

# **Localization Strategies in Post-War Security Governance: Bringing in State-Society Narratives**

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## **Abstract**

This paper advances constructivist literature on norm diffusion so to apply to post-war security governance in the framework of peacebuilding in general, and Small Arms Control specifically. Treating peacebuilding as exercises in norm diffusion enables more subtle analyses of the politics of norms when international actors get involved in post-war societies. In particular, the paper illustrates that viewing peacebuilding through a lens of ‘norm localization’ is not only an appropriate analytical framework, but also an empirical necessity for the international peacebuilding enterprise to see even a minimum of success.

By drawing on empirical material from two case studies of internationally driven Small Arms Control – Cambodia and Kosovo – this paper applies a comparative research methodology in order to adapt the idea of norm localization so to be analytically purposeful in post-war situations. In such situations, the state is often just one of several social organizations competing over ordered packages of symbolic configurations outlining state-society relations. It is therefore useful to conceptualize the struggle over norms as a struggle over political legitimacy, and focusing in on those competing state-society narratives that enable dominant discourses and patterns of representation. By adapting the norm localization framework so to also include the contest over ideational configurations embedded in such state-society relations, the theoretical framework is improved so to have relevance also in situations where state institutions are very much in the making.

## Introduction

How do international standards travel between the international and the local in contexts of contemporary peacebuilding? International standards promoted through peacebuilding missions may be regarded as norms, i.e. shared expectations about behaviour, and agreed upon standards for right and wrong (Tannenwald 1999). Norms pertaining to the contemporary peacebuilding enterprise are envisaged to travel from the headquarters of International Organisations, via committed practitioners deployed in the field, and then – aided by best practice and capacity building modalities – introduced to local norm entrepreneurs who in turn ensure the sustainability of these norms in the local society.

Two decades of research on international norms in IR has taught us that norms matter in international politics (Kratochwil 1982; Wendt 1992; Katzenstein 1996); that non-state actors play a particularly important role in the process of spreading norms (Finnemore 1993; Klotz 1997; Price 1998; Keck and Sikkink 1998); and that international norms may spread through both instrumental and normative mechanisms (March and Olsen 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Research efforts reflect policy developments at the international level, addressing the question of how norms diffuse among states and International Organisations (IOs) (e.g. Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999), and how they affect domestic elites and institutions (Cortell and Davis 2000).

However, less attention has been paid to questions of how local social and political dynamics shape not only the acceptance/rejection of international norms, but also their intersubjective meaning in historically specific local contexts. Specifically, this issue is only recently dealt with in the peacebuilding literature. Some have followed up on Björkdahl's (2006) challenge to pay more attention to the unravel how peacebuilding missions serve as teachers or sources of norms (Alldén 2009), but the local appropriation process is still largely obscure to us. The field of security governance, which still tends to be considered an area of less normative conviction, has neither been particularly inclined to consider the ideational aspect of transfer practices (but see Gheciu 2005). This is problematic, considering that IOs rest on a 'best practice' system in their approach to norm change in post-war security governance, in which international standards are developed from experience in other contexts.

This article seeks to contribute to the literature on how norms travel by further developing the framework of norm localization, as put forward by Acharya (2004; 2009). The localization framework is particularly apt to capture the way norms travel through peacebuilding, due to its analytical perspective, which instead of focusing on top-down socialization, rather gravitates towards the way local agency give meaning to norms introduced by external actors. However, in the context of peacebuilding it makes sense to talk about an extended version, or what this paper will call 'two-step localization', i.e. the overarching process of, on the one hand, external adaptation to local realities, and, on the other, locally driven congruence finding, and treat the overall process as connected and with coupled significance for the outcome of the diffusion process. The first step is the adaptation practitioners working in the field make in order to tune their message to a local context, and the second step consists of the locally driven process of giving the new norms local flavour, and thus framing it in terms consistent with emerging state-society narratives. Bringing in the significance of the construction of state-society narratives is a key preoccupation of this article, which is concerned with going beyond the realm of formal institutions, and more actively including societal discourse and ideational properties of state-society narratives in order to explain the outcome of norm diffusion processes.

The paper applies the adapted norm localization framework to a comparative case study of two post-conflict Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Control programmes. SALW Control intends to reduce the availability of primarily civilian held weapons in

societies emerging from war, and has become an integral part of the peacebuilding enterprise over the last two decades. Empirically, however, we observe large variation in the way SALW Control fares, here illustrated by a case of successful SALW Control in Cambodia, and a not-successful case in Kosovo. Success here means the official evaluations conducted by external consultants for the mother organisation, since it is interesting not so much to evaluate the outcome but to scrutinize the process. The cases were selected based on their relatively clear project outcomes, and their permitting conditions for research into normative changes. Furthermore, it was important to contrast two cases of such different character, but in which the international ambition was essentially the same. By focusing on the way local agents lay out the rules for both adaptation and localization, this article illustrates how specific identity based processes shaped the specific outcome of internationally driven SALW Control in the two cases examined. The empirical focus is important not only because of the prominent position SALW Control has assumed in post-conflict peacebuilding enterprises, but also because of the importance of realizing the role of localization even on an issue often considered a technical undertaking between war and peace. If SALW Control is to be effective, this paper argues, it ought to follow the insight that “the success of norm diffusion strategies and processes depends of the extent to which they provide opportunities for norm localization” (Acharya 2004, 241). As it appear, scope for ‘two-step localization’ is crucial even in matters of ‘hard’ security.

The paper proceeds by first addressing the role of agency in the research agenda on norm diffusion, before outlining the proposed adapted localization framework as a more appropriate analytical prism to study diffusion taking place in peacebuilding contexts. It then argues in more detail why and how peacebuilding in general and SALW Control specifically ought to be treated as exercises in peacebuilding, before empirically illustrating the theoretical propositions through two fieldwork-based cases of such SALW Control.

### **Bringing agency back in: From diffusion to localization**

The research agenda on the way norms, rules, ideas, institutions and practices travel in international politics has assumed a prominent place in IR. Continuously adapting according to empirical realities and academic conjunctures, the main preoccupation is the “transfer or transmission of objects, processes, ideas and information from one population or region to another” (Hugill and Dickson 1988, 263). While political science is often more concerned with controlling for interdependence and related equifinality, studies of diffusion take the bull by its horns, and render the transfer and transmission between political entities the subject of analysis (Gilardi 2012).

Research seeking to explain norm diffusion have centred the analysis on the international rise and ‘cascade’ of a norm. In Finnemore and Sikkink’s ‘norm life cycle model’ states adopt new norms due to international pressure, and over time internalize the given norm (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, moreover, developed the ‘spiral modal’, in which norms travel through a gradual process that starts with the state’s entanglement in, for example, human rights norms; go through a process of ‘habitualization’ where the validity claims become depersonalized; and is followed by a process of internalization (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999).

Besides addressing dynamics at inter-state level, there are efforts at moving the attention beyond the international sphere, to how domestic conditions are crucial to understanding the differentiation in adoption of new norms and rules. As Checkel notes, there is a need to get a better sense of “how norms ‘out there’ in the international system get ‘down here’ to the national arena and have constitutive effects” (Checkel 1999, 85). Along this

strand of research, Legro finds that organizational cultures in specific domestic institutions such as in the military plays a role in mediating between systemic norms and the states' preferences (Legro 1997). Cortell and Davies (2000; 2005) moreover, argue for a focus on domestic salience, i.e. the international norm's legitimacy in the domestic political arena, in order to grasp how constitutive effects emerge domestically. Checkel on the other hand, claims that the propensity for successful norm diffusion is dependent on the degree of a 'cultural match' between the systemic norm and the target country, and suggests four categories of state-society relations – Liberal, Corporatist, Statist, and State-Above-Society – that determine whether societal pressure in a bottom-up manner, or elite learning in a top-down modality, will be the determinant mechanism of norm empowerment (Checkel 1999, 87–91).

The literature on international norm diffusion has in this way gone from a focus on the purely international level, to a focus on what happens when international norms meet local contexts. Acharya presents this in a systematic framework, and argues that norm localization is particularly apt at capturing the process of a 'dynamic matchmaking' between an external idea and the local 'cognitive prior' (2004; 2009). Instead of focusing on the successfulness of norm internalization, the norm localization model addresses the strength and idiosyncrasy of local agency in giving meaning to an external idea. The norm localization framework seeks to capture a more pertinent dynamic, which we may call the local 'politics of norms': "Local actors operating out of a historically formed normative context often redefine and reconstruct international norms in accordance with their beliefs and needs. Their ideas matter as much, and often more, in norm diffusion and institutional change in world politics" (Acharya 2009, 30). This resonates with studies that consider agency as decisive in norm diffusion processes. It has been highlighted how Transnational Advocacy Networks and civil society organisations act as norm entrepreneurs and are able to launch new norms onto the international agenda (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Price 1998); how International Organisations serve as teachers of norms (Finnemore 1993; Björkdahl 2006); and also how specific domestic institutions such as the military (Legro 1997) might be determinant in launching international norms into a domestic context.

