles. Accordingly, despite some concessions to village-scale elites, power and resource control remain highly centralized. The AMP's primary concern was to restore socio-political stability and marginalize FRETILIN following the internecine violence of 2006, which toppled the FRETILIN administration and precipitated the return of international peacekeepers. It did so primarily through distributing patronage financed by oil exports, revenues which had not been available to FRETILIN. By handing cash, subsidies and government contracts to those capable of creating violent disorder, the AMP solidified its shaky coalition and popular support, at the expense of entrenching 'rampant' government corruption (Kingsbury, 2014: 185, Nixon, 2013: 159). Perhaps unwittingly, the PSBI present during this period, UN Integrated Mission in East Timor (UNMIT, 2006–12), supported this political consolidation. Reflecting the broader, post-Iraq trend to favour stabilization over liberalization, UNMIT's main objectives were to suppress violent political conflict, promote security sector reform, and provide security around elections. The earlier focus on decentralization waned significantly, making it even easier for the AMP to pick and choose international allies who would support their interests.

The AMP's approach to the 'traditional' reflected attempts to co-opt village chiefs into its patronage networks by making institutional and material concessions that nonetheless reaffirmed the centre's grip. The 2007–12 AMP programme ostensibly promised to decentralize authority and resources 'in strict partnership with traditional administration' (Cummins and Leach, 2012: 165). In 2009, the FRETILIN-dominated sub-districts were

abolished, leaving the districts and *sucos* as East Timor's main sub-national governmental tiers. To eradicate FRETILIN's local influence and restore social peace, political party affiliations were banned in *suco* elections. While the quota systems for women and youth remained, entire councils were now to be elected as slates selected by *suco* chiefs, enabling dominant local elites to recapture local governance *en bloc*, and thereby re-subordinate women and youths (Brown, 2012: 66–7). Chiefs were also permitted to co-opt *liana'in* — keepers of 'traditional knowledge' — onto their councils, enabling them to appoint pliable elders who would legitimize their decisions using *adat*.

These concessions to traditional authorities are frequently invoked as evidence of hybridization, but merely labelling them as such does not explain their limits in a way that the politics of scale can. Notably, villages still do not control resource allocation, which remains firmly centralized, as, for example, in the 2009 US$ 70 million 'Referendum Package' and the 2010 US$ 44 million Decentralized Development Programme, both run out of national ministries (Butterworth and Dale, 2011: 8). Reflecting their desire to consolidate power and resource control at the national scale, AMP ministers have fiercely resisted any decentralization of budgets or authority, limiting district councils' responsibilities to just health and water (Kingsbury, 2012: 268–9, 271 n38). Since financial resources remain a gift of elites at the national scale, village leaders are compelled to lobby them for patronage, precluding the emergence of serious local challenges to the national scale. Formal allocations are supplemented by personalized patronage like Gusmão's disbursement of US$ 50,000 to each *suco* in 2010. Designed to boost his party's standing in the 2012 elections, this was highly controversial among other AMP members (Kingsbury, 2012: 269). Meanwhile, FRETILIN's LDP was scaled back to the district level, its budget cut to just US$ 2.35 million. Thus, despite concessions to traditional leaders, as a World Bank survey concludes, East Timor's government has shifted from 'bottom-up, participatory approaches . . . to a strategy that emphasises centralized authority' (Butterworth and Dale, 2011: 8).

This trend is even clearer in relation to land. The Land Law drafted in 2012 — again with international input — reflects a 'desire to regulate resources at a national scale', privileging existing occupiers and investors 'over . . . customary systems' (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012: Ch. 1). Yet again, manifesting the use of the state's scale management function, the AMP government initially re-invited USAID to generate new land regulations but, when these proved unsatisfactory, USAID was dismissed and Portuguese advisors engaged instead. The 2012 legislation still assigns the central state power to allocate all land not recognized as 'private'. The latter category includes Indonesian or Portuguese titles — unsurprising, perhaps, given that another Carrascalão was now deputy prime minister. It also allows pre-2006 occupancy to override customary claims. This represents a massive concession to 'newcomers', including those who seized land and property after 1999,

which they welcomed as strengthening their hand vis-à-vis traditional land-
holders (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012: Ch. 5–6). Conversely, the latter complain
of being abandoned in favour of violent land-grabbers (Cummins, 2015:
83). The land law has also consolidated national-scale control of patron-
age resources, permitting the government to issue large land concessions to
investors, generating 'persistent allegations of rent-seeking' and corruption
scandals (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012: Ch. 5).

