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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Narrow Vision in Peace and Security

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The study of peace and security is inevitably an interdisciplinary endeavour. Conflict, whether of the armed variety or not, is a complex social phenomenon/activity, and one that we still struggle to fully comprehend. But this is by no means for lack of trying. Sociological, anthropological, political, legal, economic and historical approaches are among a large array of disciplines from which thinkers and doers have attempted to make sense of, and deal with, conflict. Furthermore, each of these disciplines are themselves exceptionally broad – researchers specialize into much narrower sub-disciplines and take on specific themes and/or geographic areas; and their work can also be found dotting the breadth of the spectrum between theory-oriented and practice-oriented work. A narrow and in-depth focus on a single issue and from a single discipline or sub-discipline is of course of great importance in enhancing our understanding on that issue from a particular perspective, and is vital in furthering the academic value of that discipline. But by the same token, by focusing too intently on an issue from our individual academic 'silos', we risk losing sight of the broader picture, one that is crucial in understanding such a multi-faceted issue. At some point, the various strands of work on peace and security need, to a degree, to be brought together if we are to make headway in solving the problems that continue to threaten peace and security, in the region and beyond.

Southern African Peace and Security Studies is designed to help scholars from different backgrounds and disciplines to interact at an academic level, and at the same time provide its readers with a broad and inclusive perspective of the various challenges the region faces in terms of peace and security. At the same time, it aims to remain relevant, readable and useful for practitioners in this field. It is thus to be expected that this journal will publish articles from a broad range of perspectives and disciplines. This issue is no exception, with articles ranging from continental diplomatic strategies, to historical accounts of the formation of ethnic identities, and to the issue of conflict minerals. With such variety in content and in approach, identifying common threads is not necessarily feasible or useful. But by the same token, reading the articles contained in these issue, one is reminded of how easy it is to misunderstand issues of peace and security, and the common (and often relatively unquestioned) assumptions that go with them.

In their article on Botswana's foreign policy, Ikanyeng Malila and Robert Molebatsi remind us of the gap between appearances and reality. They point out that the reputation that country has in terms of democratic credibility – Botswana remains one of the highest-scoring African

countries on internationally recognized scales of democracy – may be a shiny veneer covering a set of democratic values that are in decline; and more pertinently, that the appearance of a (temporarily) 'ethical' foreign policy, when seen in depth and in the light of its contradictions, may be closer to carefully calculated realpolitik. This is particularly evident in what can be seen as double standards in the promotion of democratic values abroad, and in a changing stance to a relatively unchanging problem (namely democratic deficiencies in Zimbabwe).

Similarly, in her historical analysis of ethnic division and construction in Thaba Nchu in South Africa, Sayaka Kono exposes the strategic formation of identities of convenience, in which people were brought together by a need to protect themselves from victimization and harassment, and in a bid to improve their livelihoods, against the turbulent backdrop of apartheid South Africa's Bantustan policies. It explores how people from ostensibly different ethnic backgrounds came together, at least temporarily, under the inclusive banner of a particular 'ethnicity' that was being created for the purpose of protection. This serves to reinforce how fluid and artificial ethnic identity is, and reminds us that there are not uncommonly very practical and strategic concerns that play a major role in creating such identities – something that is all too often assumed to be determined by birth and accompanied by strong and unbending emotional ties. Again, multiple perspectives are critical in capturing an accurate picture of the situation at hand.

The following two articles both deal with the issue of conflict minerals, albeit from different perspectives. Focusing on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Just Castillo Iglesias examines the regulatory frameworks and codes of conduct that are currently being employed in an attempt to curb the international trade in conflict minerals from that country – namely tantalum, tin, tungsten and gold. Sethelile Ntlhakana, on the other hand, explores a different regulatory framework – the Kimberley Process – from the perspective of its application (or perhaps the lack thereof) to the alluvial diamond fields in Zimbabwe. Both are critical of the effectiveness of these regimes in solving the problems at hand, something both relate to a failure to correctly grasp the situation on the ground.

As both of these papers reveal, the issue of conflict minerals is, in many regards, frequently misunderstood. Campaigns aimed at creating mass awareness of the problem have been somewhat successful in doing so – more so in the case of so-called 'blood diamonds' than in the case of the DRC's set of conflict-related minerals – but this has often come at the price of an oversimplified and even misleading understanding of the problem. If some of these campaigns are to be taken at face value, solving these conflicts is primarily about removing conflict-related minerals from the international marketplace. In reality, however, the conflict mineral problem is multifaceted, and must be seen from both the supply and demand sides (at local, regional and global levels), and from economic, social, legal and political perspectives. Important questions need to be raised in this regard. How dependent is the existence of a conflict on the trade in these conflict minerals? How realistic are the prospects of enforcing the regulation of these minerals? How well are different approaches being coordinated? And if a boycott (whether official or de facto) on such minerals in a certain region is to be employed, what kind of negative economic and social impacts will it have on the population in that region?

The problems the authors identify raise some important concerns in this regard. We see, for example, that one of the factors that may be inhibiting our ability to grapple with the problem of conflict diamonds, has been the narrow definition that the Kimberley Process has adopted in determining what a conflict mineral is – it only applies the term to cases in which diamonds are being used to fund the military activities of non-state actors. By definition state actors cannot deal in conflict diamonds. Similarly, in viewing the conflict mineral issue in the DRC in isolation – separate from the root causes of the conflict in that country, and even from other (non-mineral) sources of funding that can and are being acquired by armed groups – those developing regulatory frameworks and codes of conduct are coming up with solutions that may be counterproductive to the achievement of a peaceful, stable and prosperous DRC.

This brings us back to the issue of our tendencies to remain in our disciplinary (as well as regional, thematic and other forms of) ‘silos’ in forming our perspectives of problem definitions in the field of peace and security, and by extension, what is needed to solve those problems. Appearances can be deceiving – in the field of peace and security it is virtually a given – and problems that are complex – another given in peace and security – obviously require complex and nuanced solutions. In order to grasp what is broken and how to fix it, it is vital that we remain open-minded, and willing to draw from and make use of a wide array of tools.