This focus on agency, and in particular local agency, in redefining and reconstructing external norms so to actively find a fit between the international and the local is a perspective that brings constructivist approaches in IR back to the debate on the power of norms. Constructivist accounts have been accused of concealing the power embedded in ideas, and thereby of failing to consider the political purpose and potentiality of norms (Barnett and Duvall 2005; Guzzini 2005). This is perhaps particularly relevant in studies on so-called Europeanization, in which the influence of the EU on memberstates and those of its neighbours who either wish to be members or wish to forge a special relationship with the EU is studied according to the extent to which these states fulfil the relevant set of laws and rules (for an overview see Börzel and Risse 2012). Studies of Europeanisation are preoccupied with demonstrating whether the "logic of consequences" (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005; Van Kersbergen and Verbeek 2007; Hooghe 2005) or the "logic of appropriateness" (Gheciu 2005; Lewis 2005) can explain the voluntary adoption of EU norms, rules, institutions and practices. In their attempt at applying systematic frameworks of analysis, however, the relevance attributed to local agency in shaping and giving meaning to external norms is underplayed, or included only as an elite level phenomenon. Acharya's norm localization framework not only allocates agency in diffusion processes primarily to local actors, but is also concerned with how the external norm is fitted through an active congruence making process taking place at the domestic level. The norm may be contested, negotiated and eventually localized so to fit an existing cognitive prior, and the outcome may take on rather different properties than originally intended by international norm protagonists.

While Acharya treats localizations explicitly as the outcome of diffusion, his focus on “congruence making” is consistent with efforts at conceptualizing norms as processes, rather than as “things” (Krook and True 2012). A perspective on norms as processes were earlier noted by Laffey and Weldes (1997) in their seminal work on symbolic technologies as alternatives to what they call misinformed accounts of beliefs as distinct objects, or commodities. They noted how one cannot reduce norms to a ‘cause’ that produces an ‘effect’, and that while neo-positivist models treat ideas as individuals’ causal beliefs, and distinct from interest, non-rationalistic approaches emphasize that ideas are symbolic and representational and thereby social and intersubjective rather than a collection of individual beliefs. This social aspect of ideas emphasizes the systems of representation embedded in their constitutive meaning: “symbolic technologies are themselves forms of power through their capacities to produce representations” (Laffey and Weldes 1997, 210). Treating norms as process rather than “things” or a “cause” allows a better and deeper understanding of the way “norms are subject to ongoing attempts to reconstitute their meanings” (Krook and True 2012, 109), and to focus on the way local agency are crucial in this stretching and bending of externally introduced norms. This also implies attention to overcoming the neat differentiation between instrumental and normative mechanism of social action: in treating norms as processes, and as inherently imbued with power through their capacity to produce systems of representation, we require to know more about the way the two types of effects are interwoven rather than mutually exclusive (cf. Kelley 2004; on the collapse of thin rationalism and social constructivism see Zürn and Checkel 2005; Fearon and Wendt 2002).

### **Framework of analysis: Adapted Norm Localization**

Acharya’s norm localization framework is suitable to capture the way international norms enter into a vigorous process of renegotiation processes over the meaning of events, identities and interest. The strength of this analytical framework is the focus on local agency in determining the outcome of a diffusion process, as well as the careful interconnections between agency and structure. In addition, it connects with recent work on how the reconstitution of norms – including those not universally accepted – is an inherent part of norms (Krook and True 2012). However, aspects of the localization framework may be further developed. Norm localization as described by Acharya is explicitly treated as an outcome, i.e. the resulting situation of institutional change following a norm diffusion process. While this might be useful in order to distinguish it from the static categories of rejection and wholesale acceptance, it does not provide the dynamism so called for. Treating localization as a process, instead, enables analyses that capture the entire set of strategies, social interactions and cognitive processes at play when an external idea or institution enters into a local context. Furthermore, the norm localization framework remains fixated with the state level, allowing only marginal roles played by diverse aspects of cultures and alternative actors on the domestic scene. While probably suitable to the empirical reality in for example the ASEAN context, as studied by Acharya, in many context of low statehood, or where the central institution lacks capacity or willingness to act and enforce, there is a need to expand the framework of analysis so to include alternative sets of actors, and alternative negotiation processes. In sum, the norm localization framework offers a good starting point in comprehending diffusion practices in contemporary peacebuilding, but requires appropriate changes. In this article three specific adaptations are proposed.

First, moving beyond and beneath formal institutions in order to trace diffusion processes brings an analytical focus that looks at institutional change at a societal level, or what lies outside the realm of law or official state institutions. In order to include this ‘beyond

the state' perspective, it is purposeful to combine the localization framework with Joel Migdal's (1988) model of state-society relations, and focus on how the state in what he calls 'third world states' is only one among many social organizations scrambling to provide normative frames to the people living on a given territory, and that other competing social organizations may be as influential in presenting specific sets of communal ideas as the state (Migdal 1988, 13). This "scramble" between different local social organisations over dominant social constructions is quite typical of many societies outside the realm of the Western notion of consolidated states. Contexts of low statehood is often characterized by intense negotiation over dominant norms and legitimisation strategies, or what we may call the master narrative, i.e. sociocultural forms of interpretation meant to delineate and confine interpretation strategies and agency constellations (Bamberg 2005). Constructing the frames of interpretation and systems of representation is more than an intuitive exercise in understanding the social world. It is fundamentally an exercise in power over knowledge. Indeed, the study of master narratives takes the attention to performed knowledges that are competing with one another, changing the question from what is true to what knowledge is being used for, and thus to legitimisation strategies of existing power relations (Bamberg 2005). As an analytical tool, it is useful to define this process as *narrative construction*. Narrative construction as a concept originates from cognitive psychology, for which it has been used to explain how people construct the nature of their reality (Bruner 1991). Similarly, for the purpose of studying struggles over normative structures in domestic societies, narrative construction takes place in the form of a series of negotiations over the content of key concepts guiding state-society relations: authority, legitimacy, national identity, and the persona of the state itself.

The second, related alteration to the localization framework aims at a more detailed consideration of elite-society negotiations over the meaning of external norms, and of their interconnectedness with existing intersubjective structures. This implies a view that considers interest to be socially constructed rather than materially induced, so that narratives cannot be reduced to any *a priori* incentives but are instead constructions that legitimize transformations of state and partisan interests (Widmaier 2007, 785). In searching for insight into the processes whereby actors make choices based on specific narratives, a focus on elite involvement in this narrative construction is useful. But, as Widmayer points out, attitudes pertaining to social traditions among the public also constrain elites (Widmaier 2007, 784). Elites do not freely rein the public, but must continuously consider the extent to which the public will be adequately persuaded by the narratives proposed to them. Moreover, social institutions like religion, traditional law, or other bodies of norms circumscribing state-society relations affect the extent to which elites can construct, bend or alter narratives freely. Such social institutions represent the social structure within which elites must locate the narratives, while concomitantly also alter (some) elements in order to frame the discourse according to specific interests.

Finally, when treating the localization framework as process rather than outcome, it is acceptable to include both adaptation and localization, and treat them as a part of a continuum. While Acharya is careful to exclude adaptation from his framework, it might be useful to bring it back in when looking at the dynamic and interactive processes whereby international actors seek to transmit certain ideas and institutions to domestic societies. International actors are likely to adapt their message according to what they perceive as the remit of acceptable interpretation, and elites subsequently localize the given norms according to the limits posed by emerging/existing state-society narratives. It might be useful to consider the overall process as a two-step-localization, while keeping in mind the different stages involved.

After these alterations to the norm localization framework, the paper now turns to a reconceptualization of Peacebuilding in general and Small Arms Control specifically, with the intention of providing in-depth analyses that goes beyond the success or failure of the peacebuilding enterprise.

### **Norm Diffusion in Peacebuilding Processes**

Peacebuilding emerged on the international agenda in the 1990s, and has mustered an entire range of actors, financial instruments, ideological agendas, and practical implementation standards over the last two decades. Peacebuilding takes place in post-war contexts that is often as politically contentious as the period of war itself. This is the period where former foes are bound to live together, and former comrades test their confidence. Material and normative structures are in flux, and international actors enter into a society in the making where the stakes are high. War may behave as shocks that induce societal transformation (see Widmaier, Blyth, and Seabrooke 2007), and a significant reconfiguration of social norms and legitimate agents is likely to take place in the historical periods in which international actors seek to construct sustainable states emerging out of armed conflict.

For the purpose of peacebuilding, diffusion describes the transfer or transmission of a specific set of rules, norms, ideas and institutions by an international organization to a target state, which whether voluntarily or not allows external actors to operate on its territory. Consequently, international norm diffusion in peacebuilding contexts is the conscious efforts by external actors to transfer ideas, norms, institutions or specific policies to local actors by means of coercion, inducements, and socialization. This departs somewhat from generic definitions of diffusion, which tend to take a more ambiguous approach to the intent and direction of norm diffusion, and where it seems that norms rather arbitrarily bounce from one actor to another. However, it also departs from approaches that assume such norms to be purely Western hegemonic impositions, and instead follow Reus-Smit, who insists that “powerful normative precepts spread to the rest of the globe not through simple processes of socialization, but also through mobilization in concrete political struggles”, and thereby that local lenses may generate new local meanings to ‘global’ norms (Reus-Smit 2011, 1215). The definition fully recognizes the politics and power implicit in norm diffusion, while accommodating analytical attention to the influence of those political struggles and cultural mobilisation that shape the local negotiation of international norms.

