

# Reconstructive Methodology and Critical International Relations Theory

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**Abstract:** Drawing on the work of the latest generation of social philosophers institutionally or intellectually linked to the Frankfurt School, this article examines the critical-reconstructive-explanatory methodology that became a distinguishing feature of contemporary critical theory after its 'reconstructive turn.' The article aims to show how these recent developments can contribute to overcoming the various criticisms that continue to challenge Critical International Relations Theory (CIRT) from a methodological viewpoint, such as its normative and interpretative emphasis at the expense of the empirical dimension of analysis, its inability to provide a substantive explanation of the social pathologies and mechanisms of domination it criticises, its insulation from issues of pluralism and multiculturalism, the absence of debate with outside approaches, and the lack of clarity on how theory connects to practice. After discussing the main aspects of the contemporary critical theory methodology, the article ends with a brief illustration of this methodology using as a basis the critique of the liberal peacebuilding.

**Keywords:** Reconstruction; Methodology; Frankfurt School; Critique of Liberal Peace; Critical Theory.

## Introduction

Critical theory, as understood in this article, is the kind of social theorising that seeks to analyse society from the standpoint of its emancipatory values.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, critical theory stands apart from positivistic theorising – or, in Max Horkheimer's terms, from 'traditional theory'<sup>2</sup> – because of its normative orientation and its reflexivity. This means that critical theory entails a commitment to transforming the world towards a better future for human existence, and implies becoming aware of the social function of theorists in knowledge production and its impacts in social practices and public processes of self-reflection. Noteworthy in this respect is that emancipatory values anchoring critical theory are not abstract ideals, but rather conceptual elaborations derived from moral

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principles that emerge in contexts of struggles for political and social transformations, and assume a certain permanence in social institutions. The crucial point, thus, is that the emancipatory reference for critical theory is immanent to practices of the society itself, rather than an external, transcendental criterion for ethical judgement.

No matter how varied have been the voices that have tried to elaborate this general insight, and however diversified and sophisticated have been the theoretical approaches produced since critical theory emerged in the 1930s in the work of thinkers of the so-called Frankfurt School, the fact is that the debate over the methodological issues involved in this particular kind of social theorising has only assumed a more detailed and explicit elaboration in the writings of contemporary critical theorists. Of course this does not mean that methodological concerns were absent in the Frankfurt School's early generations. After all, it would be neglectful not to note that left-Hegelian notions such as dialectics and immanent critique were assumed as methodological orientations of critical theory from its earliest moments. Since the 1980s, however, due to internal developments and external pressures from voices arising in the broader debate about critique, critical theory has been faced with demands for more specification and self-clarification on how to translate methodologically its interrelated normative and empirical dimensions, its theory-praxis nexus, and how to avoid its tendency to Eurocentrism and universalism (Strydom 2011). These internal and external pressures have led to important methodological developments that are making contemporary critical theory more amenable not only to a pluralistic and pragmatic version of social critique, but also to an explanatory perspective of knowledge production.

Although critical theory was introduced in the International Relations (IR) academic field around the same time such contemporary methodological developments began to take shape,<sup>3</sup> it is worth noting the secondary position, and even the absence of methodological concerns in the seminal works of critical IR theorists. Indeed, early critical IR theorists tended to read critical theory mainly as a normative theory, disregarding critical theory's original social basis and its commitment to explaining empirically the deformations of modernity. By not providing a post-positivist alternative for empirical analysis, critical IR theorists have reproduced the positivist empirical–normative divide, as if reflexivity had necessarily to be equated in the realm of normative thinking to the detriment of empiry. Consequently, a growing chorus in recent years has urged a more empirically grounded critical theory, besides its predominantly normative focus, which inevitably brings to light the need for greater engagement with methodology, as well as greater transparency and specification of the methodological choices of critical IR theorists (Jackson 2011; Hamati-Ataya 2012; Brincat 2012, 2017).

This article joins these voices, seeking to show how the pragmatic turn in critical theory and its reconstructive approach, which has become the general methodological orientation of contemporary critical theory, can help to overcome the divorce between empirical analysis and normative theorising that has been a problematic tendency since critical theory was introduced in the IR field in the 1980s. For this purpose, the paper reviews critical theory's contemporary methodological developments to suggest a framework for analysis that not only reflects the Frankfurt School's particular kind of social

critique, but also works as a useful tool for the conduct of critical inquiry on world politics and international peace and security.

Given this purpose, some delimitations are necessary. First, even though recognising that the wider debate about critique is now under the impact of various currents and competing ideas derived from Michel Foucault's genealogical critique, Michael Walzer's hermeneutics, Pierre Bourdieu's critical sociology, Roy Bhaskar's critical realism and others, this article focuses basically on the Frankfurt School's particular type of social critique and on its impacts in the IR field. Second, and related to the former, contemporary methodological developments in the Frankfurt School tradition not only respond to internal demands, but also to provocations derived from the wider debate about critique. Therefore, even within the limits assumed here, the article takes into consideration, albeit indirectly and through Frankfurtian lenses, some relevant concerns arising from those alternative niches of social critique. Third, the article focuses on contributions about methodology made by contemporary critical theorists, not on their particular social or political theories. Thus, rather than presenting the state of the art of critical theory in general, the article's goal is more specific and is restricted to examining fundamental lines of the contemporary methodological debate from within the Frankfurt School tradition. This analytical choice and the selective treatment of authors and issues that results from this option are not only due to the limits imposed by the article's length, but also to the fact that the Frankfurt School legacy is the one that has most influenced what is conventionally known as Critical International Relations Theory (CIRT).

In view of these introductory considerations and delimitations, the article proceeds in four sections. The first briefly examines the main methodological achievements and weaknesses of CIRT. The second section presents an account of contemporary works of Frankfurt School thinkers whose methodological contributions have not yet been sufficiently considered in the IR field. The section aims to show how their works have led to the emergence of reconstruction as the core methodological orientation that bridges, in a more explicit and sophisticated way, critical theory's normative and empirical dimensions. Based on these methodological indications, particularly on Piet Strydom's work, the third section seeks to show how reconstruction can be translated into a framework for the conduct of inquiry in critical theory. Moving back to the IR field, a concluding section reconstructs the liberal peacebuilding project to illustrate the methodological framework discussed in the article.

