



War and peace? An agenda for peace research and practice in geography[☆]

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ABSTRACT

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In 1885, Kropotkin called for geography to be 'a means of dissipating [hostile] prejudices' between nations that make conflicts more likely, and 'creating other feelings more worthy of humanity'. As a body of scholars, we have risen far more ably to the negative task of 'dissipating' than to the positive charge of 'creating': Geography is better at researching war than peace. To redress that imbalance, we need both to *conceptualise* more clearly what we mean by peace, and make a *commitment* to researching and practising it. These arguments are made with reference to the broader literature and research along the Danish/German, Israeli/Palestinian and Kyrgyz/Uzbek interfaces.

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Introduction

Geography is better at studying war than peace. This contribution proposes an agenda for how geography in general, and political geography in particular, can think more clearly about peace.

The title of this paper is a reference to a Derek Gregory's plenary lecture at the Royal Geographical Society – Institute of British Geographers 2008 conference, 'War and peace' (Gregory, 2010). That paper neatly illustrates the state of human geography's engagement with these topics. On war, it is authoritative and informed, eloquent, theoretical, and interdisciplinary: a compelling and thought-provoking critique of cultures and practices of warfare. Conversely, peace is little more than gestured it, and soon disappears from the paper. The argument here is simple: for our discipline to play a serious role in addressing the problems wracking twenty-first century humanity, it is imperative that this imbalance be redressed.

There is a long and patchy history of geographical engagement with peace. In this paper I do not seek to review this literature, but to engage with certain aspects of it in order to make two propositions: geography must firstly *conceptualise* what it actually means by peace, and secondly clearly *commit* itself (through the intersection of academic research and activism with normative agendas) to peace. I suggest that, in so doing, geography can, as Gregory desires, reposition itself as one of the 'arts of peace' (Gregory, 2010: 181).

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Conceptualising peace

When discussed by politicians, journalists, academics, and even activists, it is frequently assumed that everyone knows what 'peace' is, and thus the word is commonly left undefined. Therefore it is vital, at the outset, to problematise peace and ask what 'it' is. To begin with, I will consider three disciplines that have pondered the matter more deeply than geography: peace studies, Biblical studies, and International Relations theory. The purpose of these excursions into other fields is not to attempt to summarise their numerous debates and achievements, but rather to demonstrate the rich and varied ways in which 'peace' can be conceptualised. This will provide pointers to begin exploring how the term has been used within the geographical tradition.

Peace studies

In a famous editorial that launched the *Journal of Peace Research* in 1964, Johan Galtung described the 'absence of violence, absence of war' as 'negative peace', counterposed to positive peace as 'the integration of human society' (Galtung, 1964: 1). The limitations of negative peace are seen by political scientist Julie George's recent analysis of the politics of ethnic separatism in Russia and Georgia. Saakashvili's 2003 Rose Revolution inaugurated a period of territorial centralisation, economic reform, anticorruption programmes, state-building, and war. This "destabilised the tenuous peace of the Shevardnadze era ... [which] relied on a weakened Georgian state with individualised benefits and informal institutions surrounding economic enrichment and political power" (George, 2009: 67). This 'peace' was an uneasy and untrusting truce between the corrupt leaders of an unjust society divided into warring regions.

Saakashvili's 2008 war with Russia was ruinous, but the 'peace' that the republic enjoyed – or endured – beforehand was hardly Edenic. That is why Galtung was clear that 'negative peace' – preventing, stopping or de-escalating armed combat – is obviously a good, but believed that peace research should aim at understanding the processes whereby positive peace could be built and sustained. Indeed, for Galtung the definitional purpose of peace research is 'research into the conditions... of realising peace' (Galtung, 1969: 183).

Biblical studies

An expansive definition of positive peace has been offered by the discipline of Biblical studies. The word generally translated into English as 'peace' in the Hebrew Bible, 'shalom', appears 200 times and, Swartley argues, the base denominator of its many meanings is 'well-being, wholeness, completeness' (Swartley, 2006: 27). Mennonite scholar of Old Testament studies, Perry Yoder, has studied the meaning of these occurrences. He begins his book on the topic with the words, 'Peace is a middle-class luxury, perhaps even a Western middle-class luxury' (Yoder, 1989: 3). This was his conclusion after working in 1980s Philippines. He means that Western peace activism, essentially opposing the use of lethal violence including revolutionary violence, maintains the structures of an unjust society and thus this type of peace seemed to Filipinos as 'the rhetoric of those who have it.' He gives an example of Guthrie, a British palm oil processing plant that was raided by the New People's Army while he was there (Yoder, 1989: 4–5). Guthrie was said to have hired mercenaries to help the company 'persuade' peasant farmers to sell their land to make into a plantation, depriving them of their livelihoods. The farmers tried to organise and sabotage, but the military used harsh measures to protect the company so the NPA entered one night, tied up the guards and took them away, and destroyed the plant. For western peace activists to call on the peasants to desist from violence, when not pressuring the company and British and Philippine governments to act justly, he came to conclude, was perverse, with western peace activists (including himself) espousing a concept of peace that maintained the status quo for the comfort of the wealthy. Everyone says they are 'for peace', those building ICMBs and those opposing them: the need, therefore, is to ask, 'what kind of peace?', and 'for what kind of peace ought we to work?' (Yoder, 1989: 10).