Endowing peacebuilding with the conscious effort to bring about a normative change in the target societies implies treating the agents of peacebuilding with the potential capacity to socialize. Ikenberry and Kupchan (1990) argue that socialization of domestic societies is at the core of hegemony. In their study on hegemony and socialization, they illustrate how the hegemon “imports normative principles about domestic and international political order, often embodying these principles in institutional structures and in constitutions or other written proclamations” (Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990, 292). The premise in this present article is that in order to capture the central processes at work, contemporary peacebuilding should be understood as part of a hegemonic endeavour; not in order to dismiss it as a neo-colonial practice (cf. Paris 2002; Lidén, Mac Ginty, and Richmond 2009; Darby 2009), but to capture the inherently imperial geostrategy involved in seeking to social engineer post-war societies. Imperial geostrategy is one that seeks to change, and bring into the fold, what lies beyond the boundaries of Empire (Browning and Joenniemi 2008). This matches the dominance preference for a direct channel between internationally generated standards and domestic governance: there is today a consensus in many multilateral forums that international agencies of security and development *should* build institutions, ensure the introduction of best

practices, and induce change through capacity building and local buy-in in peacebuilding situations – with the intention of constructing sustainable and governable sovereign states, and thus ensuring their membership in the international system. The consequence of treating peacebuilding as attempts at socializing local actors is that it implies conceptualizing it in normative terms, and thus demands an ontological adjustment from technical evaluations of formal institutional change – often through law and rules – in the target society, to broader reverberations in the normative structure of society. As mentioned, however, normative does not imply the absence of power. Quite the contrary; the process of shaping social structures is particularly critical in a context of post-war politics, where defining who constitutes legitimate actors is a matter of (political) survival: “(...) ‘politics’ cannot be reduced to who gets what, when, and how. Politics, at its core, involves arguments over the meaning of events, and such acts of interpretation tell agents ‘who they are’ and ‘what they want’” (Widmaier, Blyth, and Seabrooke 2007, 749). Giving meaning to events, identities and interests are crucial post-war spoils, and the battle for social legitimacy is not a sideshow.

Contrary to the situation in consolidated states, peacebuilding contexts are more prone to undergo fundamental changes in domestic structures, and are thus unlikely to display established ‘models’ of state-society relations. Hence, it is more useful to explore the *formation* of these discourses and structures in relation to diffusion processes, rather than to search for how a predefined national model or culture ‘fits’ with international norms as promoted through peacebuilding projects. Narrative construction in the case of peacebuilding may be defined as the process in which agents promote historically conditioned conceptualizations of the nation, the state and their inter-relationship, with the intention of legitimizing a specific representation of state-society relations. By extending the norm localization framework so to include this contestation over state-society narrative construction it permits analyses of the processes taking place beyond the formal state-level, and is thus more apt at studying diffusion in post-war peacebuilding contexts.

This paper argues that the outcome of internationally driven peacebuilding depends on local agents engaging in a process of narrative construction that legitimizes a specific understanding of state-society relations. Such state-society narrative construction makes sense of the preceding war, and establishes intersubjective structures from which actors derive identity *and* interest. Institutions, norms, rules or ideas transmitted from international actors to local societies are thus bound to feed into those emerging master narratives if they are to achieve a minimum of success and sustainability.

In the next section I first introduce the emergence of Small Arms on the international agenda, and then explain how Small Arms Control is a set of activities that embody a specific vision of state-society relations. It then provides two cases that empirically illustrate the significance of localization strategies for the outcome of external micro-disarmament.

## **International Organizations and Small Arms Control**

The Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)<sup>1</sup> issue emerged on the international agenda in the first half of 1990s. In an effort to call attention to the proliferation of such Small Arms – in, to and among conflict areas – observers noted that non-state actors were perpetrators of

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<sup>1</sup> There is no universally agreed upon definition of the category SALW, but the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) define it as “all lethal conventional munitions that can be carried by an individual combatant or a light vehicle, that also do not require a substantial logistic and maintenance capability” (UNDDR 2006). This is compatible with the UN PoA definition and other standard definitions. It includes guns and rifles of all calibres, anti-personnel landmines, as well as shoulder-fired rockets and missile launchers (Bourne 2007).

grave human rights abuses in intrastate wars, and that their weapons of choice were simple SALW rather than major and sophisticated weapons systems addressed by existing Arms Control treaties (cf. Sislin and Pearson 2001; Boutwell and Klare 1999; Lumpe 2000). A coalition of states, NGOs and academics brought the issue into the UN system by framing proliferation of small arms as a threat to human security. They also emphasized that these weapons were feeding the kind of intrastate wars that swept the global periphery, and that the spread of these weapons enabled the use of child soldiers, and were particularly detrimental to civilians in ‘new wars’. These arguments contributed to global awareness of and emerging international norms against proliferation and for international control of SALW (Krause 2001; Laurence 2002; Garcia 2006). Subsequently, the UN has developed a number of agreements and protocols aiming to control the trade, production, use, stockpiling and distribution of SALW, and its ammunitions. This has been accompanied by regional organizations such as the EU, OAS, and ECOWAS, which have developed similar and often more specific standards governing the same issue area.<sup>2</sup> Norm building at the international level continues, and the finalization of negotiations over a comprehensive Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) will reveal how sticky this norm has become in the nearly 20 years since its first appearance as an international issue area. There is however a growing body of critical voices arguing that norms in the field are either weak or non-existent, and have little impact on states’ behaviour (Grillot 2011).

Meanwhile, SALW control initiatives have taken hold as integral and prominent parts of post-conflict peacebuilding (Bourne and Greene 2010). Post-war countries often witness widespread and uncontrolled weapons in circulation, both among state forces, armed groups, criminal organizations, and civilians (Kreutz, Marsh, and Torre 2010). Several of the world’s most influential IOs are involved in activities aiming to strengthen the central state’s control over these weapons, and have over the past two decades developed the umbrella term ‘SALW Control’, also called ‘Micro-disarmament’. We may differentiate between disarmament, i.e. the process whereby sovereign states decide to downsize weapons arsenals through international treaty agreements or otherwise (Buzan and Herring 1998), and micro-disarmament, i.e. the set of activities aimed at removing weapons from society and at democratizing weapons management at state level (Faltas and Chiaro 2001). Collectively, SALW control programmes refer to a diverse set of activities aimed at reducing the availability of small arms, or, as the Belgrade-based UNDP initiative SEESAC<sup>3</sup> defines it, “those activities, which, together, aim to reduce the social, economic and environmental impact of uncontrolled SALW proliferation and possession” (SEESAC 2006a, 1). In practice it means controlling and centralizing the use and proliferation of SALW in post-conflict situations, and strengthen the state’s capacity to uphold the monopoly on legitimate use of force at the expense of other, non-state agents, while introducing systems of democratic security governance. It involves weapons collection and destruction, legislative and regulatory reform, training of police and military in arms management and democratic security governance, stockpile management, and awareness raising and risk sensitization among the general population (SEESAC 2006a, 1).

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<sup>2</sup> See Small Arms Survey (2003), and Greene and Marsh (2010) for an overview of existing regulations. There are today many different international and regional agreements that govern the SALW domain, but the overall picture remains ‘patchy’ (Greene and Marsh 2010, 181). Most significant are the 2001 Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA) (A/Conf.192/15). In addition, a wide range of instruments touches upon the SALW trade and conduct, such as A Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials (UNGA, 1979), UN Arms Embargoes, as well as provisions of International Humanitarian Law.

<sup>3</sup> South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) is a long-standing and influential UNDP programme for SALW Control in the Balkan region.

Empirically, however, SALW Control in peacebuilding has experienced mixed results (Bourne and Greene 2010). The question driving the research behind this article is: Why do some internationally driven SALW Control programmes succeed in post-war micro-disarmament, while others fail? The empirical picture is mixed, and evaluation of “success” and “failure” complicated. Yet, a scrutiny of how international disarmament programmes fare ought not to be deterred by these challenges. Here, “success” and “failure” seeks to reflect the fulfilment of the project ambitions, and take the project evaluations at face value. Since this article is interested not so much in evaluating the outcome as much as studying the process, this methodological choice is justified.

### **Social engineering in Small Arms Control processes**

International organisations got involved in micro-disarmament already in the 1980s, but it was adopted as a more systematic approach from the 1990s onwards, and has evolved into Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) on the one hand, and SALW Control, or civilian disarmament on the other. Early versions centred on removing the weapons from conflict protagonists through various incentive based programmes. The idea was to remove weapons from conflict protagonists by offering cash, commodities, or other individual incentives (see for example Berdal 1996; Muggah 2009; Özerdem 2009). Over time, an awareness of the communal aspect and the role of social norms in the transition from war to peace affected the design of the SALW Control programmes, and Colletta and Muggah (2009a) call the latest version ‘interim stabilization measures’ and ‘second generation security promotion’. These range from dialogue and sensitization programmes, created to “enable re-socialization processes and adjustment of mindset and behaviour”, to more bottom-up security promotion such as ‘weapons in exchange for development’, or other activities aiming to “consciously engender local ownership and locally legitimate approaches by focusing on existing institutions rather than forming new national bureaucratic structures” (Colletta and Muggah 2009b). In short, while SALW Control has traditionally been treated like technical adjustments between chaotic war and stable peace, it is increasingly reflecting the above observation that there is an element of social engineering taking place (see also Pouligny 2004). While committed to working with “existing institutions”, it is nonetheless a diffusion process at work, in which certain normative expectations applying to the modern nation states are transferred from external actors and into local societies. These normative expectations are consistent of at least three identifiable norms: first, the *state monopoly on legitimate use of force*, which is assumed to ensure stability both within and among sovereign states existing in the international system, and is the basic norm upon which all rests. Second, IOs vision of small arms control standards entrusts the state with the legitimacy to rule, and propagates a specific configuration of state-society relations, in which a democratic security sector is accountable to an active citizenry through the establishment of *community friendly state institutions*. Third, and partly contrary to domestic practice in many Western societies, IO-led small arms control in post-war contexts propagates standards that *limit civilian weapons possession*. This is justified as a needed indication of the transition from war to peace, and as a symbolic legitimization of the new political rulers. Taken together, these three norms make up what we may call a collective security culture, which regards the security governance of a state to be the preoccupation of central security institutions, not by individuals, and where these security actors ought to be legitimate representatives accountable to their community (cf. Squires 2000). This normative ‘load’ of SALW Control is often not explicit, but conceptualizing it in these terms allows for better analyses of the normative configurations at

work. This bundle of norms, together forming a collective democratic security model, will hereafter be referred to as SALW norms.

