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A Governmentality Approach to Peace Operations

Elisa Lopez Lucia

Governing disorder : UN peace operations, international security, and democratization in the post-Cold War era / Laura Zanotti. - University Park : Pennsylvania State University Press, c2011. - xiv, 180 p. - ISBN 978-0-271-03761-5

In this book, Laura Zanotti uses Foucault's governmentality theory and genealogical method to trace the formation of the political rationale of the post-Cold War international security regime. Interestingly, she goes beyond the literature focusing on the capacity and legitimacy of international organisations to question how the legitimisation of discourses of international order developed. She convincingly demonstrates that, in the 1990s, discourses of democracy converged with discourses of collective security: democratisation became a means to create a peaceful world and non-democratic states were constructed as "political monsters" to be "normalized". Democracy was operationalised through the doctrine of "good governance", which became the organising principle for UN intervention as a universalised technical

solution to achieve peace, democracy and development. In addition, at the beginning of the 2000s, the concept of "human security" emerged and converged with these previous discourses. It expanded the definition of international threat and shifted "the referent and source of legitimacy of international organizations from states to population" (19). As a consequence, political monsters endangering the human rights of their own populations lost, to a certain extent, their right to full sovereignty, and this opened the way for legitimizing forcible intervention through the "responsibility to protect" concept.

Building on Foucault's governmentality theory, she addresses peacekeeping as a practice of government meant to "transform disorderly states and steer their conduct" (7). She traces the genealogy of the political rationale of the UN post-Cold War international security regime to the reform of penal institutions in classical Europe as analysed by Foucault, and exposes what, she argues, are its four main government techniques to "normalize" states: governmentality; disciplinarity, biopolitics and

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carceralisation. Consequently, the good governance doctrine is used as a framework for translating democracy “into a plurality of technical problems and issue-specific programs of institutional reform” (57) where these government techniques can be deployed.

Whilst insightful, her analysis of the UN security discourse and practices lack some precision: the object of her analysis is blurry as she does not clearly differentiate “peace-keeping” from “forcible intervention” (in general called “peace enforcement”), which instead do not imply the same conditions in terms of legitimacy, consent of the governments involved, and reaction of the international community.

Later, she exemplifies her argument using the cases of the peacekeeping operations in Haiti and Croatia. In her view, through governmentality and disciplinarity, the UN project tried to make the Haitian penal system more comprehensive, continuous, predictable and independent, like the reorganisation of penal institutions in Europe by the Enlightenment reformers. She explains the origin of the failure of this project,¹ using Foucault’s genealogy, by arguing that institutions cannot be removed from their domestic and economic context. In the Haitian case, the UN transplanted this model of penal institution at a time when it was economically unsustainable, especially after the international community stopped providing assistance to the Haitian state due to electoral mismanagement in 1997. The result was, according to Zanotti, political disorder. Therefore, she analyses the failure of the peacekeeping operation as “the outcome of the encounter between an unreflectively universalized political model and the Haitian economic

situation and resources” (79). However, her explanation remains somehow ambiguous: is the institutional model intrinsically inappropriate? Or, could it have been successful, had the international community been more consistent with its economic assistance? Is it fundamentally impossible to try to transplant a foreign model of institutions or is it a question of being more reflective of local conditions? Moreover, she fails to problematise another probable cause of failure: the lack of consistency between the political agendas of the actors intervening under the loose “coordination” of the UN (member states, international organisations, NGOs). She points to this only to prove that the UN cannot be compared to the Leviathan. And lastly, she fails to analyse the Haitian political context under Jean Bertrand Aristide and its contribution to political disorder.

She then uses the Croatian case to analyse the disciplinary and governmental mechanisms used by international organisations to pacify and Europeanize Croatia. The central organising concept of the UN project in Croatia, carried out by UNTAES, was respect for human rights. This long-term project lasted well beyond the withdrawal of UNTAES, as international actors continued to monitor and assist its transformation. Again using Foucault’s governmentality theory, she analyses some interesting aspects of this normalisation process that illustrate the strategies used in particular by Euro-Atlantic organisations: the “government by community” use of exclusion/inclusion processes to influence their target; as well as disciplinarity through standardising and individualising. Furthermore, she shows that international efforts were met “with a

¹ Her analysis goes up to 2000 with the withdrawal of the MICAH.

mixture of formal accommodation and practical sabotage” (125). For example, local administrations went against respect for human rights by complicating housing and citizenship issues for the returning Serbs. On the one hand, she convincingly demonstrates that normalisation opens up space for acts of resistance to it, and that these acts of resistance by local actors can involve oppression (of the Serbian minority in this case) and are not intrinsically “ethically good”. This is in line with her aim to adopt neither universalising praise or condemnation of peacekeeping, nor a deterministic vision of political life. Nevertheless, on the other hand, she contradicts these two statements: in the case of Croatia she does not give conclusions on the success or failure of the intervention as she does with Haiti; she argues that Haiti was a failure with respect to the UN’s objectives, but she does not acknowledge that Croatia was a success (again with respect to the UN’s objectives). This bias is due to the fact that she equates the UN’s objective of normalisation to a “totalizing aim”, which never achieves its goals and

always creates resistance. However, as she herself points out, the UN project covers a variety of actors with multiple aims; moreover, some kind of normalisation can be attained, such as in the Croatian case, where the international community is perceived to have fulfilled its goals by transforming the country into a self-governed and relatively well-functioning “European state” respecting human rights, even if the country remains under international scrutiny. Indeed, resistance should not be seen as a sign of failure; normalisation of the internal political process and the subsiding of resentment take longer than institutional normalisation.

To conclude, Zanotti insightfully clarifies the evolution and legitimisation of the UN security discourse and how it is translated into such practices as peacekeeping. Nevertheless, her aim to question established practices without being in favour or against international interventions is somehow a failure, as she appears quite deterministically negative in her analysis of the results of peacekeeping operations.