

The Centre for Cross-Border Studies North/South Research Forum

“Peacebuilding Across Borders”

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DISCUSSION PAPER

How Can Research Contribute to Cross-Border Peacebuilding?

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This paper has been prepared to stimulate discussion on the various ways in which research may support the building (or cultivation) of peaceful relations within violently divided societies. Prepared in advance of the June 2011 North/South Research Forum in Derry/Londonderry, it is meant to be a modest contribution to efforts to map out that space where research and peacebuilding meet, so as to increase the chances of positive and sustainable impacts. It should be noted that the paper focuses exclusively on the positive face of research. That is, it does not delve into the ways in which research may exacerbate tensions within conflict prone settings – as important as this may be (for example, eugenics research, apartheid or nazi anthropology, or hydrological research in water-scarce regions).

Discussion below explores seven principal roles played by research in the broad area of conflict resolution and peacebuilding:

- I: Analysis of the Complexities of Conflict and of Peace**
- II: Problematization**
- III: Problem-Solving**
- IV: Programme Input**
- V: Policy Input**
- VI: Capacity Building**
- VII: Creation, Protection, and Provision of Neutral Space**

I: ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLEXITIES OF CONFLICT AND OF PEACE

Research can make the connections between different, and simultaneously occurring, forms of conflict (for example militarized violence and genderED violence in all its forms). It can help us to understand when, why and how non-violent conflict becomes violent; and conversely, how cultures of violence may move towards cultures of peace. There can be no

conflict resolution without a clear understanding the nature of the problems to be addressed, and the opportunities that may be available (or that may need to be created)

Ireland examples:

- Historical research on the linkages between “what was” and “what is,” OR between “what happened” and “what is happening.”
- Psychological research on psycho-social trauma, individually and collectively/ Research focusing on the nature of the problems, and the possibilities for solutions.
- “Bombs that make no Noise”
- Political research on the political structures and processes that might accommodate competing interests of different communities
- Sociological research on “cultures of violence” and “cultures of peace” (e.g., the phenomenon of “recreational riots,” or on the inter-group engagement in different contexts, or on schooling.
- Survey research tracking changing perceptions and attitudes over time

II: PROBLEMATIZATION

It is often not appreciated how important – and sometimes how threatening/challenging/ dangerous – it is to question what are seen to be taken-for-granted, and therefore unquestionable, truths. But, this is a way in which research may contribute to the generation of alternative ways of thinking, knowing, and doing in the broad field of peacebuilding. This is illustrated in the way ignored (but pressing) issues find their way onto the political agendas. “Problematization” is about the way in which research may highlight ignored societal, economic or political problems in ways that force them into public consciousness, and onto political agenda, from local to international levels.

Ireland examples

- Empirical research focusing on the Border regions – re patterns of conflict, economic deprivation, infrastructural variation; etc.
- Here we might look at research which was challenging the uncritical/ one-dimensional ways in which certain fundamental concepts/terms were being used in Northern Ireland: “reconciliation”; “Peacebuilding”,

International examples

- The research that thrust the practice of rape as a weapon of war onto the international agenda – leading to its inclusion in UN resolutions and to its eventual legal recognition as a war crime.
- The research on the anti-personal landmine treaty; and the children and war agenda.

III: PROBLEM-SOLVING

There is an essential peacebuilding role for research when it is framed, and undertaken, explicitly within a “problem-solving” approach. This is research which contains what Henri Geroux calls “the language of critique” and the “language of possibility.” Such research includes both the critical examination of the nature/dynamics/ structures of particular problems, AND the generation of possible solutions.

Here, it is important to make a distinction between research which is theoretically-focused, and that which is action-focused. The largely university-based, theoretically-focused, research may make important contributions to the conceptual delineation of structures and processes of peace and conflict, however, its frequent self-referential erudition, and contextual naivety (in terms of political context, and especially the politics of practical action) usually limits its on-the-ground impact. “Action-focused research,” on the other hand, is rooted both in theory and practice. While this may be undertaken within the walls of the Ivory Tower, it is equally likely to be generated by non-university-based researchers. This latter form of research is much more grounded in the experiences and needs within violently divided societies – and is more likely to be driven by a desire to address problems on-the-ground, rather than problems in the literature. It is the latter form of research that is more likely to have a positive impact on peacebuilding.

Ireland examples (in the form of questions): How can we deal with “Peace Walls”? How can we deal with the legacy of psycho-social trauma? How do we deal with racist attacks? How can we measure and evaluate the impact of a peace project?

International Examples: this may be illustrated in the kinds of “problem-solving” workshops of Herb Kelman et al bringing together Palestinian and Israelis or Turkish and Greek Cypriots; or the “Re-perceptualization” workshops of Ronald Fisher; or the “Getting to yes” workshops of Roger Fisher. (NB: these examples, may also be slotted into the Capacity Building section)

The difference between problematization and problem-solving:

- **Problematization** is about research that forces us to rethink and re-examine an issue that that previously seen as “unproblematic” (e.g., feminist research that challenged the systematic invisibility of gender in our thinking about the Northern Ireland Conflict.)
- **“Problem-solving,”** on the other hand, is about research that focuses specifically on a recognized problem that needs to be addressed (e.g., the problem of transforming policing)

Put another way: “problematization” is about finding problems; “problem-solving” is about finding solutions.

