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To cite this article: Ruben Gonzalez-Vicente (2018): The liberal peace fallacy: violent neoliberalism and the temporal and spatial traps of state-based approaches to peace, *Territory, Politics, Governance*, DOI: [10.1080/21622671.2018.1550012](https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2018.1550012)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2018.1550012>



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Published online: 06 Dec 2018.



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The liberal peace fallacy: violent neoliberalism and the temporal and spatial traps of state-based approaches to peace

Ruben Gonzalez-Vicente 

ABSTRACT

The liberal worldview is founded on two interlinked promises: the inherent capacity of markets to deliver prosperity and development globally; and the increased prospects for peace in contexts of inter-state integration along liberal institutional and market lines. This paper takes issue with the latter, now often prescribed as a remedy against the geopolitical instability brought about by unpredictable 'populist' leaders. While decades of neoliberal integration have brought nation-states closer together and engendered degrees and forms of inter-state equality within world market capitalism, populations across the world have fallen prey to the violence of markets and growing intra-state inequalities. In such a context, the contemporary rise of nationalism and populisms across the world is not some liberal order antithesis emerging from a vacuum, but rather a logical consequence of this liberal order, constituting an often reactionary 'counter movement' that cannot be tackled with prescriptions for increased market globalization. A focus on the everyday forms of violence fomented beyond the inter-state level by processes of marketization demonstrates that neoliberalism's rescaling of violence and risk from the international stage down to the individual has resulted in the contemporary rise of illiberal politics and, indeed, new prospects for global peace.

KEYWORDS

neoliberalism; nationalism; populism; territorial trap; violence; peace


HISTORY Received 30 April 2018; in revised form 31 October 2018

INTRODUCTION

The idea of a self-adjusting market implied a stark utopia. Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness. (Polanyi, 2001, p. 3)

The contemporary rise of illiberal politics, nationalism and partially mercantilist worldviews – with the governments of the United States, Russia and China, among others, reinvigorating national discourses and agendas, and unilaterally initiating military action or entertaining expansionist agendas; and with the rise of the far-right looming over Europe – has left liberal elites in apparent distress. As they contemplate the extensive rejection of many of the values that have

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underwritten the global liberal project since the 1980s and 1990s, these elites fear not only a potential retreat of the policies that facilitated globalized accumulation in the last decades but also the breakdown of the Liberal Peace, or the idea that economic interdependence between nation-states is paramount in containing international violence. This has been followed by a proliferation of cautionary tales against a 'populist rise', as institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) cling to market integration as the foremost recipe for prosperity and peace (Mayeda, 2016). Indeed, the clarion calls have resonated well beyond the liberal Atlantic heartland, as exemplified by the visit paid by Chinese President Xi Jinping to the World Economic Forum (WEF) in January 2017. There, the Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party attacked protectionism, promoted trade and investment liberalization, and cautioned that 'no one will emerge as a winner in a trade war', in a *sui generis* contribution to a long-standing narrative that couples anti-market resistance with international conflict (Xi, 2017).

Yet, the contemporary ascension of nationalist and populist movements and leaders that herald deeply illiberal views (Xi included) must come as no surprise after decades of neoliberal triumphalism and the promotion of a transnational order that placed the crafting of a world market above the needs of societies themselves. In such a context, the contemporary rise of nationalism and populisms across the world is not some liberal order antithesis emerging from a vacuum, but rather a logical consequence of this liberal order, constituting an often reactionary 'counter movement' that cannot be tackled with liberal prescriptions for increased market globalization (Polanyi, 2001). This paper takes aim at the now long-held and recently revitalized argument for a liberal peace. While not attempting to predict any specific outcome regarding the future of global peace, it argues that the rise of illiberal and reactionary discourses that we now observe, and their potential corollaries, must be understood in a dialectical sense as the result of a liberal market-oriented inter-state order that failed to tackle the great social dislocation that it played a fundamental role in fomenting.

To develop this critique, I draw upon three main bodies of literature that, despite their apparent affinities, are seldom brought together. These include Polanyi and Gramsci-inspired understandings of hegemonic crisis, counter-movements, and the rise of nationalism and populism (Gill, 2015; Gonzalez-Vicente & Carroll, 2017); critical political economies of social conflict within a context of neoliberal globalization (Harvey, 2005; Springer, 2015); and political geography analyses of international relations theory (IRT), and more specifically critical geographies of peace (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995; Flint, 2005; Koopman, 2016; McConnell, Megoran, & Williams, 2014; Megoran, 2011; Nagle, 2010; Williams & McConnell, 2011). Elaborating upon these, I contend that the methodological nationalism of the disciplines of economics and international relations – in which much of the liberal view is based – has left them in a sorry state in making sense of recent political development throughout the world, specifically when addressing the contemporary rise of reactionary forms of populism.

In this sense, the high degrees of violence and vulnerability associated with processes of market integration have often escaped the radars of economics and IR analyses, fixated as they are with mono-scale scrutiny of national economies and state-to-state relations. Although some liberal IR scholars have laid the grounds for a less normative paradigm that incorporates domestic variables and bottom-up societal processes into the understanding of state action, the assumption remains that policy interdependence and compatibility between states, combined with the Pareto-efficient outcomes of globally integrated production and trade, result in 'strong incentives for coexistence with low conflict' (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 521; see also Oneal & Russett, 1997; McDonald & Sweeney, 2007). Recent developments suggest there are fundamental flaws with this largely deductive hypothesis. Whereas on aggregate terms, and according to some measurements, nation-states may have benefitted more or less from globalization, social conflict occurring at multiple scales – and indeed in a class-based dimension – is an undeniable constitutive element of state action, the latter reflecting and/or attempting to contain particular constellations of social forces and their interests. In this way, the damage inflicted upon many by increasingly

disembedded markets and post-political states that shield policy from popular deliberation (both the products of the liberal agenda) are at the very root of the current crisis of liberal hegemony (Gonzalez-Vicente & Carroll, 2017).