## **CIRT and methodology**

Despite the introduction of critical theory into the IR field more than three decades ago, the methodological dimension involved in this particular way of thinking about the world's problems was not sufficiently taken into consideration in the seminal attempts to propose a critical theory of international politics (see Ashley 1981; Cox 1996; Linklater 1986, 1990, 1998; Jones 2001) or a critical theory of security (see Jones 1999; Booth 1991, 2005, 2007; Bilgin, Booth and Jones 1998; Bilgin 2005). Although this group of authors

brought to the IR field some key elements of the general architecture of the critical theory research programme – such as its transcendental dimension (concerned with human suffering), its normative dimension (committed to enlightenment and emancipation), its ontological dimension (founded on the view that social reality is not given or stable, but is socially constructed) and its epistemological dimension (based on the rejection of subject-object and fact-value dualisms, and on the premise that theory is a guide for action)<sup>4</sup> – the methodological dimension has been relegated to the background, without reaching a systematic and transparent methodology that reflects the overall architecture of critical theory and is useful as a guide for the conduct of empirical inquiry.

From among these first moments, Robert Cox's influential distinction between 'problem-solving theory' and 'critical theory' arises as an emblematic cornerstone of CIRT. Although Cox does not recognise any influence of Horkheimer's famous distinction between 'traditional theory' and 'critical theory', the parallel between both perspectives is inevitable, with a disadvantage for Cox's formulation, which suffers from some shortcomings that are still reproduced within the IR field. According to Cox (1996), while problem-solving theory is conservative, tactical, instrumental, and serves the prevailing order, critical theory conversely is progressive, comprehensive, and aims at transforming the prevailing order and institutions. From this distinction, Cox derives a normative preference for critical theory, although not offering a consistent epistemic and methodological basis upon which his choice can be justified as an alternative to the problem-solving type of positivist theorising. In the absence of a systematic clarification of its methodological grounds, critical theory is largely justified on the basis of Gramsci's conceptual accounts of global hegemony, offering virtually nothing in methodological terms capable of particularising critical theory in relation to what it tries to oppose: positivism.

By grounding his international critical theory in conceptual categories imported from Habermas's discourse ethics, Linklater (1986, 1998) proceeds in a similar way: His critical theory is equated on the basis of concepts and categories derived from the theory of communicative action, rather than on methodological grounds. As a result, subsequent generations of IR scholars merely reproduce those established conceptual categories, presuming that this is enough to give their work a 'critical' character (Jackson 2011: 183). What seems problematic here is that reflexivity, which is a core feature of critical theory, and the social basis of critique are not problematised and translated into methodological terms, leaving a gap that still needs to be filled in CIRT (Hamati-Ataya 2012).

The work organised by Brincat, Lima and Nunes (2012) – which starts with interviews with four major references in CIRT (Cox, Linklater, Booth and Wyn Jones) and expands to a forum composed of authors from the same tradition or different currents of social critique – is a representative thermometer not only of CIRT's achievements, but also of its weaknesses and limitations. When looking at the main external criticisms and self-criticisms made in this work, one cannot fail to notice that a considerable portion of them are ultimately methodological in nature. This is shown, for example, by the reflections on CIRT's closure to diversity and lack of debate with outside approaches, as well as the claims for an empirical dimension that complements and enhances its normative

dimension. If on the one hand the critical theorists interviewed claim greater openness to pluralism (Cox 2012: 26), strengthened dialogue with other theoretical perspectives (Linklater 2012: 54) and engagement with social activism and concrete problems of the world (Jones 2012: 88-91, 100), on the other hand poststructuralists, feminists and post-colonialists accuse critical theorists of equating emancipation with a universalising and abstract enlightenment narrative, that becomes closed, Eurocentric and removed from the concrete dynamics of exclusion, which not rarely results from the 'instrumentalisation' of the very idea of emancipation in the interest of projects of power and domination (Ackerly 2012: 144-145; Neufeld 2012: 175-176, 182; Weber 2012: 193-194). Particularly relevant is the feminist critique of Jacqui True (2012: 156), who criticises CIRT for not having a clear methodology capable of providing the mechanisms for reflexive practice and for diagnosis and mitigation of the dynamics of domination and exclusion it tries to criticise.

Upon considering these criticisms and the difficulty that CIRT has in dealing with different components, including its empirical dimension, it seems relevant to recall the Frankfurt School's original commitment to empirical analysis and to integrating political science, economics, sociology and eventually psychology into a wider social and political theory that could provide orientation to understand and transform social and political orders.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, faced with the need for a methodology that makes the interrelationship between normative, empirical and explanatory analysis more explicit, critical IR theorists should perhaps rethink their oppositional vocation to enable greater involvement with methodological issues and engagement with other perspectives. As Michael Williams (2012) correctly remarks, the evolution of critical theory in the IR field shows that opposition has been a key mechanism of critique and a radical way of challenging IR orthodoxy. But this oppositional logic of confrontation, as Williams also notes, comes with perils attached, such as insulation, obscurity of its methodological positions, difficulty of engagement and dialogue with outside perspectives, and an infertile belief that realism and empirical work are necessarily equated with positivism, hence incompatible with post-positivist positions (Williams 2012: 197-200).

While criticisms, concerns and demands for further developments still challenge CIRT from a methodological point of view, one cannot fail to recognise that attempts to bring dialectics and immanent critique to CIRT were made by scholars such as Alker and Biesteker (1984), Heine and Teschke (1996), Linklater (1998: 5, 9-10, 145-178, 182), Roach (2007) and Stamnes (2004). Shannon Brincat (2012), in particular, has made important efforts to show how dialectics and immanent critique have been successfully adapted in the critical study of world politics and international security. It is noteworthy that in almost all these works, an analysis prevails of the classical references of the left-Hegelian, first generation of the Frankfurt School (especially Horkheimer and Adorno), and also of Habermas, as the most influential representative of the Frankfurt School's second generation.

Regarding the IR use of Habermas writings, one cannot fail to notice that, in general, the IR reading has been highly focused on his normative theory and concentrated in elucidating the cosmopolitan ethics of the theory of communicative action, without taking into consideration that his work can also be made fruitful for CIRT through empirical analysis.

Linklater (1986, 1990), perhaps the author who has most explicitly relied on Habermas's work to propose a critical international theory, is a good illustration of this: His emphasis on normative theorising, to the detriment of empirical analysis of world politics, shows that Linklater does not explore Habermas's critical-reconstructive social science, which has both a normative and an explanatory component. As a result, the partial reading of Habermas leaves a gap to be explored, which could contribute more productively to the explanatory status of CIRT (to be examined in the next section). Also problematic are some IR readings of Habermas's theory of communicative action that explore argumentative rationality as mechanisms of persuasion in global negotiating processes and socialisation norms (Risse 2000; Mitzen 2005). Even if one considers the relevance of this type of approach for Risse's or Mitzen's constructivist purposes, it is noteworthy that their proposed empirical analysis of the theory of communicative action does not engage with Habermasian critical theory as a whole and the methodological issues involved in his critical-reconstructive social science.

