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Introduction to the Special Issue of Peace, Conflict & Development

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In the recent past there have been a number of peace researchers who have argued that a dangerous combination of the widening global socio-economic divide and environmental constraints on human development means that Peace Studies has huge challenges ahead but that its nature means that it is well-placed to contribute tentative moves towards a more peaceful world. The state of Peace Studies underlines this special issue of Peace, Conflict and Development, and this introduction will look briefly at some of its key features. It will also suggest some of the pitfalls in this endeavour, and relate the potential of Peace Studies to articles in this issue.

Peace Studies as a field of study developed in the early post-war years, largely in response to two factors, the failure of the world community, and specifically the League of Nations, to prevent the carnage of the 1937-45 wars, and the potentially catastrophic confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact that developed rapidly after the end of the war. By the mid-1950s a nuclear arms race was accelerating and it was becoming apparent that the very future of the human community was at risk. One of the early academic endeavours was the Center for Conflict Resolution at the University of Michigan and in 1957 the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* commenced publication, the editors giving two reasons for publishing it:

> "The first is that by far the most important practical problem facing the human race today is that of international relations – more specifically the prevention of global war. The second is that if

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> intellectual progress is to be made in this area, the study of international relations must be made an interdisciplinary enterprise, drawing its discourse from all the social sciences, and even further."[1]

Over the following fifty years Peace Studies developed across the world, with much of the early centres and societies being in North America, Western Europe and Japan, with later interest in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America. Within a decade of the founding of the *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* Peace Studies had extended its concerns beyond the immediate dangers of the Cold War to include broad issues of North-South relations, environmental security, gender issues and concepts such as structural violence. During the 1980s there was a further flourish in the growth of peace centres in the face of renewed East-West tensions but Peace Studies also had relevance after the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, not least because of the numerous wars in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East.

The Nature of Peace Studies

The attributes of Peace Studies as it evolved over its first forty years was discussed by Ramsbotham who identifies seven features that together set it apart from other fields of study that focus on international conflict[2]:

1. **Underlying causes.** Peace Studies looks beyond immediate conflicts to explore the roots of direct violence. Its aim is to aid the process of working towards more equitable and emancipated societies that are intrinsically less violent and more peaceful. It therefore involves addressing inequalities in their many forms, whether rooted in class, race, gender or other divisions.

2. **Interdisciplinary approaches.** A key feature in the development of Peace Studies is its interdisciplinary approach. From the early years it has embraced scholars and students of diverse backgrounds including international relations, economics, political science, psychology, sociology, anthropology and history. It has also attracted people from the biological sciences, physics, chemistry and mathematics. In combination this brings a considerable methodological and theoretical strength but also raises issues of integrating different approaches.

3. **Non-violent transformations.** Peace Studies overtly aims to emphasise the peaceful settlement of disputes, especially through non-violent transformation. It therefore places emphasis on conflict prevention, the negotiation of early ending of conflicts and sustained work to rebuild relationships in the wake of conflict. Peace Studies as a field does not implicitly take a pacifist stance and there is an ongoing debate among peace researchers over the circumstances in which the use of force may be justified. This is particularly true in relation to humanitarian intervention and the variable experience of the past decade.

[1] *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.1 No.1, p.3 (1957)

[2] Paul Rogers and Oliver Ramsbotham (1999), 'Then and Now: Peace Research – Past and Future', *Political Studies*, XLVII, pp.740-54

4. **Multilevel analysis.** The relative prevalence of intra-state conflict since 1990, albeit often involving international actors has given particular salience to the manner in which Peace Studies embraces multi-level analysis at individual, societal, state and interstate levels.

5. **Global approach.** Peace Studies takes a determinedly global approach seeking to avoid the western ethnocentrism that has been a feature of international relations. This approach looks to see the world as a single global system but also seeks to draw on approaches to peace, conflict and non-violent social change from the perspectives of different cultures.