This conceptualization of SALW Control implies that instead of evaluating institutional change through the adoption of law or other formal institutions, we ought to study *ideational properties* of specific state-society relations as they emerge in the case examined. Ideational properties here intend those configurations of norms, values and ideology from which the state elicits political legitimacy from society, and which guide the relationship between the two. Evans (2002) has pointed to the need for ‘synergy’ between the state and societal groups as critical for effective governance. Such ‘synergy’ matches what Migdal has called ‘symbolic configurations’ of rewards and sanctions, ordered and packaged in a ‘moral economy’ by those seeking social control. Small Arms control lies at the heart of crafting such symbolic configurations of social control between state and society. By creating synergy between state policy, on the one hand, and societal norms and values, on the other, the state enhances the propensities of social control, and extends its capacity of ruling by consent. By weaving SALW norms into the fabric of those symbolic configurations circumscribing state-society relations, the state augments its overall ability to assume political legitimacy at a broader level.

As for SALW Control, Ashkenazi (2010) argues that synergy between state policy and societal mechanisms for controlling weapons are crucial for effective firearms control. When state and society are opposed the disparity is obvious; when complicit it is difficult to see where the state ends and society begins, or vice versa (Ashkenazi 2010, 234). However, as Sellers observes, it might not be analytically apt to observe synergy when doubting the state-society dichotomy in the first place (Sellers 2011). Contrary to Ashkenazi then, it is more purposeful to explore not how synergy exists, but how elites *construct* ideational properties of such synergy; i.e. to concentrate on the process of crafting ideational properties of state-society relations, and thus bringing *agency* back in. It is, then, a process that need take societal norms and values into account in order to generate legitimacy, but which is mixed with interest-based motivation on the part of (those seeking to be) elites. It is thus a compromise between ideological hegemony of elites, and societal demands formed by existing norms and values.

The next section provides a brief comparative study of two key cases of SALW Control in Peacebuilding contexts. On the one hand the EU-ASAC project in Cambodia, which has been hailed as a successful case of reducing the availability of weapons in society. On the other hand Kosovo, in which 8 years of UNDP effort at SALW Control has remained rather futile. The paper argues that the decisive factor explaining these different outcomes were not levels of security, properties of the SALW Control programme, or cultural traits – commonly proposed explanations – but instead the scope for localization strategies facilitated through elite-society negotiations over state-society narratives in the respective post-war environments. In the following three conventional explanations are explored.

### **Existing explanations of SALW Control: security, implementation and culture**

When disarmament started to make headway in Cambodia around 1998-2002, the country was a highly insecure place for most people. Authoritative analysts at the time estimated that the country would easily and quickly relapse back into political unrest and violence (Doyle 2001). Crime rates were soaring, and factions within the military were deeply entrenched and openly engaged in turf wars. 1997 had seen a military show down in Phnom Penh between two of the Government coalition partners, the FUNCINPEC and CPP, leading to the ousting of Prince Ranariddh, the leader of FUNCINPEC, from the country. The Khmer Rouge had

defected in waves up until the last inclusion of Pailin province in 1998, and as such posed less of a threat to the central power than previously. But their integration into the Kingdom was going to take decades, and is in fact still on going (2013). There was nothing pointing to a permanent peace agreement or to a dramatic change in the domestic stability situation during the early 2000s in Cambodia.

Moreover, the EU Assistance on Curbing Small Arms and Light Weapons in Cambodia (EU-ASAC) programme was a medium-sized programme, and did not even cover the entire country with its budget (GTZ 2005). Cambodia had mixed experiences from the UNTAC Mission in 1992-93. UNTAC assisted in the first democratic elections to be held in the country, and saw overall success in introducing Cambodia to parliamentary democracy, but due to Khmer Rouge refusal to disarm has to suspend its mandate of disarming all armed factions party to the Paris Peace Agreement. Some aspects of the EU-ASAC have been highlighted as particularly important for the success of the programme, such as the critical personal relationships between key figures in the relevant ministries and the international staff, as well as the flexibility and ambiguity of the EU-ASACs mandate (SEESAC 2006f; Zwijnenburg 2007). But these features of the international programme are by themselves not sufficient to explain why hundreds of thousands of weapons were surrendered by Cambodians during 2000-2005.

Finally, the normative structures within the Cambodian society were (and are) severely affected by the nearly 30 years of civil war (Sen 2009). Interpersonal relations were characterized by distrust, and even family relations were severed by the trauma inflicted during the Khmer Rouge rule and genocide. Normative structures clearly played a role in facilitating disarmament of the country, but it would be a gross overstatement to claim that Cambodian norms and culture were *a priori* prone to accepting disarmament. While there are interesting aspects with the Khmer persona that should be studied in detail in relation to SALW Control, they cannot by themselves explain any particular outcomes, and certainly not why people wanted to rid themselves of their guns and rifles, and entrust the state with legitimacy to govern.

On the other hand, Kosovo must be said to be comparatively safe with respect to physical security during the UNDP SALW Control program period (2002-2012). Perceptions of security tend to differ among (ethnic) groups, with Serbs and Roma usually perceiving their environment more insecure than the majority of Albanians (for a temporal and cross-group perspective see Saferworld and Bennett 2011). In the period between 2002-2012 up to 50,000 NATO troops were keeping the peace of the roughly 2 million Kosovars. There were periods of unrest, notably the 2004 riots, in which Albanian mobs attacked a number of Serb enclaves and further streams of Serb refugees fled the province. The political conflict with Serbia is not settled, and this remains a source of concern for any security arrangement in Kosovo. Yet Kosovo and its Albanian majority have little to do with Serbia or Serbs in general. Moreover, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) – the guerrilla group that fought a war against Serbia in the 1990s – is not as universally accepted as its protagonists would argue, but it surely enjoys widespread respect and legitimacy within Kosovo society. Dissonant voices regarding the merit of the KLA are very rare. While the early days in 1999 and 2000 witnessed turf wars and executions between political parties, it seems that Albanians in Kosovo have closed ranks and are not openly challenging each other's power basis. Still, Albanians have not been sufficiently persuaded by this homogenization to give up their weapons. In other words, security perceptions can only nominally explain the difficulty UNDP and partners had in introducing SALW Control in Kosovo.

Regarding the properties of the SALW programme, much has been written about Kosovo as the 'test' for the comprehensive liberal peacebuilding framework. The major UN-led international administration of Kosovo, with substantial funding and comprehensive

reforms, points to a high probability that the small territory will surrender its weapons and successfully introduce weapons management strategies. Admittedly, there are major social problems such as unemployment and lack of developed infrastructure in Kosovo, but one cannot readily speak of significantly low levels of human security – especially not when comparing with Cambodia. During the immediate period after the NATO liberation, major aid influx caused an economic boom in this traditionally poorest part of Yugoslavia. Altogether, the arguments regarding liberal peace implementation are convincing in shedding light on some of the unintentional effects and distorted strategies of the international peacebuilding community in Kosovo, but it does not provide sufficient explanation as to why the majority of Kosovars are so reluctant to part with their guns and to accept the state monopoly on the legitimate use of force. According to ‘implementation’ arguments thus, there should have been sufficient resources for micro-disarmament to succeed.

Last, critical, ‘culture-based’ approaches to peacebuilding would expect Cambodia to be less prone to accepting weapons control introduced by Western organisations, since Kosovo after all is located within the confinements of the West. Some have pointed to the existence of a Gun Culture in the Balkans in general and in Kosovo specifically. Yet, few of these have examined how political actors in post-conflict Kosovo promote this idea of Albanians being historically close to their weapons. In sum, perspectives that view any aspect of the culture as determining outcome is essentializing by assuming the static limits of norms, and disregard the local agency involved in shaping these normative structures. Before more nuanced accounts of how norms shape outcomes in the field of weapons management, the normative structure argument is insufficient in explaining the current situation in Kosovo.

Existing explanations can shed light on parts of these two key cases of micro-disarmament of the last decade. But they fail to recognize the politics of norms, i.e. the process whereby local agents construct and negotiate narratives of state-society relations directly relevant to the norms embedded in SALW control. The intention of the next section of this article is to provide an agency-based constructivist account of the extent to which the construction of state-society narratives in these two cases provided scope for norm localization.