In what follows, I draw upon a variety of cases to explain how a dialectical approach to liberalism, neoliberalism and their illiberal responses,¹ and a multi-scalar analysis of market violence are indispensable in explaining much of the turbulence that world politics faces today. To be clear, the paper's goal is not to deny that state leaders factor in the economic repercussions of conflict when they contemplate its possibility – a logical assumption of liberal international relations scholarship. The aim is instead to argue that these calculations tell very little about the nature of peace and conflict as historically bounded processes that need to be studied in relation to broader transformations in the global political economy, the latter affecting state behaviour in terms of both economic policy and inter-state rivalry. In this way, and crucially, I also wish to refute the liberal argument that the pursuit of economic integration at any (social) cost will unequivocally lower the prospects for international conflict or, indeed, structural violence more broadly understood as a multi-scalar phenomenon.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section problematizes the concept of peace in IRT, with a more detailed discussion of economic liberalism. The following section presents a temporal critique, contextualizing the contemporary rise of illiberal politics within the transformation of the global political economy under world market capitalism. After this, I build upon Agnew (1994) to develop a scalar critique and argue that liberalism's methodological nationalism hampers a proper assessment of the transnational dimensions of processes such as development, violence or peace. I chart various scales of market-induced violence and vulnerability (as a form of economic violence) in the global era, tracing the rescaling of violence and risk from the interstate scale to the individual sphere. I conclude by discussing the transition from a 'durable disorder' (Cerny, 1998) to an emerging (albeit contested) new populist order under world market capitalism. To do so, I echo Polanyi and Marx in contending that processes of marketization, replete as they are with contradiction, cannot engender liberal or capitalist peace, but result instead in anti-liberal reactions of various kinds (what Polanyi called 'counter movements') to the violence of unrestrained markets. Importantly, these counter movements can often take reactionary characteristics, as people under threat or the perception of threat retreat into culture and nationalism against the 'other' and internationalism in all its variants.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND THE LIBERAL PEACE

While the pursuit of peace is a central preoccupation for progressive IR scholarship, peace as a concept and as an actual manifestation is rarely discussed in the IR literature. Instead, peace often appears as a negative occurrence, intuitively understood as the avoidance of war or an absence of overt inter-state violence (Galtung, 1969; Richmond, 2016, p. 57). Thereby, most IR literature focuses on the challenges to state-based peace, with commentary typically dominated by the two main competing schools, realism and liberalism, both subdivided into further dissenting sub-camps. Conventional realist approaches take the 'anarchic' or violent nature of international politics as a given and place their focus on states' survival strategies. Offensive realists warn of the disruptive effects of 'power transitions' and in the contemporary context claim, for example, that as China grows economically and militarily, and as its interests expand and it seeks greater influence, tensions with other countries are certain to arise (Mearsheimer, 2014). Defensive neorealists hold similar assumptions about the foundations of the international system, yet contend that states privilege security over domination and that the incentives for conflict are contingent rather than endemic, with balances of power potentially keeping states at bay and preventing conflict (Waltz, 1979).

Liberal theorists dispute these interpretations and reject that competition alone guides state behaviour. Elaborating on the Kantian ideal of ‘perpetual peace’, and drawing upon Adam Smith, David Ricardo or John Stuart Mill, liberal theories contend that economic integration and institutional enmeshment or socialization exercise a constraining force on conflict and are conducive to peaceful scenarios (Doyle, 1986; Howard, 1981; Johnston, 2008; Keohane & Nye, 1977). While there is no absolute agreement on the exact shape that such ‘interdependence’ should take (Mansfield & Pollins, 2001), liberal IR scholars often hold that large-scale conflict in the 21st century can be avoided if the liberal world order survives the relative decline of the United States and manages to assimilate rising powers such as China. The emphasis is placed both on institutions and norms of reciprocity, on the one hand, and on economic integration, on the other. Regarding the latter, and evoking Smithian language, the agenda for a ‘capitalist peace’ assumes that free markets represent “a hidden hand” that ... build(s) up irrevocable and peaceful connections between states’ (Gartzke, 2007; Richmond, 2008, p. 23), and that ‘put simply, globalisation promotes peace’ (Gartzke & Li, 2003, p. 562). The theory is in many ways deductive, but relies also on the statistical data that on aggregate tends partially to support the liberal peace argument (except for the period leading to the First World War; see also Barbieri, 1996) and on the ‘logic’ that national leaders are not expected to act irrationally or be insensitive ‘to economic loss and the preferences of powerful domestic actors’ (Hegre, Oneal, & Russett, 2010, p. 772).