This pattern also manifests in how state agencies engage with traditional
practices. Another fact cited as evidence of hybridization is the increased use
of *tara bandu*, 'ruling through prohibition', a traditional method of banning
undesirable practices through communal negotiations and ritual displays.
Ironically, rebutting the international/local binary, and reflecting traditional
authority's degradation, *tara bandu* has been reintroduced in many areas
by international NGOs, because the practice had 'been forgotten over time'
(Belun and TAF, 2013: 30). Also violating simplistic traditional/state bina-
ries, village elders typically seek state officials' involvement in *tara bandu*
ceremonies to bolster their withered authority. Indeed, they display a 'marked
inability to resolve inter-village disputes, including those precipitated as a
result of the *tara bandu* programme itself, without mediation by government
officials' (Meitzner Yoder, 2007: 51). Government forestry officials have
supported *tara bandu* to enforce bans on logging — which boomed after
1999, including in 'sacred' areas with the active involvement of traditional
authorities — and sand-mining in Dili's main river (Meitzner Yoder, 2007:
45–8, Wallis, 2012: 753). In such cases, there is a confluence of interests
between local elders seeking assistance to reassert their customary authority,
and government officials seeking to bolster existing state laws on resource
exploitation. Absent such confluence, *tara bandu* is contested or ignored.
For example, government officials' use of *tara bandu* to assert the state's
right to exploit natural resources have been criticized as incorrectly follow-
ing traditional rules and conflicts have emerged over whether to maintain
plantations or restore them to 'sacred' domains (Meitzner Yoder, 2007: 51;
Wallis, 2012: 753). Customary rights are routinely overridden where they
clash with large-scale state projects as, for example, in the government's
establishment of a massive national park in Lautem district, in league with
international NGOs (Cullen, 2012). Such outcomes are only explicable as
struggles for power and resources between actors located at different terri-
torial scales.

Finally, descriptions of hybridity cannot explain how East Timor's re-
vised mode of local governance actually functions. In theory, the AMP's
concessions to village elites permit their recapture of *suco* councils. Many
hybridity scholars assert that this has occurred fairly uniformly, generat-
ing the '"re-traditionalization" of local government' (Cummins and Leach,
2012: 170). This has rightly attracted criticism of the negative consequences,
particularly for women, defying the notion that hybridization yields eman-
cipation (Niner, 2011). However, other research suggests a more variegated

picture, reflecting the uneven degradation of traditional authority and local horizontal social conflicts. Outcomes are 'highly dependent on the local politics, as well as the history of the *liurai* in the community' (da Costa Magno and Coa, 2012: 167). Many communities, dominated by feudal social relations, have reasserted 'their cultural practices for identifying leaders'; elsewhere, however, as during the CEP experiment, some seize democratization as 'an opportunity to exercise their freedom to elect their leaders and to be elected, enabling not only those from particular kinship groups to be a leader' (Gusmao, 2012: 182). Thus, just as the degree and nature of decentralization reflects inter-scalar power struggles, so village governance reflects local struggles to shape state institutions.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that hybridity is an inadequate framework through which to address an undeniably crucial question: how are the outcomes of international interventions shaped by socio-political dynamics in target states? Despite claims to the contrary, hybridity ultimately reifies and necessarily dichotomizes notions of the local and international, and wrongly assumes that PSBI outcomes are driven by interactions between these ill-defined entities. This leads to explanations of intervention that emphasize their degree of hybridization but typically over-simplify socio-political struggles over governance and in whose interests emergent modes of governance function. Conversely, a state-theoretical framework foregrounding social conflict and the politics of scale is capable of theorizing how PSBIs relate to target-society dynamics and can better explain outcomes. It especially can account for any intervention that seeks to (re)allocate power and resources, particularly across governance scales.

  The East Timor case study illustrated this framework's utility. The politics of statebuilding and peacebuilding here did not reflect simplistic dichotomies between the local/traditional and the international/liberal. Rather, it expressed struggles for power and resources between actors located at diverse territorial scales, who partnered or fought each other, and embraced or rejected 'traditional' and 'modern' principles insofar as this advanced their interests and agendas in a broad struggle for power and resources. 'Local', village-level governance was not simply a domain of tradition and custom that rejected liberal intervention, but a conflict-ridden and variegated scale where interveners found both willing accomplices who would benefit from their projects, and entrenched opponents, who would not. Similarly, nationally based elites selectively rejected and embraced international governance projects insofar as they served their goal of marginalizing traditional leaders' demands for power and resources from below, and centralized control at the national scale, where their interests would prevail. The outcome fuses traditional authorities and practices with subnational state institutions. Yet,

merely labelling this as hybrid does not explain the limitations of this fusion, or how hybridized apparatuses function in practice. Conversely, our framework explains these outcomes as the product of both intra- and inter-scalar socio-political contestation, and identifies which social forces promote or resist particular modes of governance, and to what effect.

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