### **Beyond Gun Cultures: Identity Politics in Kosovo Small Arms Control**

After a formal DDR process of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) – the Albanian guerrilla group that fought Serb forces in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo during the 1990s – in 1999-2000, the UNDP launched the Kosovo Illicit Small Arms Control (ISAC) project in 2002 based on the logic that high prevalence of gun ownership feeds insecurities in post-conflict societies, and the main aim was therefore to reduce the availability of weapons in Kosovo society (SEESAC 2006a). The ISAC project was, according to even some of its own project staff, a dismal failure, and while it served as a sort of awareness raising of the issue, it failed in its stated aims, infamously illustrated by the 2003 weapons for development (WfD) campaign that brought in only 155 weapons – too few for qualifying for the development award advertised (BCPR 2006, 8). The release of an estimated illegal weapons holdings of between 330.000 and 460.000 weapons (Khakee and Florquin 2003, 17) among the roughly 2 million Kosovars yielded further evidence as to the failure of the UNDP to reduce availability of weapons in Kosovo society. Following this lack of success, the UNDP launched a more ambitious Kosovo Small Arms Control (KOSSAC) project in 2007. KOSSAC sought to be a more comprehensive and inclusive SALW Control than its predecessor, and evidence from interviews with stakeholders indicate that this was achieved. Local actors were increasingly included, and a number of activities were implemented, notably the development of a Kosovo

SALW Strategy, establishment of a Kosovo SALW Commission, development towards a legal framework regulating all weapons related issue, and “institutional mentoring and training” (UNDP 2010, 14). Yet, while KOSSAC succeeded in redeeming the local tone deafness of ISAC, and operated largely in the post-2008 environment of more tangible prospect of viable statehood for Kosovo following the unilateral declaration of independence, also KOSSAC struggled to alleviate the impression of a Kosovo “awash with weapons”. This is illustrative for example in the European Commission’s annual Progress Report of 2009: “The wide possession of weapons by the civilian population remains a serious concern. There is no strategy for the collection of such weapons. The Law on Explosives needs to be updated and relevant implementing legislation adopted” (European Commission 2009, 46). However, according to an official evaluation of KOSSAC in 2010, the situation following the KOSSAC project was better than for that of its predecessor, although this might have been due to more realistic targets rather than tangible impact and implementation, which still seems to be lacking (UNDP 2010).

*Localization step 1/adaptation:*

The UNDP struggled to develop the scope for ownership in its SALW Control, and through its activities it becomes clear that weapons control was framed in terms consistent with a disarmed society, whose security was to be guaranteed by international forces *assisted by* local security structures. The role of international peacekeepers is important here, and their role was always ambiguous. While NATO’s KFOR troops were highly regarded and the most trusted international institution, it is uncertain whether a society going through a period of statebuilding finds comfort in non-organic security forces: their reason to doubt international peacekeepers is not so much because they lack credibility, but because the act of giving up weapons is a manifestation of the legitimacy of this structure. In Kosovo, including local security structures was a highly sensitive issue, as it meant a breach of the “status neutral” position of the future of Kosovo. The UNDP and its international partners were concerned with civilian weapons collection because it would indicate improved security, a commitment to peace, and a definition of Kosovars as ‘modern’ Europeans – much in line with the dominant narrative in the international community of Kosovars as victims, not as political subjects. The way disarmament was conceptualized was thus too external and at odds with local identity politics taking place during those crucial post-war years. The politics of statebuilding was ignored in this attempt, and the message of ISAC/KOSSAC not properly fitted local discourses concerning ‘what kind of state’, but instead provided a recipe of statebuilding alien to the local conception of what their state ought to be. This can be illustrated for example in the lack of local sanctioning and acceptance of the Arms Law, which was passed in 2009, and which applied a strict licencing system to civilian weapons holders. Interviews with informants in the Kosovo Police and in the Parliament indicate that this law resonates poorly in the Kosovo society, and as such will be difficult to implement: as one interviewee stated: “The problem with the drafting of the new law was that the influence of the internationals was too big. Everyone have weapons here, for tradition, or because it is a part of our history. We learned to live in this environment, these are our habits!”

*Localization step 2/congruence with state-society narratives:*

There was a fierce competition over narratives defining state-society relations in the Kosovo society during the time of UNDP SALW Control. The elites involved in the competition over social control in the Kosovo post-war theatre were primarily Albanian political parties and movements with key roles in the contentious 1990s. The politics of identity and collective memory construction coloured much of intra-Albanian political struggles, and this contest

over constitutive features of the Kosovar nation had implications for the way norms were translated into the local society.

The most significant set of agents in shaping narratives of state-society relations were Albanian political actors with a vested interest in constructing certain national identity frames that would legitimize their existence and dominance. Strong regional loyalty characterises politics in Kosovo, in what international observers often call “a political landscape based upon a blueprint of clan structures” (author interview NATO source, 2010). Whether these are really ‘clans’ is not the question in this research. However, the competition between narratives originating from different loyalty-based groups is instructive of how political legitimacy is perceived in post-war Kosovo.

Political cleavages in contemporary Kosovo are deeply informed by developments in the 1990s (cf. Ingimundarson 2007). Two blocks have dominated post-war politics: the LDK party led by Dr. Ibrahim Rugova until 2006 on the one hand, and the two parties emerging from the KLA, the PDK of Hashim Thaqi and AAK of Ramush Haradinaj. These two blocks represented different approaches to dealing with Serbia and repression of Albanians in Kosovo during the 1990s: whereas the LDK represented an urban based intelligentsia that formed a response to Serb oppression based on pacific ideas of internationalizing the conflict (Malcolm 1998), the KLA developed a rural-based and militant guerrilla movement to counter Serbia. These two approaches towards the same goal of autonomy for Albanians in Kosovo never reconciled (Judah 2000). Subsequently, identity politics in the post-war theatre was clouded by the actions and profiles of these two blocs of Albanian political elites.

The prevailing model of state-society relations can be said to emerge from three narratives cultivated largely by the political parties originating from the KLA. This is first evident by a narrative of *autonomy*, in which the yolk of Serbia’s repression has been brushed off by mobilization of identity parameters in direct opposition to Slavs in the Balkan region. This is constructed by focusing on the historical autonomy and authenticity of the Albanians through the right of first occupation narratives of the original Illyrian tribes, of which the Albanians see themselves as direct descendants (Kostovicova 2005). It is also supported by a belief that Albanians in Kosovo never socially blended with other peoples, and that external rulers, foreign religion, or outside customs never tainted their culture. Therefore, a perception appears to exist that the culture of the Kosovars remains ‘original’, and that fundamental characteristics of the Albanians remain intact and ‘Illyrian’ in nature. Faced with an onslaught of Serbian myths of Kosovo as its “cradle of civilization”, the Albanians in Kosovo developed a nationalist narrative largely as a counter-discourse to Serb myths (Mertus 1999; Sugarman 2010). Lacking a religious basis to counter the Serb claim to Kosovo (Duijzings 2000), the narrative of the Kosovars as historically, and anthropologically true heirs of the land served as a paradigm from which Albanians could overcome internal conflict and heterogeneous composition, and construct a common basis of identity vis-à-vis Serb claims to the territory. Moreover, this ‘original culture’ frame makes repeated reference to the traditional body of law – the *kanun* – that is said to have governed the land under Ottoman rule, when Albanians enjoyed significant self-autonomy. Counter to the collective security norms diffused through UNDP, the *kanun* describes Albanian traditions as not only encouraging of non-state authority and a horizontal composition of society vis-à-vis the state, but also explicitly proscribing individual ownership of guns. In addition to the specific regulation of use, ownership and handling of weapons, the *kanun* more generally justifies individual claims on the monopoly on force in opposition to the central state (Schwandner-Sievers 2004, 113). Evidently, obedience to the *kanun* is not prescriptive in contemporary Kosovo society, yet it has the capacity to be a reference point in time of crisis, and it is described as constituting a strategic programme for preserving the Albanian identity irrespective of all external factors (see Mangalakova 2004, 4). The foremost effect of references to the *kanun* is that it supported

narratives in which the individual – usually the head of a family – is obliged to protect himself, his family and his business, in opposition to the central state. This individual security culture stands in stark opposition to the collective security governance model espoused through the UNDP SALW Programmes. Thus, the situation is one where a narrative of autonomy has created unity in the Albanian society in Kosovo, and created constitutive norms based on a conception of the nation as given historical right to the lands; as a homogenous and untainted society; and as the embodiment of a long tradition of idiosyncratic practice manifested in the *kanun*. The implementation of the ISAC and KOSSAC programmes largely ignored these references and emerging identity narratives, and while unsolicited references to ‘gun culture’ were deployed in order to explain why Kosovars refused to surrender their weapons, the constitutive ideas behind these cultural expressions was never adequately accommodated in programme planning or implementation.

A second narrative that emerged in the post-war context was one of the Kosovar nation as inherently *militant*. It has been noted that the Kosovar Albanian identity was founded on a narrative of victimization, and that this characteristic tied their faith to the Serbs (Obućina 2011; Clark 2000). I argue that the post-war period has effectively discharged this narrative, and replaced it with militancy. During the war, the KLA actively utilized a recruiting discourse based on traditional, Albanian values and features, which stressed the role of militancy, heroes and masculinity. This is far from unique to the KLA, and may be observed in many contexts of war. However, a glorification of the armed struggle and of intrinsic militant characteristics of the nation is not an obvious post-war development. In many cases, people can be seen as tired of war, and refuse an identity linked to warrior culture and militancy. In Kosovo, there is an apparent preservation of supposedly militant features of the Albanian nation, witnessed most overtly in the construction of statues across Kosovo towns, featuring prominent KLA commanders in uniform, and sporting large weapons. Constructing a militant Kosovo persona after the war, however, was not a mere crystallization of events; because not all Albanians supported a militant approach, and also because the militant approach itself was possibly brave yet rather marginal both in terms of fighters and strategic achievements (Ingimundarson 2007). The pacifist camp led by Ibrahim Rugova dominated Kosovo society up until about 1997 and still enjoys a respected legacy and space in the historical narrative. But, as Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers (2006) have documented in their work on the role of KLA martyr Adem Jashari in post-war Kosovo, public discontent with what they call the master narrative of KLA and their militant heroes in Kosovo’s history writing is non-existent. Interestingly, Kosovars seems to have no problem supporting both the narrative of the KLA *and* the narrative of Rugova as the ‘father of the nation’. In the post-war political landscape, the LDK has sought to promote a civic and peaceful conceptualization of the Albanian nation,<sup>4</sup> while the PDK and AAK have been making the armed struggle of the KLA the centrepiece of their political legitimacy.<sup>5</sup> This has been further supported by reference to historical Albanian militants, such as Skenderbeg,<sup>6</sup> the *kaçak* rebels,<sup>7</sup> and Shaban

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<sup>4</sup> “LDK was born and grown in this land, from this people, and protects its permanent interests in the future as well. (...) LDK bears traditional values, and grows modern values. (...) LDK do not wish harden and militant words, its members are worker of freedom. (...) LDK is originally of Kosova, an alive source, beating violence with democracy” (LDK Party Program 2007, translated and referred to in Çelnaja 2008)

<sup>5</sup> “PDK is identified on values and goals of patriotic organizations of the post World War II, successor of KLA war and bearer of its goals fulfilment in peace. (...) It will remember in its memory all those who fell heroically in battle, those who were killed and massacred, and those who died in tortures” (PDK Party Program 2007, Translated and referred to in Çelnaja 2008).