A more nuanced exposition of the liberal argument suggests that what brings nations together and heightens the opportunity cost of conflict is market integration according to a set of commonly devised regulations – rather than the realization of an ideal ‘free’ trade archetype (Moravcsik, 2005). This results in a sort of ‘embedded liberalism’, with the successful integration of post-Soviet states and China in world market capitalism through World Trade Organization (WTO) membership and other liberalizing initiatives understood as a deterrent to military action and, hence, as an effective strategy for both global growth and security, particularly in the face of China’s rising economic and military might (Funabashi, Oksenberg, & Weiss, 1994). From this perspective, not only is violence avoidable but also peace may indeed be engineered with the creation of a world market society being key to this endeavour as well as to the broader goal of crafting a liberal hegemony able to deliver a veritable ‘end of history’ where markets and functioning liberal democracies prevail (Fukuyama, 1992). The engineering of market-orientated democracies has indeed often been the main task of liberal peace- and state-building operatives in post-conflict areas (Campbell, Chandler, & Sabaratnam, 2011).

Yet, decades of neoliberal integration have not brought Fukuyama’s prophecy closer to its realization. Across the world, liberal market integration has facilitated convivial relations among key countries and paid important dividends to elites, yet it has also resulted in the concentration of wealth in ever fewer hands, rising inequalities within countries (although not between them) and higher concentration of wealth at the top, and increased risks and vulnerability as the logic of market competitiveness takes hold of many aspects of our lives (Anand & Segal, 2015; Lynch, 2006). The relation between the United States and China or the processes of economic integration in the European Union are clear examples of these trends. In these places as well as others, inequalities, precarization and economic insecurity have given way to a populist and nationalist momentum that can be interpreted both as a popular response to the extreme and diverse forms of violence engendered by processes of market integration, or as a manoeuvre to channel discontent towards the ‘other’ in order to protect elite interests (Gonzalez-Vicente & Carroll, 2017). By prescribing ever more market globalization to counter populist politics and avoid conflict, liberal elites add fuel to the fire as they sever the very conditions that led to the disfranchisement of significant segments of the population in the first place. Thereby, it is crucial to understand how the argument for capitalist peace fails to factor in the crisis-prone and socially destructive tendencies of capitalism, particularly in a context of unfenced global competitiveness along market lines.²

Two of the underlying problems in the liberal peace argument stand out. The first has to do with the statistical selection of fixed points in time that suggest correlations between growth in trade and diminished conflict – while failing to discern mechanisms of causation (Hayes, 2012). A wider temporal lens is needed to situate the contemporary rise of mercantilist and illiberal politics in the context of neoliberal globalization, representing the same sort of ‘counter movement’ that Polanyi had warned of in his reading of the 19th-century downward spiral towards war – aided in our contemporary case by the demise of the traditional left (Blyth & Matthijs, 2017; Carroll & Gonzalez-Vicente, 2017). The second problem relates to liberal international political economy and IRT’s scalar fixation on inter-state matters and hence their inability to factor in violence in the absence of war. I turn now to these two points.

NEOLIBERALISM’S ILLIBERAL MOMENT AS COUNTER MOVEMENT

On paper, the two intertwined arguments for liberal peace would seem to make sense: if countries remove the barriers to trade and investment and choose to specialize in their comparative advantages, international productivity will be raised and we will enjoy a more prosperous global economy with satisfied consumers and states; also, if states develop close economic linkages, they will have important material incentives to avoid conflict with one another. In the real world, competition between jurisdictions and social groups implies often that the development and prosperity of some is based on the exploitation and vulnerability of others, as typically emphasized by the extensive literature on bifurcated economies, temporally constrained and contradictory growth patterns, and uneven and destructive forms of development. In this way, it is not that economic interdependence, when removed from its social context and put under the microscope, does not raise the costs of conflict. However, the political choices and social transformations needed to achieve interdependence are a key variable to understanding a state’s behaviour and predisposition to conflict. And while governments may in many junctures align with the interests of capital, they are not immune to crises of legitimacy, and will need to mediate issues of accumulation and social cohesion when people perceive the social transformations required to achieve interdependence to have a negative impact on their lives (Jessop, 2016, p. 189). This will reflect in a way or another on state behaviour as political elites, current and prospective, jostle for votes and/or legitimacy.

A key problem with the argument for liberal peace lies in its emphasis on narrow temporal correlations between trade and (lack of) conflict, which removes interdependence from its broader political economic context, disembedding peace and conflict from the broader set of historically bounded and politically contingent social relations that underpin them. A widened analytical timeframe renders clear the dialectical relationship between (neo)liberal social projects and their social responses, both progressive and reactionary. Whereas high volumes of trade may coincide at a particular ‘optimal’ period of liberal expansionism with interstate peace, they may also transform societies in ways that engender the conditions for a potential ‘illiberal’ turn or counter movement resulting in a higher risk of conflict as beggar-thy-neighbour positions emerge and new enemies need to be sought by political elites to bind national-constrained constituencies to their agendas to maintain power.

We can observe this temporal incongruity in the work of some of the key proponents of the capitalist peace. For example, Oneal and Russett (1999, p. 439) argue that trade ‘sharply reduces the onset of or involvement in militarized disputes among contiguous and major-power pairs’, which are identified by Maoz and Russett (1993) as the set of countries more likely to enter into conflict with each other. Despite Oneal and Russett’s sophisticated approach to the data (modelling, for example, to avoid ‘false negatives’ by factoring in geographic contiguity, or controlling for alliances) and the attention paid to statistical rejections of the liberal peace argument, trade interdependence and the occurrence of conflict are analyzed on a year-by-year basis (Oneal & Russett, 1999, p. 428). This is also the case with other comparable studies (Hegre, 2000; Oneal &

Russett, 2001; Souva & Prins, 2006). This temporal frame is problematic, as inter-national conflict tends to build up over prolonged periods of time, and the adverse impacts of interdependence and liberal integration are more likely to result first in crisis and social dislocation, followed by some sort of economic distancing (perhaps under a new administration that replaces the one that embraced liberalization) and a wide range of policy measures, before leading to military conflict – underpinned either by the state that perceives that liberal integration is having negative impacts on socioeconomic development, or more often than not by the one which wants to prevent the deterioration of important trade and investment links.