His experience of working with and talking to Filipinos led him to a close re-reading of the idea of shalom in the Bible. He concluded that 'shalom is a vision of what ought to be and a call to transform society' (Yoder, 1989: 5) – 'a far cry from seeing peace as the passive avoidance of deadly violence'. He identified three 'shades of meaning'. The first, and most common, refers to material, physical well-being; in certain dialogues in the Biblical text, one individual checked on another's 'shalom', their okayness, their all-rightness. This is shalom 'marked by the presence of physical well-being and by the absence of physical threats like war, disease and famine' (Yoder, 1989: 13). The second is just social relationships between people – the absence of war or poverty, for sure, but more than that, 'the presence of positive and good relations as marked by justice' (Yoder, 1989: 15). As an example he cites a prophecy in the book of Isaiah, about God's restoration of the land:

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful place
And the effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust
forever (Bible, Isaiah 32: 16–17).

Yoder identifies a third cluster of uses around shalom: a moral or ethical meaning of 'straightforwardness', acting with integrity and honesty rather than deceit, blame or guilt. Together, he argues,

these three shades of meaning have a continuity: 'shalom defines how things should be' – a way in Israelite society of referring to material world, relationships and character as all right, as okay. Peace is 'okayness' (Yoder, 1989: 15–16).

Yoder argues that the New Testament idea of 'eirene', the Greek word usually translated as 'peace', is used in much the same way, with one distinction: it is used theologically to talk about God (as 'the God of peace', Bible, Hebrews 13:20) and the good news of God for all humankind ('the gospel of peace', Bible, Ephesians 6:15). In particular, Jesus' death and resurrection is said to bring peace between God and humanity, peace between people (Jew and Gentile united in Christ), and even ecological balance. Thus Christ's death and resurrection has transforming power, setting things right between old enemies (Yoder, 1989: 21).

Swartley extends the analysis of peace in the New Testament. He reads the Biblical text as suggesting that peace is achieved not through power and violence, but through repentance transforming enmity into friendship, pursued non-violently through actions such as blessing and loving one's enemies (Swartley, 2006: 1–26). Swartley would doubtless concur with Yoder that Biblical peace is:

the result of things being okay... things being as they should be; when things are not that way, no amount of security, no amount of peacekeeping in the sense of law and order and public tranquility will make for peace... only a transformation of society so that things really are all right will make for Biblical peace' (1989: 22).

This is a vision of 'positive peace' as general well-being and just social relationships that is poles apart from a 'negative peace' as an uneasy and untrusting truce which, by suppressing opposition to injustice, can work to the advantage of the powerful.

International relations theory

This summary of the richness and multiplicity of the conceptualisation of peace within Biblical studies is offered to show that 'peace' is far broader than the antonym of war. For political geography, however, arguably a more useful relevant debate to follow about the meaning of peace is that within International Relations theory (IR), a body of scholarship that emerged after World War 1 explicitly to understand the inter-state system in order to chart a pathway to peace. This is particularly relevant for our discipline, both because many geographers likewise seek to understand violence in the international system, and because we often engage with IR literature. Here, I lean particularly on the work of Oliver Richmond. His two recent books, *The Transformation of Peace*, and *Peace in International Relations*, are claimed to be the first attempt to thoroughly trace the development of the concept of peace within a discipline that too often assumes it.

Richmond's basic contention is that peace 'is rarely conceptualised, even by those who often allude to it' (2005: 2). The theorisation of peace that does occur is generally hidden away in discussions of war, but peace is usually discussed in ways that disguise that it is essentially contested (2005: 5). For Richmond, this is problematic for a number of reasons: it is ironic in a discipline whose *raison d'être* is to understand the obstacles to peace; it may be that peace discourses are a form of 'orientalism', actors who know peace creating it for people who do not; and because '[c]oncepts of peace may also be used as a tool of war, used to justify, legitimate, and motivate a recourse to war' (2005: 13). Therefore he seeks to problematise the concept: 'to take note of who describes peace, and how, as well as who construct is, and why' (2005: 7).

Richmond analyses and summarises the meaning of 'peace' in the major theoretical strands of IR. For idealism, generally associated with the early decades of the discipline before World War 2, peace meant a future world of complete social, political and

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