IV: PROGRAMME INPUT

There are some areas of research that may feed more directly in the formulation and implementation of peacebuilding interventions. Though, as noted above, for this to happen, research needs to be undertaken, structured/ framed, and presented to suit the particular (pragmatic) needs of the groups or organizations involved in the peacebuilding projects/programmes. An interesting example of fruitful **collaboration** between researchers and peacebuilding initiatives is the recent alliance between INCORE and the Irish Peace Centres to establish a “Community Based Research Ethics Review Group” which has as its objective: “to systematically identify and address the ethical risks in our work in conflict-prone areas so that we might optimize the positive impacts, and minimize potential negative impacts. A peer-driven ethics review group for community-based research projects is underpinned by a set of understandings: (1) that ethical assessments of community initiatives should be driven by communities themselves; and (2) the need to cultivate a more

explicit culture of ethical self-consciousness in research undertaken in and on conflict-prone areas.’ In this example, the experience of the university researcher in research ethics is brought together with the grounded experience of practitioners. At the moment, this project only considers initiatives which contain a research component. However, the ethical review capacities developed here are already being considered for application in **any** project located in a conflict-prone setting.

A second example is the Community and Policing in Transition (CAPT) Project led by Intercomm in Belfast. INCORE is responsible for the research component of the project – which includes: evaluative research on the functioning of the project (how does the project work, and why? What lessons might be drawn for seeding it in different contexts?); comparative research on international cases of police-community relations; and input into the training curriculum. The importance of this example, like the IPC example above, is that collaboration between researchers and practitioners is based on a mutually beneficial, and clear, division of labour which adds significant value to both research and practice.

V: POLICY INPUT

Research has played a central role in informing the formulation (or change) of government policies related to, or affecting, dynamics of peace and conflict – this would apply to the broadest range of policy issues since in violence-prone settings, any policy may affect the dynamics of peace or conflict

One of the most direct ways in which Research may exercise policy influence governmental actors:

- The case of post-apartheid South Africa is instructive here. In the period of transition, the new government was particularly receptive to the ideas generated by universities inside and outside South Africa.
- There are cases where academics take up political positions: as elected officials, as policy advisors, as academic fellows within government departments (though this is not, technically, a political position).
- Academics are often recruited on a consultative basis to inform the drafting of policy in bilateral and multilateral settings. Eg peacebuilding policy (Development Agencies; Foreign Ministries)

Policy input is not limited to government actors. It also applies to non-governmental and intergovernmental actors: eg., the role of university research influencing decision makers and policy with the SEUPB PEACE Programs, and the CRC, and NICVA, and so on.

VI: CAPACITY BUILDING

Universities and colleges have a central role to play in nurturing and developing the Conflict Resolution/ Management/ Peacebuilding capacities across the full spectrum of actors in the peace and conflict field in the Global North and South: governmental, non-governmental, and private sector actors. Thus, for example, training programmes and professional development courses offered universities, colleges, research centres, and NGOs/ Community Groups have all contributed to developing peacebuilding capacities.

Ireland examples: INCORE Summer School (<http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/courses/ss/>) ; The Junction's "Towards Understanding and Healing" (<http://www.thejunction-ni.org/TUH-Index.htm>); Transitional Justice Institute's Summer School on Transitional Justice (<http://www.transitionaljustice.ulster.ac.uk/TransitionalJusticeInstitute.htmSummerSchool2011.htm>)

VII: CREATION, PROTECTION, AND PROVISION OF NEUTRAL SPACE

A sometimes under-appreciated role for research in peacebuilding is the provision of neutral space for contentious ideas to be presented, examined, developed, in a way which is one step removed, yet fully immersed, in the political, economic, and societal realities within which the research is nested locally, nationally, and globally. The importance of this role cannot be over-estimated, especially in settings where space for dialogue, independent thought, and political engagement has been reduced, or is under attack outside of the walls of the university.

- this may be illustrated in the kinds of issues addressed through research and teaching of a university – or training in a non-university research centre
- this may be illustrated in the hiring and faculty, or selection of research staff, visiting scholars, or students from conflict affected regions. Example: the IDRC programme in the 1980s to provide funding to Canadian university to "host" Latin American academics who were being systematically murdered in their countries. Example: the funding by WUSC (World University Services Canada) to sponsor Refugees in East Africa to study in Canada
- This may be illustrated by the Chevening programme (<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-us/what-we-do/scholarships/>) where participants were able to escape the day-to-day pressures of life and work in war-zones like Afganistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Southern Philippines to collectively reflect on their experiences through the intense immersion research settings which allow the systematic comparison with the experiences of other participants.

The creation, protection and provision of neutral space should not be taken for granted. The targeting of research staff, intellectuals, and students is not uncommon in conflict zones around the world. Under such conditions, universities and research centres in the Global North have moral and professional responsibilities to protect peace researchers (indeed, all researchers) from immediate harm, and to engage intellectually and practically to dismantle those structures that subsidize and sustain violence in all its forms.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This paper seeks to stimulate thought about the intersections of research and peacebuilding. It is neither comprehensive nor even a small scale map for our inquiry. It is but a starting point for discussion at the forthcoming June 2011 North/South Forum. I warmly welcome comments, suggestions and critique. A final version of the paper will be posted following the Forum, incorporating the discussions before and during the event.