6. **Analytical and normative.** This is a core aspect of Peace Studies in that, as Ramsbotham puts it – "Peace Studies is both an analytic and a normative enterprise. While there has been a tendency to ground Peace Studies in quantitative research and comparative empirical study, the reality is that most scholars have been drawn to the field by ethical concerns and commitments. Deterministic ideas have been largely rejected, whether in realist or Marxist guises, with large-scale violence and war seen not as inevitable features of the international system, but as consequences of human actions and choices."[3]

7. **Theory and practice.** Finally, Peace Studies tends to demonstrate a stronger relationship between theory and practice than many of the social sciences. This does not mean that peace researchers are implicitly involved in activism, though they may quite often see one of their roles as providing research support for activist movements. They will also tend to engage with government departments, intergovernmental agencies and non-government organisations. Although the engagement with governments, NGOs and activist movements may stem partly from Peace Studies as a normative enterprise, such engagement is also seen as a two-way process of testing theoretical insights.

Limitations of Peace Studies

The attributes of Peace Studies as discussed above are broadly similar now, a decade after Ramsbotham's characterisation. What is also clear is that there are substantial issues that affect the ability of peace researchers and teachers to achieve their aims. One, inevitably, is the level of controversy within Peace Studies over the extent to which it is a radical endeavour that is aligned broadly with leftist politics. This relates also to the vexed question of whether and when force might be used to achieve peace. This particular issue remains unresolved, as does the critique of Peace Studies in terms of its political orientation. Such a critique was at its height in the final phase of the Cold War during the early 1980s, when Peace Studies in Western states was frequently seen as "appeasement studies" and castigated for what was claimed to be a consistently leftist outlook which reeked of support for the Soviet bloc.

As a consequence of this, much of the research emanating from Peace Studies centres was subject to intensive scrutiny, not least from policy institutes with a broadly anti-Soviet

[3] *Ibid*.

agenda. Perhaps surprisingly, this actually had a positive effect in terms of the further development of Peace Studies because it required particularly robust and exact standards of research. It meant that in addition to the normal processes of peer review typical of academic publications, any research papers actually published from a Peace Studies perspective were subject to further intense examination. The end result of this was substantially to improve the quality of research, especially when it related directly to issues of East-West rivalries. A second impact of this intense scrutiny was the attention that was focused on Peace Studies which, in turn, resulted in particularly able and committed students seeking to study at the main centres, especially at postgraduate level.

From 1990 onwards, a particular focus of Peace Studies was on conflict resolution, not least in terms of "Track 2" and other informal negotiation processes. This is hardly surprising given that the decade of the 1990s was marred by intense, protracted and immensely costly conflicts, especially in the Balkans and the African Great Lakes. By the start of the third millennium, conflict resolution was the most significant growth area within Peace Studies, but it did involve two controversies. The first was that some critics saw conflict resolution practices focusing far too much on resolving immediate conflicts without sufficiently exploring the underlying causes, including the structural problems that were at the root of the conflicts. The second was that the seriously vigorous military response by the United States to the 9/11 atrocities seemed to render traditional conflict resolution approaches irrelevant.

By the end of the decade, the disastrous consequences of the 'war on terror', not least in Iraq and Afghanistan, lent weight to those peace researchers who had argued against the response, and those consequences did indicate that conflict resolution approaches had in no way been rendered obsolete by 9/11. Even so, the issue of superficiality of approach remained. Perhaps the most effective response was that of the authors of a standard text on conflict resolution, writing in 2005:

> "We suggest that peace and conflict research is part of an emancipatory discourse and practice which is making a valuable and defining contribution to emerging norms of democratic, just and equitable systems of global governance. We argue that conflict resolution has a role to play in the radical negotiation of these norms, so that international conflict management is grounded in the needs of those who are the victims of conflict and who are frequently marginalized from conventional power structures."[4]

Nevertheless, there are three clear challenges facing Peace Studies, all of which have to be met if it is to have a role in moving towards a more peaceful, emancipated and just world. The first is the need to maintain singularly high academic standards. This is not just because of critical appraisals coming from particular political standpoints, but because a policy-orientated enterprise must be particularly competent in its research, with so much at stake, especially if it is essentially an interdisciplinary endeavour.

[4] Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall (2005). *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press

The second relates to this and concerns the organisation and funding of university-based research, especially but not only Europe and North America. In the past two decades there has been a move in many countries towards the independent assessment of research in higher education institutions, the results of such assessment relating directly to government funding for research. At the core of research assessment, such as the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF), is the peer review of research, principally by academics but with some external input. Such peer review relates to the norms of the different disciplines and in the social sciences this is primarily through the assessment of papers published in leading journals and of books intended for academic audiences.

