

H-Net Reviews

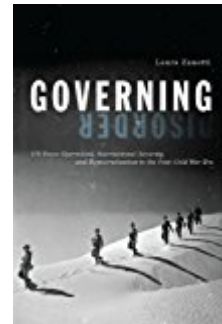
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Laura Zanotti. *Governing Disorder: UN Peace Operations, International Security, and Democratization in the Post-Cold War Era*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011. xiv + 180 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-03761-5.

Reviewed by Nicholas Kiersey (Ohio State University)

Published on H-LatAm (October, 2012)

Commissioned by Dennis R. Hidalgo



There is a marked tendency among Foucauldian theorists of international relations (IR) to avoid engagement with the world of the non-discursive. As Zanotti notes, one ironic effect of this tendency is that Foucauldian IR often reads as a “substantialist” approach to the study of politics. Of course, one great advantage of the Foucauldian approach to IR is that it looks for power “elsewhere.” Eschewing the ontological givens that other IR theorists take for granted, such as the state, Foucauldian scholars posit a social world where nothing exists outside of discursive relations of power. IR Foucauldians have failed, however, to follow through fully on their commitment to contingency. In their research they survey the landscape of contemporary political power, hunting for traces and signs which confirm what they already hold to be true: that liberal modernity is a fundamentally imperialist paradigm, hell-bent on reducing the aleatory of human life to a systematized caricature of itself. Echoing the opening remarks of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s recent *Commonwealth*, Zanotti cautions that such an approach can produce “apocalyptic or totalizing views” (p. 137).[1] Indeed, as someone whose professional experience as a United Nations (UN) political officer has given her an intimate familiarity with the interface between discourses and political actualities on the ground, it is no surprise that Zanotti would find such accounts lacking in nuance. As well she knows, the magnitude of modern liberalism’s global reach and vision is equaled only by its tendency to fail spectacularly, beset as it is by mismanagement, the unintended consequences of its

actions, and, of course, energetic strategies of resistance.

The book’s key value-added contribution for IR scholars is the duo of applied cases on Croatia and Haitian peacebuilding. These come nestled in a competently written narrative which identifies two key post-Cold War inflections in the way democracy and security are imagined and organized. Concerning the prior, the essential shift concerns a deliberate move to target state governance reform as a way of better leveraging technologies of subjectification in order better to achieve the promise of democratic peace theory. The state was thus consciously seized upon by UN planners as a relay point both for a series of governmental operations to promote social regularization and, importantly, for the elaboration of a network of national and international surveillance mechanisms to ascertain progress in relation to these operations. Zanotti contends that posing reform efforts in terms of “governance” is helpful for planners insofar as the term allows policies to be presented as uncontroversial, “apolitical, technically sound, and universally valid” (p. 57).

The specific content of this “good governance” trope emerged hesitantly, in a series of conferences from 1988 to 2003, solidifying perhaps most concisely with a “sea change” overseen by secretary general Kofi Annan in 1997 (p. 44). That year, drawing on language developed by the UNDP earlier that same decade, Annan’s first report to the General Assembly framed “governance” as

an alternative framework to the by now evidently failed strategies of neoliberalism and socialism alike. As Zanotti elaborates, this view retained much of neoliberalism's focus on the state as a "downsized" regulator, but added a Republican and socialist intuitions about the need in development work for political and poverty-related components, in collaboration with private and civil sector bodies. As such, a series of benchmarks are elaborated in formal documents at that time, sometimes expressed in the normative language of human rights, but more commonly in the technocratic language of capacity-building, optimization, and civil society participation.