<sup>6</sup> George Kastrioti Skenderbeg was a 14<sup>th</sup> century Albanian who is popularly known for his bravery against the Ottoman occupation. He has become the epitome of the alleged warrior-culture of Albanians, and features as an enormous figure in armour on horseback in many Kosovo squares, including in Prishtina.

Polluzha,<sup>8</sup> to mention some. Summarizing, in observing how militancy came to dominate the post-war nationbuilding process in Kosovo, it is striking to see how the key characteristic of the state – i.e. the monopoly on the legitimate use of force – was never a domain of the nation, but instead a perceived phenomenon of the past, and existing as a perspective of the future. Central actors in the security sector in Kosovo (as well as the general public) regard the establishment of a Kosovo army/military as an intrinsic *right*, as a feature of all states, and hence an inevitable trajectory also of the evolution of the KLA into a civilian Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) and subsequently into the Kosovo Security Forces (KSF) (author interviews KSF colonel 2011). There seems to be a perception that the full potency of the Kosovo state cannot be reached without a fulfilment of this function; regarded as intrinsic to any state. The fact that the current status of the Kosovo security apparatus is far from enjoying any monopoly on force may contribute to a dilemma, in which the lack of a fully sovereign state is compensated for by emphasizing the ability and potency of the KLA, and of the Albanian man's natural inclination to fight oppressors with his weapon. The worldview of the KLA identified a person as 'a man willing to use his weapon' (Small Arms Survey 2005, 219), and this projection of a militant persona has in the post-war period compromised the process of transferring norms of small arms control. It may have been regarded as a stripping of its potency, and in any case at odds with the ideals of the Albanian man and the nation he represented. In the Kosovo environment during the ISAC and KOSSAC projects, there was more at stake than convincing people that they were safe; they also had to be convinced of a kind of identity shift. The fact that young males between 18-35 seems to have been prone to keep guns for "status" and because it is "trendy" and a "legacy of the war" (author interview KOSSAC staff 2009) indicate that militancy has indeed become a significant identity marker in post-war Kosovo.

The third narrative running counter to norms embedded in UNDP SALW Control is what several authors have observed as locating the national in the *traditional* (Krasniqi 2007; Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006). The KLA emerged from the rural countryside of Kosovo, and in particular in three regions: Drenica, Llap, and Dukagjini (Bekaj 2010, 19; Judah 2000, 135–142). These regions recruited leadership, soldiers, and not least a set of historical analogies and structural grievances: it was in the Drenica valley that the historical hero Azen Bejta and his wife Shota Galica had fought against the first Yugoslav forces after the First World War, and it was here the most ostracised and poorest people in Yugoslavia lived. What is more, it was in the Drenica village of Prekaz that Adem Jashari and his extended family became martyrs for the KLA in 1997. Observers have described Prekaz as a site of memory significant for Albanian nationbuilding in Kosovo (Obućina 2011). Drenica, Llap and Dukagjini were strongholds of resistance during the war, and subsequently played important roles as points of reference for the Kosovars in the post-war history writing. However, elevating traditionalism to the national level was not a process without resistance. The urban-rural divide was in the 1980s and 1990s an obstacle to overcome in order to close ranks in the face of an existential threat, and a weakness exploited by Serbia, who targeted the 'rebels' in the countryside but left the large towns such as Prishtina and Mitrovica largely in peace (Sugarman 2010). The former KLA party leaders came out of the most rural areas in Kosovo, and their political office depends on the loyalty of voters in the same rural areas.

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<sup>7</sup> The kaçak rebellion was an uprising against Ottoman attempts at revoking Albanian autonomy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Judah 2000). When in 1912 the Serbs replaced Turkish military with Serb forces that advocated anti-Albanian policies in Kosovo, the kaçak rebellion grew in size and strength (Malcolm 1998, 273-275).

<sup>8</sup> Shaban Polluzha was a member of Tito's Partisans who grew disillusioned with the Serb betrayal of Kosovo unification with Albania after the Second World War, and who fought with 20.000 men against the Yugoslav forces after the end of the war (Malcolm 1998, 312). 'Kommandant Shaban' is commemorated in contemporary Kosovo society.

Their interest in maintaining an idea of the Kosovo society as grounded in the traditional rests with the realization that this renders them representative of the nation, and their voters the ‘most authentic’ of Kosovars. These heroes of the KLA have a vested interest in creating synergy between the nation and the traditional, by encouraging folkloristic symbols and cultivating the particularistic as the true Albanian way of life. This nested relationship between politics and traditionalism shaping the post-conflict identity construction did not resound with the UNDP’s idea of small arms control. Collecting weapons from these traditional families meant projecting a modern conception of the state as the legitimate providers of security and the use of force. It was not compatible with a traditionalist nation to embrace a modern state model. And the political protagonists had nothing to gain from exposing themselves as promoters of small arms control. In this climate, the more established LDK, symbolized by the silk scarf-wearing Ibrahim Rugova, would have risked his legitimacy by trying to advocate for small arms control. The position of LDK was already precarious considering its lack of support to the KLA during the war, and while it was present in the political landscape it was in no position to aggressively project a conception of the Kosovo nation as idle and disarmed.

To conclude, Albanian elites in Kosovo were during the post-war period embroiled in intra-communal struggles over identity politics that entangled the role of weapons in civilian possession in bigger debates about the legitimacy of the nation, the state, and their inter relationship. By developing narratives of identity that go far beyond ‘gun culture’ or other simple categories of explanations, certain Kosovar elites have an interest in constructing ideational properties of state-society relations based on historical references, cultural associations, and anthropological representation specific to Kosovo. These gave them legitimacy to represent the ‘real’ Kosovo. This collective identity, in turn, has rejected disarmament, contrary to international actors’ efforts and expectations.

The post-war narratives are products of political processes taking place in the unusual situation of Kosovo under international administration. It is necessary to remember that construction of narratives of state-society relations in Kosovo was not only a product of identity politics among Kosovar social organizations, but was also a direct response to the attempts by international actors to “institutionalize its own reconstruction agenda by forgetting the past and by omitting the future status of Kosovo” (Ingimundarson 2007, 114). The ISAC and KOSSAC programmes in Kosovo promoted a similar type of ahistorical security model. Their efforts to promote limited civilian weapons ownership and democratic security practices failed to acknowledge the political character of state-society narratives in the society they targeted. Instead of working with these narratives and taking emerging systems of representation seriously, they did like so many other actors in the Kosovo landscape; overruled them. The lack of local agency in the shaping of SALW Control effectively delegitimized the introduction of these norms. Instead, local agents propagated a different conception of a Kosovar identity from the one promoted by UNDP, and finding no scope for localization. This contradiction gave the deathblow to locally sanctioned SALW Control, as it precluded conditions for congruence and negotiation over the meaning of Small Arms Control norms. Without norm localization, SALW norms appeared alien and at odds with constitutive narratives of what and who the Kosovars were all about.

### **“Put down your weapons, pick up the dharma”: Cambodian Small Arms Control**

After the long-running civil war in Cambodia, the United Nations Transitional Assistance in Cambodia (UNTAC) first attempted to tackle the SALW problems in 1992-1993. The distributions of weapons by armed groups, however, ceased first in 1998, when the Khmer

Rouge defected and integrated in the Royal Government of Cambodia. The most recent micro-disarmament programme in Cambodia aimed at rural areas and was financed by the EU's Assistance on Curbing Small Arms in the Kingdom of Cambodia (EU-ASAC), mandated under the CFSP, and operational from 2000 to 2006. Its "contribution and technical assistance would pursue the aims of influencing public opinion in favour of civilian disarmament, consolidating and developing civil society involvement in the process of weapons collection and disposal of arms collected and/or rendered surplus through demobilization" (European Union Council 1999, sec. (3)). Moreover, it set out to "promote confidence-building measures and incentives to encourage the voluntary surrender of surplus or illegally-held small arms, the demobilisation of combatants and their subsequent rehabilitation and reintegration" (ibid). EU-ASAC engaged in financial and technical assistance to the RCG, conducted weapons for development (WfD) programmes in nine provinces throughout the country, and supported local NGOs in awareness raising campaigns. The programme was considered successful in relieving the Cambodian society of surplus weapons, as well as strengthened gun control and state security structures (GTZ 2005; SEESAC 2006b).

First, EU-ASAC assisted in the collection of around 142.000 weapons from civilians and armed groups in Cambodia. The resultant situation after the SALW project is one where criminal groups or gangs, as well as high-ranking officials and their children and bodyguards, are the main abusers of weapons. Firearms among the civilian population are no longer an issue in general. There seem to be a conviction among community leaders and in society at large that weapons do not have a function in times of peace.