This may seem an entirely reasonable process but it presents two problems for Peace Studies. One is that peace researchers may frequently be seeking to communicate with the policy community as a priority, with academic audiences less significant, and the other is that the peace research community is relatively small so that peer reviewers of peace research outputs may be drawn largely from the conventional politics and international relations community. The issue is partly resolved by the existence of well-regarded Peace Studies journals, such as *The Journal of Peace Research* and *Security Dialogue,* and partly by a practice of peace researchers publishing in the academic literature and also communicating their research much more widely through policy outlets and widely-circulated web outlets. Even so, it is a limitation for Peace Studies that is experienced less by other social science disciplines.

The final problem is a tendency for Peace Studies to be all-consuming, seeing peace and conflict issues as embracing every aspect of human activity. This was a criticism levelled against Peace Studies especially in the 1970s when it moved beyond the issues of East-West rivalries and the nuclear arms race, and it remains a danger. To some extent such a wide view is inevitable and explains the need for an interdisciplinary approach and it is perhaps avoided if relevant issues are examined from the perspective of those attributes of Peace Studies identified by Ramsbotham.

Future Challenges

As the title implies, *Peace, Conflict and Development* is a broadly based journal and it can be argued that these three elements of human activity are at the base of concerns facing the international community. That community faces formidable problems in the coming years through a combination of socio-economic divisions and environmental constraints.

The past 30 years has seen economic growth across much of the world, more recently concentrated in Asia, but it has been a process of growth that has not delivered equity. As a result, some 85% of world wealth is concentrated in just 20% of the population as a relatively wealthy trans-national elite forges ahead of the rest. In many parts of the global South this has been paralleled by considerable improvements in education and communications, a hugely welcome development but one that also means that people are far more aware of the deep

disparities that now exist. Even in countries experiencing particularly impressive growth rates such as China and India, there have been very strong reactions from the marginalised. China is experiencing considerable problems of social unrest, often exacerbated by local corruption and cronyism, with this leading to numerous examples of strikes, riots and other forms of protest, albeit little reported outside the country. Meanwhile India is faced with a neo-Maoist Naxalite rebellion stretching across much of the country and acknowledged to be its greatest single internal security threat.

In many countries in Europe and in North America there have been gathering public protests against the selective austerity brought on by the 2007-8 financial crisis, itself an indication of structural failings in the working of the liberal market economy. While the *Occupy* and the *Indignado* movements do not stem from deeply impoverished communities they are, like the movements in the global South, indicators that the liberal market economy is not delivering socio-economic justice.

In the longer term, these divisions are likely to be greatly exacerbated by the impact of environmental limits to growth, especially the impact of climate change. There are very strong indications that climate change is accelerating and that positive feedback mechanisms such as the albedo effect on sea ice and the release of methane from thawing permafrost will add further to this. Furthermore, it is now highly likely that climate change will be asymmetric in its impact, with a disproportionate affect on the tropical and sub-tropical land masses, including a profound effect on the ecological carrying capacity of croplands and their ability to feed a growing population. On present trends, there is a risk of a dystopian future suggested nearly forty years ago by the economic geographer and conservationist, Edwin Brookes, of a "crowded, glowering planet of massive inequalities of wealth buttressed by stark force yet endlessly threatened by desperate people in the global ghettoes..."[5]

Given these challenges there is an urgent need to move into a period of transition involving a transformation to far more equitable and radically low-carbon economies, a transition with fundamental consequences for the older industrialised economies but also involving innovative development alternatives for the global South. What may well be necessary is changes in economies, societies and political systems every bit as great as the original industrial revolution or, more recently, decolonisation. One definition of prophecy is "suggesting the possible" in the sense of investigating potential alternative before they are more generally seen as essential. This is a task for many, not least academic communities, and it may well be that those areas of academic inquiry that combine the normative with the interdisciplinary, and multilevel analysis with a global outlook, may have a particularly significant role to play. Peace Studies was born out of concern with the potential destructiveness of the nuclear arms race, but it may face challenges just as great in the future.

[5] Edwin Brooks (1974), 'The Implications of Ecological Limits to Development in Terms of Expectations and Aspirations in Developed and Less Developed Countries', in Anthony Vann and Paul Rogers (eds.) *Human Ecology and World Development*, London and New York: Plenum Press.