

Learning From Each Other: A Theoretical and Applied Overview of the Relationship
Between Disability Studies and Peace Studies

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Abstract: This paper is concerned with the importance of dialogue between the interdisciplinary fields of disability studies and peace studies. The considerable potential for learning opportunities arising from understanding this interrelationship is highlighted through two regional studies. These regional studies focus on the disabling impacts of war and regional conflict and the constructive role of disability studies and peace education in contributing to cultures and structures that enable the non-violent transformation of conflict.

Key Words: disability studies, peace studies, interdisciplinary dialogue

Making Connections

This paper invites dialogue between two areas of knowledge that traditionally have not had much direct contact with each other- disability studies and peace and conflict studies. The intention is to help facilitate a process whereby there may be a constructive sharing of ideas, the development of participatory research, and consideration of educational and other pertinent issues. It further develops the profound relevance of a social view of disability to human and social affairs in this instance in the areas of war, major conflict and the understanding and development of peaceful alternatives.

Given the human and social cost of war and its disabling effects, it may be said that war constitutes a powerful challenge to the moral and social basis of any society. The significantly disabling impacts of war in the production of impairments and the social relations that disable people who have impairments are issues of great relevance to disability studies. Human endeavours to find ways to prevent violence and resolve major conflict is central to peace studies.

In these contexts connecting the emerging area of interdisciplinary scholarship known as disability studies with interdisciplinary scholarship in peace and conflict studies is a most important and pertinent task. The objective of this scholarly alliance, we hope, will be a constructive contribution to new theorising and practical knowledge of the disabling and enabling dimensions of armed conflict. The focus of such a project could be not only to help achieve a deepened critical understanding of the various *disabling* dimensions of major conflict including war, but to gain a stronger knowledge of how we might attempt to prevent such violence and the resulting impairments and disability.

Disability Studies

Disability studies -at least in its more critical discourses- addresses questions and issues about the social, economic, and political dimensions of personal and social experiences of impairment and disablement. Disability studies scholarship seeks ways to illuminate causes and enhance opportunities for access, participation and equity for those affected by impairment, and its disabling consequences. From such a perspective disability refers to the disadvantage and discrimination experienced by people who have impairments (Davis, 1997; Finkelstein, 1980; Morris, 1991; Oliver, 1996). This new and reconceptualised notion of disability moves beyond, for example, the oversimplifications of conventional medicalised interpretative frames and the oppressive blandishments of “biological fixes,” including the dangers of new eugenics thinking (Oliver, 1990; Meekosha, 1998; Barnes, Mercer & Shakespeare, 1999; Clear, 1999). Barnes (2005) highlights the holistic dimension of a social model of disability when he says that it is “a holistic approach that explains specific problems experienced by disabled people in terms of the totality of disabling environments and cultures” (p. 7). War and major conflict, as this current paper discusses, causes and results in significantly disabling environments and cultures (Clear & Hutchinson, 2004/2005).

Peace and Conflict Studies

One of the key concerns of inquiry in the field of peace and conflict studies is with critical learning about the causes and disabling consequences of direct and indirect forms of violence, whether they be at local, regional or global levels. The field is also very much concerned with the search for practical knowledge about alternatives (Hutchinson, 1996; Reychler & Paffenholz eds, 2001; Francis, 2002; Galtung, Jacobsen & Frithjof Brand-Jacobsen, 2002, French, Gardner & Assadourian, 2005).

Such practical knowledge includes building improved understandings, insights and skills as to how to transform conflicts non-violently rather than through armed conflict. There is, moreover, a related interest in exploring ways of creating structures and cultures of peace rather than war. Particular attention is given to issues of applied foresight, responsible citizenship and applied ethics, especially as they relate to opportunities for meaningful choices and democratic participation in actively resisting impaired, violent futures for our children and their children (Hutchinson, 1996; Machel, 2001; Boyden, 2002; Boulding, 2004).

How War and Conflict Disable

War, regional conflict and its disabling impacts are costly to individuals, families, communities and wider regional interests. Beyond the pain, distress and dislocation experienced, war often represents loss of human development and potential, and opportunities for full and equal participation to all levels of social and economic life of the community. War and violent conflict are significant factors causing impairment and the WHO, UNICEF, UNHCR and other UN surveys have documented, amongst other things, the role of violations of human rights and of humanitarian law as causes of disability. The numbers globally are very considerable. Presently, there are some 200,000

child soldiers. In the twentieth century, more than 100 million people were slaughtered in wars. Over 90 per cent were civilians. Although horrifying in themselves, such casualty figures represent only a fraction of the suffering caused by armed conflict (Harknett, 2000; Marcel, 2001; Cheldelin, Druckman & Fast, 2003; Hinde & Rotblat, 2003).