Besides an emphasis on the Frankfurt School's first generation and the predominantly normative reading of Habermas, the aspects mentioned above also show that contemporary critical theorists, associated with the third generation of the Frankfurt School, have not yet had a major influence on CIRT. In this respect, one notable exception is Brincat's recent work on cosmopolitan recognition (2017), where Honneth, the most prominent representative of the Frankfurt School's third generation, is brought to the scene to show how his method of normative reconstruction can improve the critical debate about cosmopolitanism in the IR field. Understood as a 'procedure for criticising social reality by exposing the gap between values and their actualization' (Brincat 2017: 11), the method of normative reconstruction is used by Brincat to examine how the idea of recognition is already realised in a series of cosmopolitan social practices. Following this procedure, she argues that 'such practices cease to remain abstract and nebulous and can be differentiated through any number of empirical processes/phenomena of interaction/s observable in the cosmopolitan sphere' (Brincat 2017: 12). What is crucial to observe in Brincat's analysis, for the purposes of this article, is the identification of reconstructive methodology as a way to connect the normative and empirical dimensions of social critique, thus avoiding a production of knowledge that falls into utopianism and moralism detached from norms already incorporated to social practices and institutions.

Another rich contribution to advance CIRT's methodological debate is the insightful work about reflexivity provided by Inanna Hamati-Ataya (2012). As she argues, there is a pattern in IR reflexive literature: IR scholars have tended to relegate the debate on reflexivity 'to the abstract realm of meta-theory, with no real translation of this fundamentally different way of theorizing into the realm of empirical knowledge' (Hamati-Ataya 2012: 671). Thus, to escape the endless meta-theoretical discussions, which have increasingly led to a sterile conversation between insulated, closed and mutually exclusive approaches, Hamati-Ataya (2012: 682) suggests a move 'from meta-theory to theory to empiry as *logically* and *praxically* necessary' steps for critical theory (emphasis in original). What this important insight brings to the discussion proposed in this article is the need to develop in

CIRT a way of connecting its meta-theoretical reflexive stance to its theoretical and empirical project. One way of doing this, as Hamati-Ataya (2012: 681) correctly suggests, 'is to translate reflexivity into a *methodology* for empirical social science' (emphasis in original).

Taking this claim into account and trying to complement Brincat's important contribution to bringing Honneth's thinking to the methodological debate in CIRT, the following sections explore a wider range of contemporary authors institutionally or intellectually linked to the Frankfurt School whose works contribute not only to a better understanding of the conceptual basis of reconstruction, but also to its systematisation as a methodological procedure.

## Contemporary critical theory's reconstructive turn

According to Karl-Otto Apel, who introduced American pragmatism to critical theorists in the 1960s, one of Charles Peirce's key contributions to philosophy of knowledge was 'the need for explicating the pragmatic meaning of truth' – that is, of what truth can mean for us – in terms of a 'grounded consensus' as the ultimate foundation of 'the whole enterprise of cognition or investigation' (Apel 1994: 191-192). This pragmatist notion of a consensual approach to truth exerted a significant influence on the second generation of the Frankfurt School. In this context, the left-Hegelian assumption that there is a dialectical tension between ideas and their practical realisation converge in Peirce's socio-pragmatic (rather than metaphysical) notion of validity, leading to the notion of 'immanent transcendence' or 'transcendence from within' (Habermas 1996: 8, 17, 2003: 92-93).

Although the left-Hegelian legacy and American pragmatism implicitly bring, from their origins, the notion that reason is simultaneously immanent and transcendent (i.e. that ideas of reason emerge from specific social contexts and practices but, at the same time, transcend such states of things in the form of regulative ideals), it is important to note that Habermas is the first author who named this complex relationship using the term 'immanent transcendence'. The clarification and codification of this concept contributes to better structuring not only Habermas's own work, but also the thinking of a third generation of critical theorists that have increasingly seen immanent transcendence as a key concept of contemporary critical theory (McCarthy 1994: 38; Honneth 2007: 66, 2003: 245; Strydom 2011: 87, 96-105).

By absorbing immanent transcendence as one of its key concepts, contemporary critical theory seeks to highlight two crucial aspects: the gap between ideas and their practical realisation and, at the same time, the potentialities for overcoming this gap found within this contradiction. In this sense, the concept of immanent transcendence reflects two different moments of critique (one negative and one positive), which can be understood in the following way: if on the one hand, a 'moral deficit' is identified in a concrete situation, resulting from a pathological or deficient realisation of reason, on the other hand there is a potential source of historically accumulated ideas of reason that can guide the overcoming, or at least the mitigation, of such pathologies or deficiencies. Critical theorists believe, therefore, that a rational and concrete ethics has been historically constructed

which is not realised in certain particular social relations, generating social pathologies or some kind of deficiency in social rationality (Honneth 2014: 10). Faced with such pathologies of reason, critical theorists try to handle them in a positive way. Instead of denying reason in an absolute way (as post-modernists usually do), critical theorists place ideas within an 'impure' (McCarthy 1994: 8), 'situated', 'detranscendentalised', 'desublimated' or 'post-metaphysical' reason (Habermas 1992: 34, 139, 2003: 83).

What emerges with this post-metaphysical move is a pragmatic-reflexive conception of reason, which grounds ideas in concrete relations of society. As Rainer Forst (2014: 2) claims, regarding the idea of justification in political theory, it is time to conceive the idea of justification 'as a practical question', which means not posing the question 'in an abstract but always in a concrete way, namely, by historical agents who are no longer satisfied with the justifications for the normative order to which they are subjected'. From this perspective, one of the traditional dichotomies of political philosophy – the opposition between an immanent and a transcendent perspective – becomes meaningless: 'If one regards persons as social and at the same time autonomous beings who are, or should be, able to determine actively the normative structures which bind them, then this standard is as much immanent to practice as it transcends practice' (Forst 2014: 4). This same post-metaphysical move led McCarthy (1994: 38) to coin the term 'socio-practical ideas of reason' and equate them with the concept of immanent transcendence. Within his pragmatic critique of impure reason, McCarthy (1995: 255) considers that the concept of immanent transcendence not only captures the permanent tension between the ideal and the real, but also indicates that in the centre of this tension there is a potential source of critical thinking that agents can mobilise in practice to transcend and transform the limits of existing problematic situations.