Here, one vital issue often left out of the liberal peace equations is the fact that most military interventions in the post-Second World War period were aimed at disciplining countries that opted out of the United States' global liberalizing project and sought to pursue a variety of indigenous pathways to modernity, often including many that did so under the rubric of socialism, democratically achieved or otherwise. The reverse is also true, as countries that chose to ally with the United States during the Cold War were shielded from attacks, and in some cases given preferential trade access, technology transfer and allowed to engage in market protection. In this context, associating conflict with the lack of strong trade links, rather than to the meticulous unfolding of a market-based imperial agenda, would be tantamount to concluding that low opium consumption was responsible for British military expeditions in 19th-century China. While there is certainly a correlation between China's ban on opium and British intervention, nobody could seriously suggest that opium consumption reduces interstate conflict. Similarly, in many of these cases, it is not that the absence of trade results in conflict, but on the contrary, that military intervention has often been aimed at expanding markets and protecting investment.

This situation is aptly explained by Richmond (2006), who discusses 'virtual' peace and emphasizes how war and peace can be synonymous in countries subjected to military intervention in the name of liberal peace. Old examples of this practice would include the above-mentioned Opium Wars or indeed most colonial wars to open new market frontiers. Cold War examples abound, from the CIA-supported assassination of Salvador Allende following his policies of nationalization and collectivization in Chile, to the training of Contras to oust the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua, or the perennial yoke on Cuba to seed the ground for a market-friendly regime.³ While these interventions were justified on the basis of dubious arguments regarding the national security of the attacking country, today these rationales cohabit with moral claims for 'human security' and humanitarian intervention in the target countries, although many authors have suggested that these moral arguments often conceal Realpolitik motivations (Chandler, 2004). The Iraq War is a case in point, having achieved a boom in trading links between Iraq and United States following the 2003 invasion, with a six-fold increase of trade between 2002 and 2008 that only started to decline following the discovery of shale oil reserves in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2017), but having achieved very little in terms of curbing internal violence.

The liberal peace fixation with short-term correlations between trade openness and the absence of grand inter-national conflict is particularly perplexing if one considers how the liberal argument for economic development dismisses the immediate social dislocations underpinned by market integration as tangential to longer term improvements for all segments of society (Garret, 1998, p. 796). Here, it would seem that liberal arguments for peace and development operate under different temporal logics. If liberalism's positive impacts on peace are attested with a focus on yearly correlations between commerce and an absence of conflict, its alleged positive developmental impacts can often be supported only by eschewing the immediate social conflict and diminished living standards fomented by interdependence and marketization – see, for example, the arguments for structural adjustment throughout the developing world in the 1980s and 1990s or more recent austerity policies in Europe, which, incidentally, many authors have demonstrated to be also counterproductive for long-term development (Blyth, 2013; Chang, 2007).

This last example brings one back to the contemporary juncture. Across the world, we are observing an emergence of illiberal politics in countries that have represented the backbone of neo-liberal globalization, and indeed at its very Anglo-American core. In many places, reactionary politicians have been first to galvanize social discontent successfully by publicly condemning the negative social impacts of economic globalization, such as increased inequalities and growing insecurity. In the United States, the UK or France, for example, it has been the populist right that has more prominently hoisted the anti-globalization flag, even if its discourses place targets on ethnic minorities or national trade imbalances, rather than on class inequality or the increased leverage of businesses in processes of transnational integration. We can see, for example, how rising job insecurity and deteriorating living standards in the UK were mobilized by the Brexit campaign. While much of the 'Leave' discourse was problematic, and focused its anger towards European Union regulations and immigrants, Brexit advocates successfully tapped into a widespread sense of vulnerability and precarization throughout the isles that is intimately linked to neo-liberal transformations at home and to the consolidation of the world market and its competitive pressures more broadly (Pettifor, 2017; *The Guardian*, 2016). Similarly, Donald Trump's anti-China and anti-migrant rhetoric resonated with the experiences of many in the middle class who have been on the losing side of growing inequality and declining social mobility for decades, but also remarkably in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis, with the top 1% capturing 85.1% of the country's income growth between 2009 and 2013 (Economic Policy Institute, 2016). Indeed, there are striking similarities in the protestations of politicians at opposite ends of the spectrum, such as Trump and Bernie Sanders, despite proposing diametrically opposed treatments to the perceived problems, with Trump doing little to upset the business-centric order and only adding bigotry and defensive nationalism into the mix.⁴