More specifically, causes of impairments from war and violent conflict include: torture and other attacks on the physical or psychological integrity of persons, malnutrition, lack of sanitation and of proper medical care, environmental destruction, disruption and deprivation of educational provision, and underdevelopment in general. Specifically, resulting conditions may include: amputations, bullet wounds, gynaecological and other impacts of rape, starvation, poor nutrition and consequences, displacement (refugees), and psychological and social impacts such as, post-traumatic stress, gendered violence, and many forms of discrimination. The UN emphasises that many disabled persons belong to vulnerable groups, such as children, immigrants and refugees (UNICEF, 1996; Harknett, 2000; Blaser, 2002).

Whilst it may be difficult to countenance, we are currently in the midst of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World. In passing a resolution in favour of such a decade, among other things the UN General Assembly highlighted the need for applied research concerned with substantially lessening, preventing or transcending such impairment, harm and suffering. In addition they urged research to better understand the enormously disabling harm and suffering that is caused to children and youth by war and other forms of violence (see UN General Assembly Resolution, 55th plenary meeting, 19 November, 1998, A/RES/53/25).

It is the intent in this paper to explore interdisciplinary relations between disability studies and peace and conflict studies and indicate practical links by highlighting some substantive issues that can be demonstrated through discussion of regional studies of major conflict.

Pertinent Studies of Regional Conflict

The theorised relations of the powerful and contemporary knowledges of disability studies and peace studies may be demonstrated in regional studies of conflict.

The regional studies outlined here are an introductory way of asserting that much can be learnt about disability and also peace studies by drawing out interdisciplinary connections. For the purposes of our argument this is a relatively detailed historical overview and rationale of the regional conflicts. We position the regional studies as exemplars of how the discussion of relevant literature on a topic can highlight and demonstrate powerful disability and peace studies links. It may also lay the groundwork for the conduct of further study.

Bougainville Regional Conflict

Bougainville is the largest island to the north of Australia and part of the Solomon Islands archipelago, just 8 kilometres from the arbitrary sea border of the independent state of the Solomon Islands. It is some 700 kilometres east of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and a similar distance from Australia's northern border. Until September 1975, when it was incorporated into an independent Papua New Guinea, it had been subject to Australian colonial rule. It is clear that Bougainvilleans themselves did not accept either the colonial rule or the incorporation into PNG and identify ethnically and culturally with the Solomon Islands. During the 1970s, demands for a referendum on self-determination were denied to Bougainville (Havini & Havini, 1995).

More recently, Australia has played an important part in bringing some settlement and peace to the area. This follows 10 years of civil war between the PNG defence forces and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) in a costly struggle for independence that has led to some 7,500 deaths and uncounted injuries and impairments. This struggle was most directly precipitated by the operation and mining of Rio Tinto's Panguna valley mine (Regan, 2001).

In 1965, Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia located very large deposits of copper-ore in the Panguna valley and in order for development to proceed, customary title to the land was denied to local landowners. Commercial production began in 1972 through Conzinc Rio Tinto's subsidiary Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL). The mining activities of BCL resulted in the major environmental, social and political dislocation of Bougainville. One University of PNG academic who was Head of Environmental Science said of the Panguna project that it was "an economic godsend-and an environmental disaster."

The Bougainville Peace Agreement was signed at Arawa in Bougainville on 30, August, 2001. This is a comprehensive agreement that brings together the three agreements reached over the previous eight months that relate to the issue of a referendum to determine the eventual political future of Bougainville, a weapons disposal plan, and arrangements for autonomy. In December 2001, a weapons disposal ceremony was held at Torokina (Regan, 2001). Also, Bougainville ex-combatants and National Government officials agreed on a budget and schedule for weapons disposal awareness activities (Havini & Havini, 1995).

Clearly, Bougainville is an important part of the Pacific region and Australia's past and present history is closely linked with it. Australia has significant strategic, humanitarian and peace-related interests in Bougainville's social and economic development.

Cambodian Regional Conflict

Crucial issues as to Australia's relations with the peoples, cultures and societies of the East Asia-Pacific region are likely to become even more important in the twentieth-first century than they were in the last. Geographically, Australia is very much part of the area. Economically, there are strong links. Australia, too, has had a significant history of military engagement in the region. The latter includes the Boxer Rebellion in China, the

war in the Pacific, the Korean War, the stationing of Australian troops at Butterworth in the Malay peninsula, the Vietnam war, military assistance to the Lon Nol regime in Cambodia, East Timor peacekeeping operations, and the war in Afghanistan.