If immanent transcendence emerges as a central concept in contemporary critical theory, it is also important to note the revival of John Dewey's pragmatic concept of reconstruction. Although Habermas does not make any explicit reference to Dewey's pragmatism (1920), in which the notion of reconstruction was seminally forged, his 'critical-reconstructive social science' (Habermas 1990) can nonetheless be interpreted as a continuation of Dewey's idea of restoring the link between ideas and the social context in which they emerged (Gauss 2013: 554). Through reconstruction, therefore, Habermas preserves the reflexive vocation of critical theory, but argues that interpretation must go beyond hermeneutics, which means it must be normatively guided by ideas justified in social reality, i.e. grounded on a historically situated social rationality rather than on transcendental ideals and abstract constructs detached from social practices. At the same time, the author takes seriously the scientific character of critical theory, advocating a kind of explanatory knowledge based on reality, but not reduced to the procedures of validation established in the positivist tradition (Habermas 1996, 2003). Reconstruction thus combines an interpretive and an objective dimension – which Habermas (2003: 7) calls 'weak naturalism' or 'transcendental-pragmatic epistemological realism' – with the goal of producing knowledge that explains the context in which the problem is immersed, and meets at the same time the critical-reflexive purposes of critical theory.



In the effort to clarify the concept of reconstruction, Honneth (2009: 43-53), the current director of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, stresses that the term 'reconstruction' designates the particular type of methodology of critical theory that distinguishes itself from construction and genealogy. According to him, unlike constructive critique (which creates its own means of justification) and genealogical critique (which aims to show how the normative ideals of society are necessarily embodied in stabilising practices of domination, as in the Nietzschean tradition), reconstructive critique seeks to discover, within institutions and practices of society, normative ideals that can guide the critique of the existing reality (Honneth 2009: 48). Critique becomes justified, according to Honneth (2009: 49, 50; 2014: 1-11), precisely because it is grounded in ideas that represent the embodiment of the social reason, that is, a reason which is connected to social practices and institutions and incorporates human achievements.

From Honneth's (2009: 49) point of view, the notion of reconstruction was already present in Marx's immanent critique of ideology, showing from the beginning the need to search in social reality itself for the principle of social critique. This interpretation allows him not only to subsume the notion of immanent critique into the concept of reconstruction, but also to extend the concept of reconstruction to the entire Frankfurt School tradition. According to Honneth (2009: 45, 49-50), despite the particular aspects of individual writings by the Frankfurt circle, the connection to the left-Hegelian tradition made appear self-evident to the Frankfurt School members, from the beginning, the need to adopt an immanent, interpretive, or, as he says, a 'reconstructive mode of social criticism'. Through reconstruction, therefore, the Frankfurt School 'solves the justification problem posed by every immanent form of social criticism by inserting a concept of social rationalization' (Honneth 2009: 50). This is, according to Honneth a distinguishing feature of critical theory: By anchoring the normative ideal in social reason, the reconstructive procedure 'incorporates progress in the realization of reason', thereby yielding 'a justified standard to criticize the given social order' (Honneth 2009: 50).

Honneth (2009: 52) calls attention, however, to the fact that this social rationality is not sufficiently fixed to remain protected from misuse. On the contrary, ideas of reason have proved to be 'porous' and 'vulnerable', sometimes losing their original normative content, as the experience of German National Socialism had shown. Looking back to the systematic convergence of critical theory with Nietzsche's genealogy in the late 1930s (particularly in the work of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse), Honneth (2009: 52) interprets this move not as the replacement of the left-Hegelian critical legacy by the Nietzschean genealogical critique, but rather as the inclusion of genealogy in the reconstructive procedure 'as a kind of metacritical standpoint' or a 'detector to ferret out the social shifts of meaning of its leading ideals'. From this perspective, Honneth (2009: 52) suggests a synthesis of left-Hegelian and Nietzsche within the reconstructive procedure, allowing an immanent critique of society that is attentive, at the same time, 'to the genealogical project of studying the real context of application of moral norms'. Through this 'historical test', the social critique can assure that its normative standard retains in social practice its original distinctive meaning. In short, reconstruction should include what Honneth (2009: 52-53) calls a 'genealogical proviso', i.e. a Nietzschean-inspired genealogical critique as a

sort of 'test' to check to what extent regulative ideals have been corrupted for the benefit of projects of power and domination.

This normative dimension of reconstruction, however, cannot leave out a substantive concern with the identification of what 'generates' the problematic situation upon which the critical analysis rests. Honneth rejects the tendency today of conducting social critique without a component of sociological explanation. This tendency, according to Honneth, is a deviation from the Frankfurt School's original research programme. According to him, the exposure of injustices in society 'on the basis of well-founded values and norms' should not exclude the need to inquire 'why those affected do not themselves problematize or attack' the social pathologies to which they are subject (Honneth 2004: 345). Marx's accounts on 'fetishism' or 'reification', and critical theory's concerns regarding 'false consciousness', 'one-dimensionality' or 'positivism' shows that these categories have the 'quality of distracting one's attention from the very social conditions that structurally' produce and reproduce systems of social injustices (Honneth 2004: 346). This suggests that critical theory must broaden its tasks by coupling 'the critique of social injustice with an explanation of the process that obscures that injustice' (Honneth 2004: 346). As Honneth (2004: 346) emphasises, only by means of this explanatory analysis can critical theorists persuade those they address that 'they can be deceived about the real character of their social condition', and can publicly demonstrate, in a convincingly way, 'the wrongfulness of those conditions'.

Thus, the notion of reconstruction that emerged in Habermas's work and was subsequently expanded by Honneth to cover the whole Frankfurt School tradition has become a core category in contemporary critical theory. Younger critical theorists like Robin Celikates and Mattias Iser have also relied on reconstruction as the methodological guidance to social critique. Although the absence of English translations hamper access to their key texts (originally written in German), Strydom (2011: 126-130) offers a consistent introduction to their main methodological positions. Despite their particular perspectives – Celikates being closer to Habermas and Iser trying to develop his own conception of reconstruction by bringing together insights from Habermas and Honneth – a crucial point for this article's argument is that both authors emphasise 'the importance of explanatory social theory' as being against the 'obsession with normative foundations' of critical theory (Strydom 2011: 128). From these authors' perspective, causal factors explaining the debilitating effects of social relations and social orders must be 'empirically identified and explained' within the reconstructive procedure (Strydom 2011: 128).