In this way, this rise of illiberal positions and movements must not be seen as a diversion from the road to neoliberal globalization, but *rather* a direct consequence of the consolidation of the world market facilitated by neoliberal policy sets and the techno-logistical developments underpinning globalized forms of accumulation. The current illiberal rise is hence aptly interpreted both as a counter movement in the Polanyian sense, and as a dialectical relationship. Although the detrimental social impacts of liberal integration are often felt rather swiftly by many, their reverberations into politics take the shape of more prolonged reactions. Yet, there is a strong association between liberal integration, its social impacts and the rearticulations of politics that follow and that we currently experience in many parts of the world (Gonzalez-Vicente & Carroll, 2017). The current rise of various kinds of populism – in places as diverse as the United States, the UK, Indonesia, Russia, Turkey or the Philippines, to name a few – represents from this perspective a 'counter movement' following a 'global organic crisis' (Gill, 2015), as people look beyond the mainstream for alternatives that explain and respond to the social dislocations brought about by the pursuit of transnational liberal integration. In this way, neoliberalism's illiberal moment is in a dialectical relationship with the pursuit of a liberal utopia, mirroring the Polanyian counter movement that would put an end to the 'Hundred Years Peace' (1815–1914). Most importantly, the traditional centre left's failure in many contexts to formulate viable responses to the current social dislocation has left it up to the reactionary right to devise a way out of the crisis.⁵ More often than not, the leaders of the new populist moment combine an enduring business- and market-centric approach to development with nationalist and reactionary discourse, resulting in a dangerous blend that is likely to perpetuate social discontent, but redirecting it not towards the policy and economic elites responsible of the current developmental impasse but towards countries that are increasingly perceived as rivals.

THE MULTIPLE SCALES OF VIOLENT NEOLIBERALISM

How are we then to explain the inability of mainstream liberal approaches to predict what seems to be a logical turn – in the form of a societal defence or Polanyian 'counter movement' versus the

inequalities, risks and vulnerabilities fomented by the world market? Much of the problem lies within IRT's scalar limitations, which we can explore by focusing on the disjunction between the interstate scale and the diversity of political economic processes and social conflict occurring at other scales. This disjunction is with no doubt closely related to IRT's development and consolidation in the post-Second World War years, a period characterized by particular patterns of growth of national development, marked ideological preferences and methodological nationalism – although at that point debates on structural violence and positive peace already existed in the margins of the field of IR (Gleditsch, Nordkvelle, & Strand, 2014). These all resulted in what John Agnew famously described as IRT's 'territorial trap', a fixation with the interstate scale and the assumption that states are containers of societies, with politics played in a domestic/foreign binary (Agnew, 1994). Below, I expand on this notion to discuss how violence or risk have been rescaled in the neoliberal era from the interstate realm and into the individual one, with societies taking on the costs of a competitive market integration that has allowed for – at least temporarily – relatively convivial relations between key states (and the elites who control them) mediating the global economic architecture (on risk, see also Beck, 1999).

IRT's territorial trap remains ubiquitous. Despite decades of powerful critiques that have presented the post-Westphalian nation-state as a never fully realized political moment and a site of social conflict (Agnew, 1994; Mitchell, 1991), states remain an ontological fixation at the core of IRT. This is even more so the case when it comes to the understanding of conflict and peace. Whereas the field of IR is today increasingly open to accepting 'non-traditional' security threats such as organized crime, terrorism or epidemics, these are to a great degree studied as anomalies in a state-based system, and considered only inasmuch as they pose a threat to state order. Typologies of war such as the Correlates of War (COW) Data Sets accept non-state entities as potential actors of conflict. However, these are narrowly defined as 'nonterritorial entities or non-state armed groups' that are not formally accepted as members of the interstate system but which must contest the power of a state or at least represent a violent challenge to state or state-like entities in order to be agents of conflict (COW Wars v. 4.0, 2014). According to this understanding, peace is not only negatively constructed as the absence of violence (Williams & McConnell, 2011, p. 928), but in particular as the absence of violence explicitly directed at the state or at gaining control of a state.

This monoscalar conceptualization of peace and conflict pervades liberal IRT, too, which considers the state the key actor in international relations, and markets the connecting fabric holding international peace together. Gartzke and Li argue, for example, how the demonstrators who took the streets 'from Seattle to Switzerland and from Gothenburg to Jakarta ... mobilised by apocalyptic visions of the menace of globalisation' failed to recognize that economic integration offers mutual benefits to states that opt for settlements in the place of fighting (Gartzke & Li, 2003, p. 562). This is, of course, a caricature of 'alter-globalisation' movements that fails to acknowledge the transnational networks behind such movements.⁶ Yet, it is a useful example to show how, by focusing on states as the aggregate beneficiaries of 'efficient' modes of transnational production and exchange, liberal scholarship eschews the variegated forms of politico-economic conflict that market reordering foments at intrastate scales.

The crucial point is that, with the complexities of global dynamics flattened into a chessboard of one-dimensional state actors, mainstream IR perspectives are often unable to address the multi-scalar violent repercussions of liberal market integration and therefore its challenges to positive peace – understood as 'the possibility of maximising human potential' (Flint, 2005, p. 7) and the absence of structural, cultural and environmental violence (Galtung, 1996; Richmond, 2008, p. 89). Peace, much like war, operates at 'intertwined and mutually constitutive' scales, from the intimate to the global (Koopman, 2011, p. 194). Anchored in mid-20th-century statist notions of world politics, conventional IR understandings of peace and conflict are oblivious to threats to everyday peace when state power is not directly under challenge. In this way, foreign direct investment or trade are considered phenomena that bring states more closely integrated,

hence either increasing the likelihood of peace (from the liberal perspective) or not necessarily having an impact on the probability of conflict in the long term (from the realist perspective).