Culturally and with respect to immigration, refugee and development assistance policies, the story is more complex. There are important considerations for what it may mean for Australia's evolving identity, sense of being "a responsible global citizen" and long-term interests. In a post-September 11 world and in the light of recent Australian government policy and actions to refuse entry to asylum seekers, these dilemmas and challenges are necessarily even more pronounced.

At the time of Australian federation (1901), "the white Australia policy" was sacred text. National identity meant "one people, one nation, one race." One of the first serious tests of the abandonment of "the white Australia policy" came with the Indochinese "boat people" fleeing the armed conflict and destruction in Vietnam and Cambodia (Mares, 2001; Jupp, 2002).

During the Pol Pot years, an estimated 1.7 million people lost their lives in "the killing fields" of Cambodia. This amounted to almost one in four of the Cambodian population. Many others were injured, impaired or scarred by the experience. Large quantities of mines and other unexploded ordinance remain in the Cambodian countryside.

The UN and also others report that the main injuries that result are loss of limbs and injuries caused by bullet wounds. Also significant is gynaecological and other impacts of rape, starvation and poor nutrition. The consequences impact not only the ability of affected individuals to participate in the activities of everyday life such as schooling and employment but also on the very physical and social infrastructure that would facilitate their rehabilitation and participation. Of course this includes basic human and social rights for equal inclusion in the life of the community (UNICEF, 1996; Harknett, 2000; Blaser, 2002).

Even before Pol Pot, up to several hundred thousand Cambodian men, women and children had lost their lives as the war in Vietnam spread across the Cambodian border. From 1972 to 1973, for example, the quantity of bombs dropped on Cambodia totalled well in excess of three times that dropped on Japan during World War Two. Deposed Cambodian leader Prince Sihanouk was to later claim that Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger had in a sense created the Khmer Rouge by the expansion of the war into Cambodia. Whatever the reasons, there have been long term consequences for a tortured country (Glover, 1999; Robertson, 2002).

While Australia had joined the USA in the war in Vietnam as a matter of perceived national interest, this had not enjoyed uncritical support at home. It is against this background that Australia was to come to later play a significant role in the Cambodian peace process. The then Australian Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans was to become actively involved in this process, including the establishment of a UN

transitional, peacekeeping authority. Skilful middle power diplomacy had played a valuable part in this development (Berry, 1999; ABC, 2002).

Broader Relevant Literature

Linked to a better understanding of the global context of such regional studies, there are important and relevant data-collection programs by the UN, WHO, UNHCR, UNICEF and other international humanitarian and development agencies. This data collection is done as an adjunct to their work in regional communities affected by war and structural violence around the world. Latest UN estimates put the number of people who suffer chronic hunger at 850 million. Many of these are in areas devastated by years of armed conflict, such as Afghanistan and Guatemala, and in societies, such as North Korea, which lavish expenditure on military programs at a damaging cost to meeting basic human needs. More generally, there are enormous opportunity costs in the 1 trillion dollars spent each year on armaments and military forces; costs that represent lost opportunities for other health giving expenditures. Over half of the world's military budget is paid for by the United States. In a recent UN report on the state of world food security/insecurity, the largely invisible costs of skewing the notion of "security" to narrowly military formulations and dollar demands is brought out. "Bluntly stated, the problem is not so much a lack of food as a lack of political will" (FAO, 2003).

In addition to such studies, there is a range of other relevant literature that includes discussions of post traumatic stress disorder as it relates to war and violent conflict (Sack, Clarke & Seeley, 1995). The latter literature raises important issues for peace educators and others engaged with peacebuilding. As part of any meaningful reconciliation endeavours in societies affected by the damaging legacies of violent conflict, whether on mind, body or social infrastructure, important educational and other considerations are raised (Hayner, 2001; Salomon & Nevo, 2002). These often involve the need for peacebuilding amongst previously warring groups, rehabilitation of individuals who are impaired by war and likely to be disabled in communities that are built as if there are no impairments. These same communities, themselves will require rebuilding physically and socially (Lederach, 1997; Salomon & Nevo, 2002).

Emergent Themes of the Literature and Regional Studies

Through regional studies we should be able to get a better understanding not only of the disabling affects of war and other forms of violence on communities and families, but also the potential ways of creating more enabling, less violent futures for people affected by war and violence.