Zanotti is at pains to emphasize, however, the often quiet and understated manner in which the idea of "political will" creeps into this otherwise technical language (p. 53). Annan's "Millennium Declaration," for example, suggests an awareness that the conditions of possibility for government include a certain amount of work on subjectivity itself, belying the deeply political and normalizing nature of governance language. Yet, as Zanotti notes, the tremendous difficulties encountered by peacekeepers and democracy promoters in the 1990s forced planners in international bodies to adopt even more capillary approaches, going beyond the level of governance to the level of the population itself. For Zanotti, the term "biopolitics" refers to an emergent trend within governance which "focuses on maintaining the equilibrium of processes of living together, and intensifies the development of an array of saviors and regulatory mechanisms targeting life" (p. 59). This shift towards life, understood in terms both of its health and its wealth, as the target of governance effectively redefines the basic imperative of Western security strategies, away from the more legalistic categories of the era of traditional *realpolitik* and towards a new, moral consensus on the stakes of democratization and peace operations for global peace. More than this, however, it represents an increasing awareness on the part of peace and democracy planners of the aleatory nature of human life; risk management and "responsibilization" become key watch words in an era of extreme interdependency. Thus, the 2004 UN High-Level Panel on Change, Challenges, and Threat declared in so many words that when states cease to protect their populations, or simply do not have the capacity to protect them, the international community may suspend the sovereignty of that state.

Beyond this macro-level of her analysis however, Zanotti's goal is to bring a hesitant voice to debates surrounding securitization and governmentality. To a cer-

tain extent, she is not fully successful in this as the book occasionally falls back into the sort of totalizing language she is explicitly seeking to avoid. Indeed, the main thesis guiding her research is that "the post-Cold War international normalizing regime operates along modalities that are isomorphic to the techniques of power that, according to Foucault, marked the great transformation of power in Classical Europe" (p. 20). In the Haiti chapter, Zanotti reasserts this line supposedly in a self-conscious effort to differentiate herself from the more totalizing approaches of scholars like Bertrand Badie and David Chandler.[2] This differentiation hinges on a recognition of the specificity of practices and their potential incommensurability with prevailing conditions "on the ground." Thus, we learn, despite the best intentions of UN reformers in the 1990s to introduce an efficacious human rights regime in Haiti, "they precipitated instead the disintegration of the capacity of local administrations to govern" (p. 105). For Zanotti, the specific problem here was that efforts to build institutions, such as the Haitian police force for example, were confounded by a disregard at the donor level for the sort of financial and infrastructural resources these projects would require. MICAHA, the UN peace-building operation in Haiti, was thus condemned to play nothing more than a coordinating role for the various NGO operations present.

Yet a question seems to raise itself at precisely this part of the book. While the chapter on Haiti does offer quite a substantial commentary on the structural imperatives that have historically been imposed on the country through its proximity to the might of the U.S. economy, its theoretical engagement presents the Haitian economy itself as nothing more than a passive difficulty for UN reformers. Yet there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that Haiti was also imagined in economic terms and that the transnational biopolitical strategies it suffered were infused through and through with neoliberal notions of the market as a crucial technology of the self.[3] In this sense, the focus on functional isomorphism with disciplinary times gone by makes itself for an oddly substantialist remark in the face of what are very contemporary financial imperatives and techniques. Despite the book's claim to wish to go beyond the sort of "life determinism" of IR's biopolitical security theorists, the book seems to avoid the question of just what an optimal human life is imagined to look like. Situating the UN's bio-narrative in discourses of liberal securitization, as merely a technical means to a moral end, seems to play down the extent to which that moral end might actually be imagined in fairly economic terms. Marxism

is a helpful guide, says Zanotti, to the extent that it can explore questions of uneven development as a condition which peacebuilding must then encounter. Yet Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2000) is subjected to a very casual dismissal for its "structural/dialectical conceptualization of history" (p. 4). This kind of shoehorning is unfortunate given both that Hardt and Negri have sought repeatedly to distinguish themselves from such reductionist thinking and that their work at the very least broaches the possibility that the events with which Zanotti's book is concerned might also be inflected by economic imperatives and rationalities.

Notes

[1]. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

[2]. Bertrand Badie, *The Imported State: The Westernization of the Political Order* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); and David Chandler, *Empire in Denial* (London: Pluto Press, 2006).

[3]. See, for example, Paul Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2005).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-latam>

Citation: Nicholas Kiersey. Review of Zanotti, Laura, *Governing Disorder: UN Peace Operations, International Security, and Democratization in the Post-Cold War Era*. H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. October, 2012.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=33402>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.