Yet, the undemocratic trends behind processes of transnationalization of capital reproduce new and old forms of violence. John Nagle, a political anthropologist of ethnic conflict, highlights, for example, how global market integration may indeed 'cause a violent backlash if economic reconstruction dispossesses groups from their land or dismantles their traditional economic systems without providing acceptable alternatives' (Nagle, 2010, p. 232), or what could also be described as processes of primitive accumulation without immediate proletarianization. The creation of masses of unemployed youth, surplus to the immediate exploitative needs of capital, is of course an important factor behind the rise of violence in many societies, as, for example, many in the Caribbean (Pantin, 1996). Moreover, these processes of dispossession and the dismantling of livelihoods are per se violent by-products of neoliberal integration.

Violent neoliberalism, mediated not by an invisible hand but by explicit elite interests (Harvey, 2005) or more subject-based processes of governmentality (Larner, 2000), is a recurrent phenomenon in the study of the globalization of capitalism. The integration of 'developing countries' with global markets is typically plagued with violent rationales of development and tangible issues of exploitation and dispossession, as vividly exemplified in Simon Springer's studies of violent neoliberalism in Cambodia (Springer, 2015). An important issue to be considered here is the transformation of the state alongside processes of economic globalization, adopting increasingly competitive and regulatory forms, and ubiquitously morphing into what some have described as 'capitalist states' (Jessop, 2002). This transformation implies that, through processes of disciplinary neoliberalism (Gill, 1995), states can in fact mediate between global competitive forces and domestic societies not to protect the latter from outside dangers or the recurring crises of capitalism, but in fact to impose measures of austerity, protect creditors, and in general promote more precarious and vulnerable patterns of living.

A powerful example of violent neoliberalism is found in processes of worker exploitation fomented by flexible regimes of accumulation required to attract capital investment. This explains why 70,000 workplace casualties in China during 2012 (*The Economist*, 2013) – a country where workers' independent organization is to a great extent illegal, or 180,000 protests in 2010 (*The Wall Street Journal*, 2011), do not affect IR's calculations of peace, despite the close link between these incidents and exploitation dynamics associated with China's integration into global markets (Chan, 2001). It is only from this perspective that IR scholars in China can present their country's growing economic pre-eminence as a 'peaceful rise', arguing that 'the Chinese have made [the choice] to embrace economic globalization rather than detach themselves from it' (Zheng, 2005). Ironically, given the ostensible incompatibility between liberal emphases upon freedom and pluralism and state propaganda, Chinese official media also suggests that globalization and peace provide 'favourable conditions for building a harmonious society', where 'the political environment is stable, the economy is prosperous, people live in peace and work in comfort and social welfare improves' (*People's Daily*, 2007). The actual 'harmonisation' of society in China has indeed entailed occasional improvements in welfare provision and some concessions to labour – for example, in the form of a new Labour Contract Law in 2007 that required firms to give written contracts to their workers. Yet, disciplinary measures hold sway, and the very lawyers who sought to protect worker rights under the Labour Contract Law framework are being incarcerated under the charges of 'disturbing social order', while income inequality and labour unrest have continued to rise (*Financial Times*, 2016; Hui & Chan, 2011). And crucially, intrastate violence can in turn be rescaled to the inter-national sphere. Therefore, analysts often associate the rise in protests and repression in China with the Chinese Communist Party's orchestration of and permissiveness towards nationalist campaigns and patriotic discourse – including typical recourse to international belligerence over disputed territories and anti-Western rhetoric – in search for legitimacy (Hughes, 2006).

Similarly, there has been an emergence of inequality, vulnerability and precarization in economically developed countries that can also be analyzed under the framework of violent neoliberalism. As transnational capital benefits from exploiting the world's largest unfree labour force in China and other low and middle income countries, middle classes elsewhere have seen their rights and economic power decline. In the United States, the last decades of globalization and prosperity have been accompanied by increased levels of poverty, a net decline of 2.7 million jobs between 2001 and 2011, and declining inflation-adjusted minimum wages (Mischel & Davis, 2015; Scott, 2015; Shaefer & Edin, 2013). Marketization has reached grotesque proportions, and today even the disciplinary apparatus of the state is up for sale, resulting in skyrocketing incarceration rates, chiefly affecting impoverished populations and the African American community (BBC, 2014). In Spain, a rampant series of evictions following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis – with over 600,000 foreclosures from 2008 to 2015 (*El País*, 2015) – left families homeless while political elites transferred €100 billion of public wealth to private and privatized financial institutions, with four-fifths of the sum deemed unrecoverable according to the estimations of the Spanish Central Bank. Global and national processes have in this way powerful impacts on other scales, including the personal lived experiences of crisis. In the United States, studies find that the 40% rise in suicides since 1999 is connected to the recession of 2007–09, while the World Health Organisation (WHO) observes a 60% increase in suicide rates across the world over the last 45 years that appears to be connected to periodic spikes in economic hardship (Oyesanya, Lopez-Morinigo, & Dutta, 2015; Whiteman, 2015). With global affluence concentrated in increasingly fewer hands (with eight people having the same amount of wealth as 50% of the world's population according to some studies; Hardoon, 2017), and with risk gradually removed from markets and transferred to increasingly vulnerable individuals, national illiberal politics has come to constitute a logical reaction to the liberal order for many, or a quest for refuge from the violence of markets, however fraught the responses offered by many of the populist alternatives now in vogue.