At the heart of the reconstructive procedure, therefore, there are three crucial methodological concerns. First, there is the methodological objective of recovering the elements of an existing social rationality, which although not sufficiently realised in practice has the potential to exert pressure on reality towards its transformation. Working this way, one can say that reconstruction mediates the dialectical tension implicated in immanent transcendence. In this mediating position, reconstruction functions at the interface between social orientations and practices on the one side, and reflexive rules historically accumulated in the form of norms and cultural models on the other (Strydom 2011: 135-136). Second, reconstruction complements its normative moment with a critical-explana-

tory orientation towards transformation of social processes and structures, which involves an empirical moment. Third, reconstruction renews the crucial epistemological question of the link between critical theory and its addressees and practice. To sum up, reconstruction integrates both a normative and empirical dimension of the social critique, as well as a pragmatic-public stance of validation as core methodological elements of critical theory.

## **Critical-reconstructive-explanatory methodology**

Strydom (2011) offers an unprecedented contribution to systematising critical theory's contemporary insights into a reconstructive methodology, which he defines as a 'diagnostic-explanatory-reconstructive-critique'. His methodological framework begins with the problem disclosure and constitution of the theme to be subjected to an explanatory critique. This first moment, as Strydom emphasises, starts from a negative impression, often emotional and sensitive, about a 'pathological' or 'unjustifiable' state of things that calls for a clarification and a transformative critique normatively guided by socio-practical ideas of reason. This impression that something seems unfair or problematic, which is immanent to social practices, means that at the opening stage of the reconstructive methodology, the participant's perspective predominates. Researchers, at this stage, share with members of society or affected groups their feelings, emotions and sufferings. This initial moment is of great methodological importance for critical theory, as it provides not only a material and an emancipatory point of reference for critique, but also an indication of what needs to be subjected to a relevant explanatory critique (Strydom 2011: 155).

The second methodological step proceeds, according to Strydom (2011), with identifying the research problem within its context and its conditions, constituting a kind of multidimensional analytical and normative diagnosis of the problem. This diagnosis involves a comprehensive descriptive analysis and draws on several methods (depending on their analytical utility) in order to permeate the multiple layers of the concrete situation, from the most superficial to the deepest level of regulative structures, causal processes or mechanisms, which even when unobservable can be interpretively discerned. Interpretation, therefore, is particularly relevant in this diagnosis, although this process cannot be restricted, as previously emphasised, to a merely interpretative and normative analysis.

Based on this diagnosis, reconstruction proceeds to a critical stage that assumes negative and positive dimensions. It is negative by exposing distorted, ideological, naturalised or reified characteristics of socio-practical ideas of reason or cultural models identified in the situation. It is positive by finding the surplus of meaning (or semantic surplus) contained in ideas or cultural models usually ignored, unrecognised, marginalised or selectively used in practice that are potentially useable with transformative aims in order to overcome or mitigate the problematic situation in question (Strydom 2011: 155-158). It is within this reconstructive moment that one should include a genealogical test, as Honneth (2009: 52-53) suggests, aimed at reflecting on the possibility that the normative force of the reconstructed formal structures have been corrupted or subverted on behalf of projects of domination, producing marginalisation, silencing and invisibility. Via this

self-critical procedure, critical theory reflexively places itself in relation to its own regulatory ideals.

This process of reconstruction culminates in an 'explanatory moment' when 'causal' contingencies, forces, factors or mechanisms are identified, leading to an explanation of 'what' seems problematic or seems invisible or silenced in the situation in question, and of 'why' the semantic potential of ideas of reason and cultural models are deformed or are not adequately realised in that situation. It is within this explanatory moment that transformative alternatives are envisioned, allowing the identification of potential ideas and cultural models that, in the case of their practical realisation, should guide the transformation of the immanent and transcendent structures that produce the social contradictions or normative deformations present in the particular situation in question. As Bohman (2009: 375, 1997: 444, 455) argues, reinforcing the argument put forward up to this point, critical inquiry need not exclude causal analysis if one rethinks causality in a manner consistent with pluralism and the post-positivist and reflexive posture of critical theory.

It is important to understand, therefore, that the kind of explanation that results from reconstruction cannot be captured through neo-positivist causal explanation, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the critical-reconstructive explanation reflects the typical reflexivist attitude of critical theorists, founded on the monist premise that world and mind cannot be separated in the process of knowledge production. Thus, access to reality is always mediated by the researcher's conventional practices and values (Jackson 2011: 125), which indicates a clear rejection of the pretence of objectivity and neutrality claimed by the neo-positivist causal explanation. Secondly, the critical explanation is not based on observable and superficial causal correlations that indicate regularities and generalisations – as in the Humean-inspired empiricism – but rather on deeper forces or mechanisms, not always detectable or measurable, that even when unobservable exert a structuring pressure on reality (Bohman 1997: 445; Strydom 2011: 142).

The kind of critical explanation advocated here shares with critical realism (Bhaskar 1998) a similar type of causality that goes beyond the Humean empiricist tradition. Generally speaking, critical realism is focused on elaborating ontological realist claims on the question of 'unobservables', i.e. entities that, although not objectively detectable and measurable, are real and produce impacts in the social world, such as social structures, language and concept-dependent categories like globalisation, capitalism, public opinion or society. From this perspective, causality is rethought to encompass causal forces within a causal complex or mechanism. Although specific causal forces cannot be isolated as antecedent and independent variables explaining why a given event occurs, they interact and counter-interact within the causal mechanism to generate effects in the world, so that the causal complex, and not its individual elements, should be considered in the explanation. Since this kind of causality cannot be equated through Hume's notions of causal necessity and regularity, generalisation and prediction do not make sense in critical realist explanations (Wight 2006; Kurki 2006).

When critical theorists explain domination, exploitation and other social pathologies of modernity through concept-dependent categories like capitalism, neoliberalism or the culture industry, for instance, they are resorting to this type of real causal mecha-

nism as an explanatory strategy. By conceiving causal analysis outside the Humean box, this alternative notion of causality enables critical theory to assume its explanatory status in a non-problematic way. Even despite recognisable similarities between critical theory and critical realism regarding their post-empiricist perspective of explanation and their reliance on causal mechanisms, there are significant differences to note between them. Critical realists share with positivists a dualist view that separates mind and world, which leads them to seek validation of knowledge through natural-inspired scientism and objectivism, even if they disagree on the issue of generalisation and prediction (Jackson 2011: 111). This not only suggests that critical realism remains relatively closer to an orthodox conception of science, but also shows that it lacks the reflexivist point of reference that the monist perspective provides for critical theory (based on the assumption that there is no autonomous world, separate from the researcher's mind). Despite Bhaskar's appeals to an explanatory critique, and his eventual claim for emancipation, there is no provision in critical realism that incorporates a normative dimension and a reflexive perspective in its scientific model. From this perspective, critical realism differs sharply from critical theory not only because it lacks a commitment to the implications of the normative stance for the concept of critique, but also because it has no 'procedure for arriving at a certain normatively relevant aspect of reality' within its methodology (Strydom 2011: 194).