Second, in an analysis of the Weapons for Development projects under EU-ASAC, an observer states, "there is a strong impression that the government also saw an opportunity to use weapons collection as a means to strengthen the position of the CPP, the ruling party. Disarmament meant less potential for armed resistance to government policy" (Zwijnenburg 2007, 29). Inevitably, the government benefited from the external assistance to persuade and induce unruly elements of Cambodia to surrender their hardware of force, and thereby entrust the state with the monopoly on force. But is it legitimate? According to Western and certainly EU standards it is doubtful whether the current situation is one in which the relationship between the governors and the governed is defined by democratic principles of legitimacy. A recent report observes that "the price for stability since the mid-2000s has been the undermining of democratic consolidation" (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2010).

Third, survey results from 2006 indicate that villagers in the target communities of WfD have more trust and confidence in the police after the implementation of EU-ASAC projects (SEESAC 2006b). Yet, both representatives of the Ministry of Interior as well as civil society groups say in interviews that the people are highly distrustful of the police. Structural problems such as low salaries, little understanding of promotion through merit, lack of crime investigation capacity, and social relations based on patrimonial structures hamper trust in the police. This is an issue in need of long-term and large-scale reform, beyond EU-ASAC terms of reference. The police, according to preliminary explorations, accepted disarmament as an empowerment of their own authority in the local communities, but developed less understanding that the surrender of weapons by civilians should be matched by a more community friendly police outreach effort. Instead, the police are often seen as corrupt, and as serving their own needs and those of their friends (GTZ 2005).

#### *Localization step 1/adaptation:*

Personal relationships are crucial in Cambodian social and political life. It is highly unlikely that the EU-ASAC would have been able to work as extensively as they did had it not been

for a slow and painstaking process by the EU-ASAC staff to win the confidence of two key influential persons in the military and police in particular. These two, in turn, assured the project's approval by the top political brass, notably Deputy Prime Minister Sar Kheng and Prime Minister Hun Sen. As a part of the confidence building process, intimate family-like relations were born, and the liaison generals and EU-ASAC staff started referring to each other as '*bong*'; the Khmer word for 'brother' (author interviews EU-ASAC staff 2010). While the relationships were instrumental at their foundations, they slowly moved towards more emotional bonds, and in my interviews many stories illustrated the manifestation of the emotional-instrumental links. The dynamic was thence one in which the personal became intertwined with the professional. The international staff learned the Cambodian way of doing business, so to speak. In turn, it enabled the EU-ASAC to work as a partner to the government, and was hence given space and permission to work with fewer constraints than if they were seen as intruding, bypassing or otherwise hampering internal affairs. Furthermore, as a former EU-ASAC staff explains, this unofficial way was considerably more efficient: permissions that would normally have taken three months to obtain through the formal bureaucratic system would take a week through these informal channels (author interview EU-ASAC staff 2010). As the project progressed, and Cambodia became one of the SALW pioneers in South East Asia, the role of the EU-ASAC staff actually accelerated, as the pressure from outside on the internationally inexperienced Cambodian generals increased with respect to dealing with international negotiations or conventions: EU-ASAC thus became a trusted reservoir of knowledge.

In line with Cambodian political traditions, the disarmament process was a top-down approach. Its effectiveness has been traced to the small number of actors involved in the decision-making and implementation of the project, and the committed attitudes on the part of this set of key actors (R. Roberts 2008). My interviews yield a somewhat more complex image, as the personal motivation on the part of the local actors from the government, military and police tend to differ substantially. While the 'brother' relation seems to be present in each personal dyad, some were more brothers than others, and it is a strong impression that the military liaison was primarily interested in the instrumental aspect of EU-ASAC (e.g. storage facilities built, gaining international recognition), rather than the substantive part (e.g. building a democratic military force). Regardless, with respect to improving weapons management both of the military and the police, it is clear that the liaisons were crucial in approving the projects and initiating the implementation, but also that there were influential persons further down in the system that were able to challenge these decisions. In particular, regional military commanders proved to possess a *de facto* veto power for activities in their regions, and in one specific military region, for example, no weapons registration or storage have taken place due to the independent role of that region's commander: "he just said no, and that was that" (author interview EU-ASAC staff 2010). Furthermore, it does not seem to be practice on the part of the EU-ASAC staff to take such 'lower-level veto problems' up with the higher-ranking generals in the central government. It is the impression that such interference would be perceived as potentially creating conflict between entrenched factions within the military, and conflicting with Khmer norms of conflict-avoidance and 'losing face'.

Overall, the local ownership over the processes was fundamental to the EU-ASAC success, and the substantial tuning in to the local context is particularly determinant in enhancing the scope of localization. EU-ASAC worked directly toward communities, civil society organisation – traditional and NGOs – and the government. In particular, their ability to reach through to communities by means of mobilizing Buddhist institutions was important to ensure a locally sanctioned approach to the issue. The disarmament information meetings with local communities were held in the local pagodas, and attended by monks. Furthermore, the slogan sounded: "put down your weapons, pick up the dharma", thus clearly locating the

message within Buddhist notions of virtue and moral ethics. This adaption to the message to the local context was one of the keys to understanding how EU-ASAC could be successful in introducing SALW Control in post-war Cambodia.

As for adaptations to the legal aspect of SALW control, the scope and content of the Cambodian Arms Law were subject to intense negotiations. From the local civil society the Working Group for Weapons reduction (WGWR) was the leading advocate for a strict and universal law, and the government seems to have taken many of these aspects into account in the final version. But one breach of the universal principle was not up for negotiations: while the Government banned civilian ownership of weapons, certain high ranking civil servants would still be permitted to own licensed firearms. This, according to the previous director of the WGWR, was due to the fact that the person in charge of the licensing bureau within the Ministry of Interior (MoI) was a particularly influential person, and if all civilian gun possession would be illegal, his office would lose serious ‘income’ (extra-legal fees). On this point the MoI refused to negotiate and when the WGWR pushed on this point the response was “this way or no way” (author interview WGWR staff 2010). In the MoI this particularity is explained from a security perspective: “we must consider the role and responsibility and rank, and compare to the military. In the end it is for their own security” (author interview MoI representative 2010). This example illustrates the prevalence of corruption practices within the Cambodian bureaucratic system. It also illustrates however the strength of neo-patrimonial forms of governance, and that the powerful person in the apparently insignificant licensing office exerted his personal influence so to affect the outcome of a national legal document. Furthermore, it illustrates what I will call the norm of natural authority: the idea that high-ranking civil servants *should* own weapons fits well with the Cambodian conception that those with power *deserve* this power and the privileges that comes with it (see below). The final Arms Law is therefore an example of norm adaptation: while deeply influenced by an idea of controlling the weapons in society consistent with SALW Control norms, it also contained “Cambodian” elements that strengthened existing institutions within the bureaucracy, and aligned with the normative framework guiding power relations in society.

Finally, the resultant situation from EU-ASAC resonates with a regional conception of the state and subversive threats from society. David Capie’s study of the way small arms norms have diffused through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) reveals that certain constitutive norms in the South East Asian region led to a localization of the SALW norms (Capie 2008). The framing of small arms norms in terms of enhancing state capacity and launching action against transnational crime and terrorism was also evident in Cambodia. We can observe that the small arms norm was primarily framed in terms of strengthening the state over other non-state actors, be they traffickers, armed groups, or civilians.

#### *Localization step 2/congruence with state-society narratives:*

Disarmament is not disconnect from other processes and dynamics in the local society, and the wider process of negotiating concepts of authority is particularly important for disarmament practices. Hereunder it is particularly relevant to consider how militarization becomes a feature of the national identity, or whether proponents of “a culture of peace” succeed. Two state-society narratives arguably facilitated the localization of SALW norms in Cambodia:

First, I argue that Cambodian elites have fed a process of narrative construction in which *absolutism* and *elitism* are seen as fundamental pillars of the nation, and use historical references to reinforce this narrative. “Absolutism, derived from cosmological traditions predating Angorian domestic organization, has been a core element of authority and

legitimacy in Cambodia” (D. Roberts 2009, 154). Absolutism here means the unrestrained rule by one ruler, who constitutes the fusion of both political and moral authority. Embedded in the idea of absolutism, moreover, is a certain element of continuity; a political system based on absolutism cannot logically be a system where challengers to this power are plentiful. Cambodia has experienced many different forms of absolutism, and scholars, as in the above quote, as well as Cambodian elites, highlight this legacy. However, while Cambodian rulers have certainly cultivated absolutism over the course of history, there have been a remarkable number of periods of upheaval and challenges to the ruling power for a nation that seeks to brand itself as absolutist by nature. Instead, it seems that absolutism has occurred in brief moments by eclectic rulers, but that their power base was continuously challenged, and thus that absolutism was usually an *objective* rather than a reality of Cambodian rulers.