Another vivid example of violent neoliberalism is seen in the apparent capitulation of the future of the world's environment and the present livelihoods of many to the immediate needs of capital. Here we see the expansion of capitalist activities in search of previously untapped resources in the developing world and elsewhere driving conflict with local populations and fomenting processes of internal colonialism and dispossession (Gonzalez-Vicente, 2017; Kaag & Zoomers, 2014). Even a wide range of allegedly well-intentioned initiatives to preserve biodiversity operate now according to market logics, relying on the valuation and commodification of nature and the deployment of green credentials ultimately to displace populations in ways that are reminiscent of processes of primitive accumulation (Fairhead, Leach, & Scoones, 2012; Lohmann, 2010). And, of course, climate change and environmental degradation in general have become key drivers of global migrations, with the risk of being displaced by natural disasters today being 60% higher than 40 years ago and 25.4 million people needing to migrate every year to escape the consequences of natural disasters (Greenpeace, 2017, p. 6). Crucial here – once again – is the fact that our current global environmental crisis cannot be understood outside the context of global liberal integration, as the promotion of 'good business environments' (note the irony) and competition across jurisdictions to attract capital investments have resulted in any attempt to make businesses pay for the environmental 'externalities' of production being just a marginal note in a downward trajectory towards an environmental dystopia.

These violent by-products of liberal integration operate at scales that go from the global to the intimate. Yet, despite the vast amounts of empirical evidence illustrating the violence inherent in processes of marketization, the epistemological limitations of IRT create illusions of liberal peace in the absence of conflict between states. The examples above illustrate how state-based peace is limited in its implications for the everyday lives of many people and may even be counterproductive at diverse scales where violence is systematically applied and justified to perpetuate liberal state peace and market integration. Importantly, people are not just victims of violence, but agents of

political change. If at an early stage of globalization liberal elites were able to contain discontent through appeals to technical prowess, claims of a lack of viable alternatives (see, for example, Margaret Thatcher's famous 'there is no alternative' mantra) and the depoliticization of policy more broadly, today we observe a process of re-politicization that often takes reactionary forms (Gonzalez-Vicente & Carroll, 2017). While in some countries progressive alternatives to the liberal order are revitalizing the political debate, and indeed solidarity campaigns have delivered some important victories across the world, what we observe in many places today is the conjunction of national reactionary discourse (with elites placing responsibilities for the social crisis on foreign forces and migrants, for example) and a continued hegemony of markets. This new populist order dangerously combines an economic base that will continue to produce market violence with nationalist rationales that undermine internationalist solidarity, and which unfortunately invite further violence towards the 'other'.

FROM DURABLE DISORDER TO THE NEW POPULIST ORDER

Writing in 1998, Philip Cerny identified the emergence of a generalized sense of insecurity following the end of the Cold War, which he described as a 'neomedieval scenario' or a situation of 'durable disorder', mirroring in a way what Eric Hobsbawm had earlier called a 'descent to barbarism' (Hobsbawm, 1994). Cerny explained that this durable disorder was characterized by:

nation-state based institutions and processes having been transformed into transmission belts and enforcement mechanisms for decisions arrived at on different levels of the wider global system, but with that system as a whole becoming increasingly incapable of generating effective, authoritative, multifunctional coordination and control mechanisms or governance structures. (Cerny, 1998, p. 45)

Some of these elements are still discernible, and have been even amplified, in the current juncture. With market efficiency having become a major ordering mechanism across jurisdictions, and with global economic competition tightening profit margins and deepening the productivity race, policy elites across the world struggle to promote economic competitiveness while maintaining social legitimacy all at once. Yet, rather than rendering state institutions obsolete, dysfunctional or completely delegitimized, the contemporary crisis has resulted in attempts to renew or transform the political discourse as a way of providing authoritative answers to the durable (social) disorder. Indeed, some of these attempts have relied, in one way or another, on class rationales (e.g., Sanders in the United States, Syriza in Greece), but many invoke the nation as an (imagined) community under attack, not necessarily by markets and elites, but by an 'other' that is often found in competing economies or immigrants and their cultures. These political rearticulations replace the optimistic globalizing rationales that liberal elites have prominently fomented since the 1980s, yet in a curious and troubling way, the new populist order promoted by the likes of Trump in the United States or Xi in China combines the centrality of markets and the role of the capitalist state in expanding them, with rising reactionary nationalism to assuage the social disorder brought about by a consolidating the world market.

In order to trace the unfolding of neoliberalism's contemporary illiberal moment, this paper has discussed the intimate dialectical relationship between neoliberal violence at various scales and the emergence of the new populist order, which has IR pundits pondering the increased likelihood of conflict. At one level, the durable social disorder of market integration should per se challenge the liberal peace panacea, given the many concrete violent manifestations of neoliberalism covered in this paper. At a different level, I have also tried to meet IR scholarship in its own terrain, understanding how some of these forms of neoliberal violence may seem inconsequential for theorists who focus on interstate war (within certain periods of time) as the only/main concern in the field of international relations. Here, I have relied on Polanyian understandings of a 'counter

movement' to chart the links between processes of liberal market integration and the social and political repercussions that follow, including in our times an apparent rise in illiberal politics. To do so, I have relied on a temporal critique to identify the long-term political impacts of the social dislocation prompted by the pursuit of a market utopia. I have also explained the multiplicity of scales in which violence works through world market capitalism, arriving at a contemporary situation in which people across the world look for answers in defensive and aggressive forms of nationalism that cohabit in curious and conflicting ways with the continued prevalence of the world market order.