By assuming a non-Humean kind of explanation, the question of the validation of critical theory is seen from an alternative angle, and here Strydom introduces the third step of the reconstructive methodology. A clearly distinctive aspect of critical theory is its implication in terms of theory and praxis, which invariably leads to the question of justification and validation of knowledge through practice. This pragmatic perspective on the question of verification and validation, introduced in critical theory since Apel and Habermas incorporated American pragmatism into their works, has been especially relevant among contemporary critical theorists. Honneth (2004: 346, 2009: 29-30), for instance, stresses that only when critical theorists are able to convince the addressees by an explanatory analysis of injustices that clarifies the actual character of their social conditions can their findings and proposals be successfully validated. For Celikates, reflexive capacities of ordinary members of society are central to critical theory as social praxis. This perspective allows him to identify the communicative (or dialogical) relation between critical inquiry and its addressees as one of the crucial aspects of critical theory's methodological structure – and, here, anyone is able to engage reflexively with critical theory, to become its addressees (Strydom 2011: 126-127, 129).

From this perspective, not only the scientific community, intellectuals and those directly involved in the situation analysed, but also the public in general are considered as qualified interlocutors to achieve the insights of critical explanation and reflexively understand its results. This involves a reinterpretation of the public sphere, whose members are now treated as cognitive agents by contemporary critical theorists (Strydom 2011: 150). It is crucial to note, however, that critical theory's claim for public and practical validation does not have the aim of justifying processes of social engineering: The purpose of critical inquiry is not controlling social processes, but initiating public processes of self-reflection

Figure 1: Critical-reconstructive-explanatory methodology

### **I – PROBLEMATISATION**

- (1) Definition of a ‘genuine problem’, usually electing as objects of analysis threats, challenges, protests, repression, crisis, violence, injustices and conflicts that may be particularly susceptible to a relevant transformative and emancipatory critique.
- (2) Initial logical link between the problem situation, its possible diagnosis and its theorisation.



### **II – DIAGNOSTIC RECONSTRUCTIVE EXPLANATORY CRITIQUE**

- (1) RECONSTRUCTIVE DIAGNOSIS: Identification of the problem situation in its concrete context using descriptive analysis, quantification and interpretation (depending on their analytical utility).
- (2) RECONSTRUCTIVE CRITIQUE: Critical analysis targeting both negative features and positive potential at immanent and transcendent levels aimed at exposing constraints and disclosing transformative possibilities of the situation.
- (3) RECONSTRUCTION UNDER GENEALOGICAL PROVISIO: Nietzschean-inspired genealogical ‘test’ aimed at reflecting on the possibility that the regulative idea guiding critique has been corrupted or subverted on behalf of projects of power and domination.
- (4) EXPLANATORY CRITIQUE: Substantive theoretical explanatory critique in terms of structure(s) or mechanism(s) as causal factor(s) generating the problem.



### **III – SCIENTIFIC-PUBLIC VALIDATION AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

- (1) THEORETICAL DISCOURSE: Scientific inter-subjective validation within the wider social scientific community through discursive practices aimed at communicating the knowledge production process as a whole (concept and theory formation and related methodological judgements).
- (2) PRACTICAL DISCOURSE: Public and practical validation through the establishment of a relation between critical theorists, their addressees and the public in order to determine whether their results and proposals should be followed as a collectively valid and thus acceptable critical-ethical action orientation by those concerned and affected by the situation.

Source: Adapted by the author from Strydom (2011: 154).

(Bohman 2001: 100-101). It is based on this practical goal that the transformative success of critical theory should be measured.

According to Strydom, in short, three key moments could be included in a critical theory methodology: problem disclosure, diagnostic-reconstructive-explanatory critique, and scientific-public validation (Figure 1). These three moments reflect interrelated procedures within a broad multidimensional process, in which they interpenetrate and influence each other. So, they cannot be regarded as separate or linearly linked steps in research development. Equally important is to emphasise that these steps should not be understood as a rigid model to be applied as a ready-made prescription, but rather as a flexible guide for the conduct of critical inquiry that should fit the particular questions of each researcher.

### **An illustration: reconstructing the international peacebuilding model**

The idea of peace has given the normative grounding for peace and conflict studies since the 1950s. Despite some predictions that this idea would have lost much of its emancipatory content due to its incorporation into the international policy-oriented mainstream in the post-Cold War era, the fact is that peace remains as relevant today as it was sixty years ago. Indeed, its emancipatory potential has been renewed as a normative orientation within the critical literature on peacebuilding and conflict transformation, which today occupies a considerable part of the research agenda of peace and conflict studies.

Noteworthy in this critical literature is the fact that it shares some similar aspects and concerns to those raised in this article: reflexivity, the need to anchor social critique in normative and empirical grounds, the need to explain the social pathologies, and a commitment to scientific-public-practical validation. However, it is equally remarkable that these concerns and the methodological choices of researchers engaged in this critical debate are in general implicit or insufficiently specified. As a result, despite the broad range of efforts that together form what has been called ‘critique of the liberal peacebuilding’, there is a lack of clarification of the methodological basis and the critical procedures that underlie this body of work.

This section proposes a brief reconstruction of the international peacebuilding project to illustrate the diagnostic-reconstructive-explanatory procedure discussed above. Relying on insights gathered from various authors, the section seeks to offer an example of how the reconstructive procedure could contribute to giving the critical agenda on peacebuilding more methodological transparency. Given the methodological focus of this paper, I do not intend to add something conceptually new to the existing critical literature on peacebuilding. Rather, the objective is to conduct a methodological exercise with heuristic purposes.

The aspect serving as a starting point for the critique of contemporary peacebuilding is a shift in international discourses, policies and practices conducted on behalf of peace, induced by the United Nations (UN) and Western powers in the post-Cold War, leading to relevant changes in the way the world is responding to violent conflict in peripheral states.

The initial impression is that the high level of involvement of the UN in questions of international peace, the increased international mobilisation in the context of peace operations since the end of Cold War, and the impacts and consequences of these interventions on conflict-ridden societies have not necessarily led to a more peaceful world. Touched by this vague initial perception, critical peace theorists assume as the first methodological step the aim of disclosing a potential problem, namely a possible disjunction between the normative principles justifying international interventions and their practical realisation, which demands a normative and an empirical diagnosis, and an explanatory critique of the problematic situation in question.

