Mechthild Exo, *Das übergangene Wissen: Eine dekoloniale Kritik des liberalen Peacebuilding durch basispolitische Organisationen in Afghanistan*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2017. 448 pages, €29.99. ISBN 978-3-8676-3872-1 (print), 978-3-8394-3872-5 (e-book)

After the valuable contributions already made by postcolonial perspectives in German-language Cultural Studies, History and Sociology in recent years, postcolonialism has finally reached Political Science. The dissertation of Mechthild Exo on the neglected knowledge of Afghan political grassroots organisations aims to go one step further in representing a decolonial critique of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm. The intervention in Afghanistan since 2001 has been guided by this logic, which prescribes that peacebuilding is best ensured by transplanting Western market democracy. With the peacebuilding project visibly failing in Afghanistan, a broad-based critique of the theoretical premises and practical implementation of liberal peace has emerged and consolidated. The author emphatically rejects both the idea of liberal peace and the criticism against it, because in her view both approaches depoliticise the conflict in Afghanistan.

The monograph is divided into three main parts. Whereas the introduction explains the relevance and aim of the study – to provide a counter-analysis of the conflict in Afghanistan from a political grassroots perspective – the first major section, "Decolonising Scientific Research", dwells on the need to conduct decolonial research and related issues. The main, second part of the book, entitled "Critique of Liberal Peacebuilding", introduces four "democratic, self-managed, feminist, ethnically inclusive, gender-equitable, justice-seeking political grassroots organisations" as producers of alternative knowledge about peacebuilding vis-à-vis the idea of liberal peace. The author provides in-depth narratives that rely on members' voices to enable the reader to comprehend the individual organisations' evolution, missions, activities, styles of work and also practical experiences.

The organisations comprise the (1) Social Association of Afghan Justice Seekers, (2) Afghan Solidarity Party, (3) Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan and (4) Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organisation. Their critique and protests focus on various responses to the violence that has decimated the country, including demands for transitional justice, the military intervention as occupation, the illegitimacy of the Bonn agreement and the peace process with Islamists and jihadi extremist groups, such as Hizb-e Islami or the Taliban. They call for investigations into the war crimes of members of the US military in Afghanistan and of former Afghan warlords elevated by the intervention into high government positions, and they decry the hegemonic claim of democracy promotion by a dominant group of foreign and Afghan non-governmental organisations that became estab-

lished or entered Afghanistan as an immediate effect of the military intervention. These four "progressive" grassroots organisations stand aloof from those mainstream civil society groups that they emphatically criticise, because they hold the latter to be implicated in the liberal peace project and its practices. They resist the liberal peace mission through regular protests and education efforts.

In the third part, "Controversies and Consequences", the author reflects how the "knowledge" about peace on the part of the activist organisations differs from liberal peace. The discussion focuses on controversies about the form in which democracy is established (via elections vs. "from below"), whether democratic values and experiences already exist among population groups in Afghanistan or have to be installed in a "good enough" fashion by foreign patrons, and how peace can be achieved (via power-sharing vs. based on justice). The section illustrates how academic knowledge production tends to adopt the perspective of liberal Western political actors and thereby reinforces their liberal peace agenda. The book concludes that because liberal peace suppresses the agency, positions and knowledge of those at the receiving end of it, there is no chance for a dialogic interface. By disregarding alternative perspectives, knowledge production about the conflict in Afghanistan follows a colonial logic, exerts epistemic power and implicates itself in destructive peacebuilding practices.

Overall, the author claims to generate not only a new perspective about the conflict and chances for peace but also an epistemic shift that transfers the authority over knowledge production and the interpretation of what and whose knowledge counts from Western scholars and intervention (security-development-peace) practitioners to the subjects of the intervention – represented by the four grassroots organisations.

However, the persuasion of the analysis suffers from several shortcomings: on the one hand, the lack of clarity as to how (scientific) knowledge is defined differently from a decolonial rather than a "mainstream" perspective creates uncertainty about what is being compared and scrutinised at what level of analysis. The tacit knowledge of the Afghan organisations sometimes features as positions and understandings rooted in collective memory, whereas at other times, it seems to comprise actual information, as when it refers, for example, to the awareness of the war crimes of jihadi groups during the Afghan civil war and of which criminals remain in government positions. It is bold to claim that scholars working on Afghanistan do not have the same state of "knowledge". On the other hand, the analysis does not scrutinise exactly how representative the chosen four grassroots organisations, with their positions, actually are. Do they indeed represent the population at large or is the reader subjected to a perspective of subaltern "elites" who are vocal enough to appropriate the political space to speak for all the various victims and suppressed

people in Afghanistan? Do forms of advocacy and political campaigning qualify as an alternative form of scientific knowledge? Lastly, the analysis is impaired by the non-systematic character of its analysis, which is most tangible in its evidence-jumping between different years (e.g. from 2009 to 2012/2013), while scarcely regarding the new political situation since 2014.

Despite these flaws, this work and the decolonial interventions it suggests should be taken seriously: engagement through anti-hegemonic, "modest" dialogue with Afghans at the grassroots. One might share the decoloniality approach or not, but on a practical level the analysis shows very clearly that justice is a precondition for reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan. The reader immediately understands why peace negotiations as currently practiced, engaging with war criminals and Islamist groups without any legal retribution, will not generate peace.

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Nichola Khan (ed.), *Cityscapes of Violence in Karachi. Publics and Counterpublics*. London: Hurst, 2017. 224 pages, £25.00. ISBN 978-1-84904-726-5

Karachi, the largest city of a country called "the most dangerous place on earth" (p. 164) is a violent place, indeed. Whether it really is one of the least safe cities of the world, as ranked in the Safe City Index, is a matter of criteria and quality of data. The editor of *Cityscapes of Violence in Karachi*, Nichola Khan, a social anthropologist and principal lecturer in the School of Applied Social Science at the University of Brighton, describes her aim as a "wish to formalise conversations that occur between academics, journalists, writers and activists in Karachi, but which rarely populate the same pages" (p. ix).

The focus of the book is on politically motivated organised violence. Karachi was a Balochi fishing village when the East India Company invaded Sindh on the way to Kandahar during the First Afghan War. It became a Sindhi town and India's second harbour on the Arabian Sea. At partition, Hindus and Sikhs, more than half of the population, migrated to India and were replaced by a much larger number of Mohajirs, i.e. Muslims from Northern, Central and Western India. The capital of the new country grew rapidly and became the centre of commerce, industry and trade. When the army took over in 1958, they moved the capital to Islamabad, in the far North of the "Western wing", i.e. West Pakistan. The "One Unit" of West Pakistan was dissolved in 1970 and the West Pakistan provinces were re-established. Unlike Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtuns and Balochis, the Urdu-speaking Mohajirs had no province of their