In many ways, these conclusions are not entirely surprising. Activists and critical scholars of the global political economy, geographers, anthropologists and sociologists have for decades studied the destructive effects of liberal market integration, from the impacts on job destruction following the implementation of free-trade agreements to the increased commodification and destruction of nature or the rising insecurity that we experience as market principles come to govern our everyday lives – all these having been politically conditioned and supported by institutions that ensure the reproduction of a system which continues to transfer risk from markets to individuals despite important forms of resistance (Cammack, 2004). Yet, these insights have not been easily incorporated into IR debates on conflict and indeed have been deliberately ignored by proponents of a liberal or capitalist peace, who insist on associating market integration with both democracy and a decreased likelihood of conflict, despite ample evidence for the contrary. This problematic position can be summarized in two false dichotomies that continue to pervade the argument for a liberal or capitalist peace: one between market liberalism and authoritarianism, which should have been completely refuted by Pinochet's Chile, Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore, the rise of the Chinese economy or 'disciplinary neoliberalism' in the West (Gill, 1995), and another between economic globalization and nationalism, clearly under challenge today by recent political developments in places such as the UK, the United States or China, to name a few.

Although I should reiterate that it is not the goal of the paper to predict the likelihood of conflict, some broad conclusions can be reached from my critique of liberal peace. If the consolidation of the world market along competitive economic lines and models of Pareto-efficiency has resulted in various forms of violence upon many (environmental, political, economic) and a rise of belligerent discourses, one should expect that replacing the goals of efficiency (or at least prevailing understandings of efficiency) and profitability with those of social justice could deliver different outcomes (Sandbrook, 2011). Here we could imagine processes of integration that put the rights of people and nature before those of capital – for example, with trade and investment agreements that penalize environmentally destructive methods of production, impose severe tariffs on products manufactured in jurisdictions where labour is unfree and where inequality is reflected in abusive salaries, or that prohibit the use of tax havens. These objectives will not be easily achieved, given the consolidation of the world market and its competitive pressures and, indeed, the great material interests at play.

To reach any of these goals, internationalist allegiances between progressive forces across nation-states would be necessary, both to push for the retreat of the market frontier from the many aspects of social life that it has inundated in the last decades and to combat the tendency to seek defence in national identities that hamper the sort of transnational political mobilization needed to take on eminently global challenges (Gonzalez-Vicente & Carroll, 2017; Sandbrook, 2011). Importantly, such campaigns are not a distant utopia, but have been a powerful oppositional force since the early days of the neoliberal era, with their voices gaining renewed prominence in the West following the 2007/08 Global Financial Crisis. Ultimately, the future of global peace will depend on societies' ability to come together and shape a world order where the rights of people and nature prevail over those of capital and, indeed, over the dystopia of a disembedded and dehumanized world market.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks Toby Carroll, Shahar Hameiri, Lee Jones, Emma Mawdsley and Brad Williams for feedback on earlier drafts. Any remaining errors are the author's own.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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NOTES

1. The endorsement here of a 'dialectical' approach is inspired by dialectical materialism, but refers mostly to something quite simple: the need to study social developments as part of complex realities where layered, simultaneous and interrelated processes shape each other across time and space (Marx, 1990; Castree, 1996). For the purposes of this paper, this implies studying peace and conflict, or liberal and illiberal politics, not as individual phenomena with a life of their own and self-contained internal mechanisms, but as processes that can only be properly understood when contextualized in relation and in tension with each other.
2. A concern among some liberal authors has been whether powerful domestic businesses in different settings would attempt to curb globalizing trends and protect national monopolies. However, while the domestic rearticulation of capital, with the rise of its globally competitive fractions and demise of the rest, may have been swiftly assimilated in various contexts without significant turmoil, it is not the threatened domestic monopolies that challenge today the foreign policy preferences of diverse states, but the increasingly alienated populations – from the exploited to the forgotten and the unemployed to the precariat – who seek refuge in leaders and discourses that offer – with more or less ingenuity – responses to the great disembedding of markets and society.
3. A closely aligned set of literature on the issue of 'democratic peace' demonstrates also the malleability of definitions, often tainted by US-friendly readings of history. For example, an article by Michael Mousseau based on the Militarized Interstate Dispute data set omits every US intervention in Latin America from 1816 to 1992 (except for a dispute with Ecuador in 1980), allowing the author to conclude that 'joint highly democratic dyads are about 3 times more likely ... to resolve their militarized conflicts with mutual concessions' (Mousseau, 1998, p. 210; see also Bremer, 1993).
4. Obviously, many on the left, but outside the mainstream occupied by traditional centre-left parties, have been wary of the increased inequalities, precarization and insecurities that accompany, for example, the marketization of welfare provision or the deployment of anti-inflationary regimes. Yet, while some of these voices have lately gained prominence in various contexts (e.g., Syriza in Greece, Jeremy Corbyn in the UK or Bernie Sanders' contest for the leadership of the Democratic Party the United States), the implementation of progressive agendas is an uphill battle within the constraints of wider regional politics and global market competition, even after taking hold of national governments.
5. Here it is important to note the transformation of the centre-left following a process of depoliticization in the 1990s, with parties such as Labour under Tony Blair, the Socialist Party in Spain or the Democrats under Bill Clinton supporting a liberal business-centric global order, and marketization and financialization at home. This resulted in vast sections of the working class being delinked from the political institutions that represented them during much of the post-war period, and rapidly declining party and union membership.
6. Critical scholars and 'alter-globalisation' movements alike do not necessarily advocate autarkic politics. Instead, they often oppose the state as an anchor of neoliberal globalization and seek to carve out spaces for social contestation and democratic accountability in the global liberal order that resemble in some way the arrangements that some societies developed historically in their relations with national governments and capital (McMichael, 2006).

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