The constitution of the object of critical analysis, therefore, takes the form of a research puzzle that forges logical and imaginative relations among three main dimensions observed in the historical context of contemporary international interventions: Particular states on the periphery of the developed world plunged into violent conflicts (local dimension) draw the attention of the UN, leading to an international mobilisation (global or regional dimension) to intervene in those states on behalf of international peace (normative level). Thus, peace is the normative anchor, or the regulative idea, that connects the international to the local, guiding practices of intervention. Based on this relational articulation, the main insight for critical analysis is that, instead of focusing on particular tactics and techniques of conflict resolution and their effectiveness in solving specific problems (which would be the goal of traditional or problem-solving theory), the idea of peace itself is the key for critical theory's understanding of the problematic situation at hand. Thus, what needs to be done in terms of critical-explanatory analysis is to examine the idea of peace in its process of actualisation, by taking into account the various uses made of this concept by the different actors involved in international peacebuilding, and identify the causal mechanism or the causal complex that explains the gap between the idea of peace and its practical realisation.

The second step of this methodology – diagnostic-reconstructive-explanatory critique – begins with the normative reconstruction of the idea of peace. Particularly important in this respect is not to take this idea as an abstraction or a subjective conception of critical peace theorists, but rather to investigate how this idea arises in the immanent context of social practices performed in its name. In other words, the normative anchor for critique is the conceptual model of peace that is immanent to the social field of intervention and that takes a certain duration in its related institutions. This conceptual model that synthesises the UN practices over decades of experiments with peace operations, the demands for peace and security of target societies, and the intellectual and doctrinal conceptual developments within this social field is capable of capturing the social rationality that normatively regulates contemporary international interventionism. Rather than an abstraction, therefore, peace should be seen as a socio-practical idea of reason in the sense defined by critical theorists. From this perspective, peace becomes a regulative idea justified in social rationality and, for this reason, endowed with a surplus of meaning that can be mobilised not only to criticise the problematic state of things generated by its deficient realisation, but also to transform this state of things in a positive way.



With the end of the Cold War, serious problems of economic and social inequality, poverty, hunger, drought and organised armed violence in peripheral states increased not only their internal demands for international aid, but also the external perception that violent conflicts and structural imbalances were closely related to each other. At the same time, concepts derived from peace studies, like the notions of positive peace and peacebuilding, were incorporated into UN high-level documents in the early 1990s. As a result, demands for structural change through peacebuilding activities were increasingly seen as a necessary step for sustainable peace, leading to significant changes in UN practices and doctrines of intervention. In the foundations of the idea of peacebuilding, therefore, there was an emancipatory and progressive commitment to the gradual structural transformation of societies affected by violent conflicts to the point where they themselves, through their own reconstructed institutional mechanisms, were able to sustain the peace, thus allowing external assistance and intervention to withdraw without the risk of arousing new waves of violence.

In this normative reconstruction, however, critical peace theorists note that the concept of peacebuilding became increasingly inspired by western liberal values, guided by the idea that transforming the structural roots of violence in conflict-ridden societies was synonymous with creating liberal institutions – democracy, the rule of law, human rights, development and free markets (Richmond 2007: 111). As a result, the notion of peacebuilding as state-building, regulated by the liberal peace model, became the standardised pattern that has been guiding the UN's practices of intervention in the last three decades. These conceptual developments produced a multidimensional model of peace operations that involves a set of political, military and humanitarian activities, and mobilises an increasingly diverse range of actors (military personnel, police officers, diplomats, humanitarian workers, nongovernmental organisations, development agencies, private security companies, and so on). These external actors, some genuinely committed to improving the situation in the field, others acting from the perspective of their own interests and objectives, are faced in post-conflict societies with a range of local actors, creating a complex social reality in which particular needs of security and development are not always convergent.

The next methodological step, therefore, is a reconstructive diagnosis of the social field where both the local and external dimensions of peacebuilding converge or diverge in a struggle for values and material goals. This task entails a substantive diagnostic analysis of the latent crisis engendered by the UN liberal peace model, including external actors' practical uses of this conceptual model and its impacts in the field, and perceptions by local actors. Using methods as diverse as media analysis, discourse analysis, analysis of official documents, interviews, ethnographic studies, to mention just a few possibilities, the reconstructive diagnosis of the social field of interventions in cases like Cambodia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, East Timor, Somalia, Sudan and others allows international and local actors, as well as their interactions, to be empirically identified and evaluated (Duffield 2001, 2007; Pugh, Cooper and Turner 2008; Richmond 2011; Richmond and Mitchell 2012). Based on these empirical cases, the crucial point to note is that the actualisation of the idea of peace, driven mostly by western values and by external actors, clashes with

the concrete needs, aspirations and everyday lives of local people. Concerned with the implementation of the grand architecture of the liberal peacebuilding model, international actors tend to neglect the substantial circumstances of the conflict on the ground and the micro-social scale of everyday struggles for security and development of people living in conditions of endemic violence (Duffield 2001, 2007).

Within this context, even the emancipatory prospects committed to social transformation end up being co-opted by a top-down project of social engineering, driven by external agents, in which local people and dynamics are erased. By ignoring the local agencies, liberal peacebuilding becomes an elitist project that often results in tensions between local people, local elites and international actors, leading to local resistance. As a result, the desired transformation of conflicts does not go beyond creating a 'virtual peace' without local political roots (Richmond 2007; Richmond and Mitchell 2012). Moreover, the growing merge of security and development in the context of international peacebuilding has provided justification for the prioritisation of security sector reform and rule of law programmes, and for diverting much of the development community's efforts and resources to security-related activities (Duffield 2001, 2007; Pugh, Cooper and Turner 2008).

On this empirical social basis, critical peace theorists are able to proceed to the reconstructive critique in its twofold dimensions. In its negative dimension, the critique of the liberal peace was already announced in the previous paragraph: Liberal state-building cannot be considered a sufficient approach to peacebuilding because it engages with international and state level actors, prioritising their elitist interests and objectives to the detriment of the concrete security and development needs of people in their everyday lives. Therefore, the liberal state-building project distorts the emancipatory value of peacebuilding, resulting in an 'empty shell' or in a 'virtual peace' not shared by local communities (Richmond 2011).