Most instrumental in this process of propagating the idea of absolutism during the post-war period is the way in which Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) has sought to manifest itself at both state and society level through a number of face-lift moves intended to appeal to both elites and grassroots. Importantly, it has gone far in seeking to subsume the two main sources of moral authority in Cambodian society: Buddhism and the Monarchy. The history of CPP goes back to the early defections from Khmer Rouge by Heng Samrin, Hun Sen, and other middle lever cadres in 1977 onwards. Its strong backing by the Vietnamese government and military rendered it unpopular with the public, whose anti-Vietnamese sentiments were and are prominent. In addition, its communist roots were considered blemishing in the post-Cold War era. Thenceforth, in 1991 the Kampuchean People’s Revolutionary Part (KPRP) became the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), just days before the Paris Peace Agreement. In a sudden turn, the previously Communist party renounced its revolutionary history, supported market economy, and, importantly, embraced King Sihanouk’s previous rehearsal of so-called anti-Communist Buddhist Socialism (Harris 2005, 201). Buddhist socialism in the name of free market capitalism has become the CPP profile. The government’s fascination with all things Buddhist seemed to have enhanced Hun Sen’s popularity, and weakened popular support to other political parties (Harris 2005, 200). The CPP has calibrated narratives of state-society relations based to a large extent on Buddhism as a basis of legitimacy. Most obvious is the motto of the Kingdom of Cambodia enshrined in the 1993 Constitution: “Nation, Religion, King”. In this way, it manifests the link between a flourishing Buddhism, a viable state and the national features of Khmers. It’s ability to propose a ‘package’ of state-society legitimacy based on popular grassroots-based institutions enabled the message of disarmament. In particular, it enabled the creation of systems of representation based on who is a legitimate and who an illegitimate holder of weapons. After militarily suppressing its rivals in FUNCINPEC in Phnom Penh in 1997; giving amnesty to Khmer Rouge in 1998; and subsuming the two most revered institutions in Cambodia – Buddhism and the Monarchy – under its leadership, the CPP together with EU-ASAC effectively created a model of state-society relations in which the monopoly on legitimate force rested with the CPP itself. Power has in this way been centralized through subsuming the two main sources of moral legitimacy in Cambodia under a personality cult of Hun Sen. The moral order in contemporary Cambodia is defined by the centralization of power in the guise of ensuring stability and of managing the tension between traditional Khmer society and modernizing foreign influence. Disarmament of any non-CPP actors seemed to serve this process of reconstructing the Cambodian national identity based on centralized power, where the Khmer people relinquish power to the upper echelons of society, thereby alluding to the ‘historically’ Khmer conception of power as absolute.

A second narrative, politically motivated as a part of the favoured conception of state-society relations, is that of *natural authority*. Natural authority here means inborn personal

authority, not bestowed upon it by an external body. In Cambodia, this narrative is supported by norms of patrimonial systems of governance and Buddhist and Hindu conceptions of authority as predestined and unchangeable. In many interviews for this research, the reference to untouchable elites acting with impunity towards a society living at their mercy was brought forward in order to explain specific phenomena. The narrative of natural authority is supported by the idea of ‘merit’ in Buddhism’, and ‘hierarchy’ or ‘Brahmanism’ in Hinduism. Belief in karma as the sole earthly merit impacts social relations in that it legitimizes the relative power imbalance between members of a community, as it is perceived as ‘natural’: people with more wealth or a higher social ranking are believed to enjoy these circumstances due to good karma stemming from previous lives. Along the same logic, the poor or people of low social standing perceive of their situation as ‘given’; the only hope for improvement is to be found in building up a better karma through earthly merits or good deeds, to enjoy better conditions in the next life. Upward social mobility, as it were, thence does not exist as a perceived attainable concept in traditional Khmer Buddhist society. As observed by others, preaching this philosophy as meaning accepting one’s lot in life serves the wishes of the authorities well (Marston 2009, 246). The phenomenon of personality cults of power finds legitimacy in Hindu principles of social hierarchy, and combines this teaching with Buddhist ideas on ‘natural’ authority based on karma. The result is a fairly stable system of patrimonial inter-personal relations in which “those in power [...] belong in power; those at other levels of society have been born to take orders” (Chandler 1991: 4, quoted in Kimchoeun et al. 2007). This narrative is critical to understanding parts of the Cambodian post-war developments, including aspects of the micro-disarmament process. Specifically, this natural hierarchy can be witnessed in the state-society model envisaged by Cambodian elites: as Caroline Hughes argues, “a harmonious relationship between a centralized and hierarchical government apparatus, and Cambodian citizens, sharing a mutual respect and rightful conduct, is viewed as the appropriate goal” (Hughes 1998, 306). The aggregated effect of these two religiously diverted ideas is a conception of power that “emphasize supreme authority and unquestionable obedience to authoritarian models of governance” (Bit 1991, xv). In the case of micro-disarmament, it was particularly helpful in ensuring compliance of the grassroots level of society. After having convinced key officials, and entangled them in a system of accountability, their influence over the lower levels of the hierarchy was considerable. After all, the belief that lower levels of society “have been born to take orders” enforced a reverence for authority in matters of statebuilding.

To conclude, it emerges that the external conception of SALW Control was both adapted to local realities, and localized according to emerging state-society narratives. The result is that the state has managed the task of monopolizing the use of force – not a minor achievement considering the long and multi-dyadic conflicts that characterized Cambodia in the preceding 30 years. The result is furthermore that political legitimacy is absorbed by a small and powerful elite, who forms a politico-military network of individuals that extracts individual wealth through their control of state institutions (cf. D. Roberts 2009; Richmond and Franks 2007; Brinkley 2011; see also Global Witness 2009). In the process of removing weapons from civilians and armed groups, the top brass of the CPP simultaneously consolidated its monolithic system of power. Legitimacy for this new political modality was derived in part from the normative conviction in Khmer society that those *with* power *deserve* power and the privileges stemming from it: by proving that those connected with CPP had power, they gained power, by this logic.

The narrative construction process centered on the monopolization of sources of legitimacy: sitting political leaders have been able to subsume both the Buddhist sangha and the Monarchy under its leadership, and while people might be privately distrustful – yet respectful – of the authorities, they are prone to listen to messages coming from or sources

affiliated with or sanctioned by these revered institutions. Post-war Khmer identity draws on the perspective that Cambodia is a peaceful farming society, victimized by externally sponsored violence for too long. Its leaders use the great civilizations of Angkor to present continuity and pride as inherent features of the Cambodian state, which is framed as a peace-loving, agrarian entity, which has overcome great hardship due to its conservative and hierarchically structured socio-religious system. The CPP has clearly benefited from these narratives, but is simultaneously bound by them, as can be seen by the way it has tapped into moral sources of legitimacy to legitimize its rule.

The EU-ASAC assisted in this process of monopolizing both power and the use of force by accepting that the group of liaison persons in the Cambodian government made certain selections as to which components of international small arms control they would accept. As examples shows, forbidding high ranking civil servants to own weapons was not accepted by the local counterparts, partly because it would be derogatory for this social strata to see limits to its power in this way. There was no space for the foreign norm teacher to challenge such Cambodian realities.

The situation in Cambodia is one in which the post-war national identity has rejected militarization, and adopted a 'culture of peace' by referring to Buddhist teachings. Across Cambodia towns local artists have transformed collected weapons into statues of peace and harmony, symbolically refusing a glorification of militancy. The EU-ASAC fed into this process in their effort to reach out to the battered peasants in rural communities. Sanctioned by national government and local officials, the EU-ASAC was able to convincingly spread the message of disarmament. But this 'culture of peace' is loaded with oppressive norms of inferiority and discrimination. On the grassroots level, the political culture and patterns of conflict resolution point to a deep respect for authority. Regardless of whether this respect stems from legitimacy or fear of breaking social codes, it reproduces patrimonial systems and hierarchical modes of governance, in which the poor live at the mercy of the powerful, and where this is to some extent respected and accepted. Arguably, this grassroots respect for authority enabled the message of EU-ASAC. Simultaneously, however, the image of Khmer people as non-militant and respectful of hierarchies supports current political developments, which takes Cambodia in the direction of autocratic politics around the personality cult of Samdech Hun Sen.

### **Conclusion: two-step norm localization in international SALW Control**

This paper has sought to illustrate that local narratives of state-society relations structure international norms as they enter into local realities. It has done so through two case studies of externally driven micro-disarmament. It emerges that this can take place either, as in the case of Cambodia, in the form of norm localization processes, or as in Kosovo, where state-society narratives rejected SALW norms due to the international insistence on framing it according to collective security and an idle society, leaving little scope for locally driven localization processes.

The paper gives evidence to three aspects of an adapted norm localization framework proposed above. First, localization is better treated as a process rather than an outcome. While the boundaries are often blurred, it is fruitful to consider localization as the diffusion process itself rather than the result after diffusion has taken place, because it allows for analyses that consider norms not just as a static body of existing social rules, but as continuously changing and as representational patterns of power. This could be seen in the case of SALW Control in Cambodia, where the process of localization itself was the main battleground for shaping national identity discourses that would eventually lead to a specific political system.

Moreover, in Kosovo it became clear that the lack of localization processes was due to the international reluctance to allow local actors the scope needed to reconfigure the original SALW norms, hence preventing local congruence processes to take place.

Second, from the case studies it emerged that external norms of SALW Control entered into a fierce climate of competition over state-society narratives, characteristic of post-war situations. These norms are ambiguous to the elites: on the one hand they pose the opportunity to monopolize power in the form of legitimacy to enforce order, but concomitantly they embody the challenge of ‘democratizing’ the security sector, and thereby promising accountability to society. This ambiguity is part of what enabled the Cambodian elites to localize the SALW norms. They found ways of making the civilian disarmament appear congruent with local norms of hierarchical social structures and absolutist power, while disregarding many of the aspects of democratization of the security sector. However, even the ‘minimalist’ view on SALW norms was not sufficient for Kosovo elites to present it to the Kosovars: they were embroiled in an identity war with other actors in the Kosovo landscape, and saw SALW norms as adverse to their own political survival.

Third, this article brought together the international efforts at adapting SALW norms and the locally driven process of finding congruence in a two-step localization framework. This has considerable empirical traction, as internationally generated norms often go through multiple processes of adaptation and localization on their travel between the HQs in New York, Geneva or Brussels, through practitioners working in the field, via local elites and into domestic societies. This stretched version of localization view permits a better understanding of the rickety road that norms travel through international peacebuilding practices.

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