The inclusion of a metacritical standpoint or a genealogical test in this negative moment of reconstruction is crucial to show how the meaning of peace has been distorted to become an instrument of power and control. Articulated through the liberal peace model, peacebuilding becomes a security *dispositif*, strongly supported by military forces to control and repress potential focuses of resistance. Thus, discourses and practices carried out in the name of liberal peace follow an instrumental and ideological logic, where the rhetoric of freedom, good governance, democracy, free market and human rights converge to security to create the conditions of possibility for more intrusive, internationalised and militarised forms of controlling the unstable peripheries, thus protecting the developed centre of the liberal system (Duffield 2001, 2007; Dillon and Reid 2009; Chandler 2010). In other terms, liberal peacebuilding and its emancipatory values have led to military intervention and economic and social engineering that have echoes of imperialism, albeit with a key difference: Rather than traditional categories of trust or protectorate, liberal state-building has constructed 'states of paper' – endowed with formal sovereignty, but with low political autonomy and degraded sovereign local power – which enables external interference for indefinite periods of time on behalf of liberal governance (Chandler 2008).

At this point, the causal complex producing the pathologies of peacebuilding can be identified: capitalism and its neoliberal imperialist resonances. This explains why peacebuilding has been transformed into a management device that serves the strategic imperatives of the post-industrialised, capitalist states 'to control or isolate unruly parts of the world' (Pugh 2004). This causal complex drives peacebuilding to reinforce international order by privileging the developed centre of the world in detriment of the periphery, which remains dependent on foreign aid and with its structural inequalities increasingly deepened. This explanation shows that liberal peacebuilding serves more the security and development interests of the post-industrialised world, than those of populations most deeply affected by violence in conflict-ridden societies.

The critical-reconstructive methodology, however, does not exhaust itself in its negative exposing dimension, but has an important positive disclosing side. If a deficit is identified in social processes of realisation of the idea of peace, this very idea has a normative surplus of meaning that can be mobilised in practice to overcome the deficit identified. From this perspective, critical peace theorists interpret the problematic situation as potentially capable of driving the process to positive outcomes. One of these positive potentials can be identified within the hybrid space shared by international actors and local actors as the basis for disclosing a post-liberal approach, in which forms of local agency, local claims for autonomy, the type of informal politics that provides much of the everyday governance, as well as the dynamics of acceptance and resistance can be valued (MacGinty 2008; Richmond 2011; Richmond and Mitchell 2012). The challenge for this post-liberal hybrid approach is to explore channels of cooperation and engagement between local and international agents, conflict and peace actors, elite and grass-roots subjects, liberal and non-liberal rights and institutions, taking as the starting point the idea that both international actors and local agents have to transform themselves and engage in self-reflexive processes. This means that neither external actors nor local populations should be 'romanticised' (as essentially 'good' or 'bad' agents), but should be engaged reflexively in peacebuilding to transform themselves in order to achieve local, state, regional and international forms of emancipatory peace (Richmond 2011).

Regarding scientific-practical validation (the third step of critical theory methodology), the critique of international peacebuilding involves a continued process of publication in academic books and journals, where critical peace theorists expose their empirical analysis and theoretical elaborations to scientific validation. With specific reference to public and practical validation, scholars engaged in criticising liberal peacebuilding are fully aware of their addressees: international political elites (UN and state officials) and the wide range of international actors engaged in post-conflict recovering programmes (donors, international financial institutions, development agencies, militaries, humanitarian workers, nongovernmental organisations, and others); and local elites and informal stances of authority and governance (religious leaders, women, elders) living in post-conflict societies. For a post-liberal peace to emerge, all these actors need to be reflexively involved in peacebuilding discourses and practices, becoming vital components in the constitution of a local-international hybrid space, where the potential of the idea of peacebuilding can be actualised in a more positive and emancipatory way. To this end, crit-

ical peace theorists, some of them acting as peace workers, have an important role in explaining and communicating the results achieved in their diagnostic-reconstructive-explanatory critique, thereby contributing to initiating processes of self-reflection in this expanded scientific-public community.

## Conclusion

This article has shown that contemporary thinkers linked to the Frankfurt School tradition have attempted to overcome some pressing challenges of critical theory, such as the lack of clarity about its pragmatics, the need to respond to external accusations of universalism and Eurocentrism, the need to translate reflexivity into methodological terms, and the difficulty of dealing with an empirical dimension that complements and enhances critical theory's normative dimension. By assuming reconstruction as the core concept that gives the general methodological orientation of critical theory, contemporary critical theorists have shown how this concept, articulated in a critical-reconstructive-explanatory framework, contributes to enhancing the particular kind of social critique of the Frankfurt School tradition.

After illustrating the application of this methodology through a reconstruction of the international peacebuilding, I conclude this article by reaffirming that greater attention to the writings of Frankfurt School's contemporary thinkers, largely unexplored among critical IR theorists, can contribute to moving CIRT towards modes of knowledge production that are more context-sensitive, empirically based, pluralist, and socially validated, without affecting, by means of such reorientation, CIRT's post-positivist convictions.

## Notes

1. I express my deepest gratitude to two anonymous referees for very helpful and detailed comments and suggestions about this article.
2. I refer here to the opposition between critical theory and traditional theory defined in Max Horkheimer's classic essay of 1937, one of the seminal texts of the Frankfurt School's intellectual tradition (Horkheimer 2002).
3. Considering as an initial milestone the publication in 1981 of the seminal essay of Robert Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory' (1996), and the article of Richard Ashley, 'Political Realism and Human Interests' (1981).
4. These dimensions are based on the general architecture of critical theory defined by Strydom (2011: 8).
5. I thank one of the anonymous referees for this insight.

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## Metodologia Reconstitutiva e Teoria Crítica das Relações Internacionais

**Resumo:** Inspirando-se no trabalho da mais recente geração de filósofos sociais institucional ou intelectualmente ligados à Escola de Frankfurt, este artigo examina a metodologia crítica-reconstitutiva-explicativa que se tornou uma característica distintiva da teoria crítica contemporânea após sua ‘virada reconstitutiva’. O artigo pretende mostrar como estes desenvolvimentos recentes podem contribuir para superar várias críticas que continuam desafiando a Teoria Crítica das Relações Internacionais (TCRI) do ponto de vista metodológico, como sua ênfase normativa e interpretativa às custas da dimensão empírica da análise, sua incapacidade de fornecer uma explicação substantiva das patologias sociais e dos mecanismos de dominação que critica, seu isolamento com relação as questões do pluralismo e multiculturalismo, a ausência de debate com abordagens externas e a falta de clareza sobre como a teoria se conecta à prática. Depois de discutir os principais aspectos da metodologia da teoria crítica, o artigo termina com uma breve ilustração dessa metodologia usando como base a crítica da construção da paz liberal.

**Palavras-chave:** Reconstituição, Metodologia; Escola de Frankfurt; Crítica à Paz Liberal; Teoria Crítica.

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