Beyond drawing together this literature, we think critical understandings and insights can be gained by asking the following questions in relation to the regional studies that are overviewed in this paper. The questions themselves reveal interesting and pertinent dimensions of the interrelationships of disability studies and peace studies. Specifically we want to ask:

- What are the disabling consequences (physical, social, gender-related, educational) of war or armed conflict in this region?
- What human rights and international law is relevant in the aftermath of conflict and how has it been experienced in practice?
- How may constructive peace-building initiatives be undertaken to reintegrate/empower those affected/disabled by war or armed conflict in the region?
- What community strategies/techniques/processes are most likely to contribute to enabling cultures of peace and inclusion for ex-combatants in the region?
- What are the possible lessons from this regional situation for practical peacebuilding initiatives among those affected by the aftermath of violent conflict or war elsewhere in the world? (Clear & Hutchinson, 2004/2005)

Literature particularly relevant to such regional studies highlights the potential for mutual learning between the fields of disability studies and peace and conflict studies. Existing studies are still relatively small but nonetheless important. They include, for example, studies of the experiences of survivors and their traumas from situations of armed conflict (DePaul, 1997), the prevalence of psychopathology in adolescents from refugee families (eg Tousignant, Habimana, Biron, Malo, Sidoli-leblanc & Bendris, 1999), and genocide and disability (eg Blaser, 2000). There is also some important analysis of approaches and programs for intervention with children and youth affected by armed conflict (Crisp, Talbot & Cillopone, 2001; Canadian International Development Agency, 2002).

Towards a Disability and Peace Discourse

The matters raised through these complementary regional studies are varied and are likely to have significant practical and applied dimensions. They include issues of appropriate humanitarian action and development assistance, resilience, trust-building and meaningful reconciliation, conflict resolution skills development, and the encouragement of educational and other opportunities and choices for active participation in processes for creating more enabling, inclusive and peaceful futures. Such practical efforts would make central a rehabilitation focus that is not only about the repair and restoration of individually impaired bodies, but the rehabilitation of the social infrastructure and social rights that will ensure that individuals can take an active part in communities that are themselves just and healthy.

The overall benefits, constructive lessons and wider applicability of such interdisciplinary conceptualising could be multiple. Specifically, with each regional study it is possible to focus and articulate achieving benefits in a range of areas such as those briefly discussed below. In important ways, such benefits are likely to be complementary in deepening both understanding and exploring alternative pathways. We see them as involving directly related matters of civic or socially engaged foresight, humanitarian benefit and other practical rehabilitative, social and educational outcomes (Hutchinson, 1996; Reychler & Paffenholz, 2001; Francis, 2002). They are inextricably bound with greater understanding of the disability and peace issues that we have outlined.

Moreover, they expose disability and rehabilitation as central social constructs for defining and building peaceful futures non-violently.

These particular regional studies suggest very important issues concerning youth, disability and peace building. In terms of the exploration and conceptualising of disability studies and peace studies as potentially something greater than the sum of their separate meanings, we believe this presents particular issues for defining more enabling futures. This is not a singular view of the future but rather an opening up of dialogue on alternative futures (Galtung, Jacobsen & Frithjof Brand-Jacobsen, 2002; Hicks, 2002; Slaughter, 2004).

In the regional study involving Bougainville, a central issue of disability and peace is the effects of recent armed conflict and violence-enculturation upon young ex-combatants. Many young Bougainvillean men have been psychologically and physically impaired by extended periods in armed conflict. Reintegration and inclusion in communities that are themselves disabled by conflict, will require significant and sustained rehabilitative effort.

The Cambodian regional study looks at the longer term, intergenerational effects of the legacy of war in post-conflict situations. In this case, the emphasis is on some second-generation social, economic and educational implications. The children of displaced persons or refugees who have settled in Australia from Cambodia offer an important example of the opportunity to work collaboratively in seeking to better understand such complex and culturally sensitive issues. In each case, there is a particular interest in the potential for greater inclusion and participation of those people disabled by war and regional conflict and peace-related, community-building initiatives.

This conceptualising must finally extend to regional and global questions of power relations that maintain profound patterns of disabling social and economic relations. This refers to a “structural violence” that is deeply implicated in war and regional conflict and their disabling impacts (Boulding, 1990; Calder, 2002; Monbiot, 2003).

There is also an important related dimension in terms of Australia’s negotiation of its place and identity in the Pacific region and as part of the international community over coming decades. Such negotiation includes issues of disability and inclusiveness, immigration, multiculturalism, education for human rights, conflict resolution, literacy, development assistance to low-income countries, and more broadly Australia’s responsibilities under international law and as a member of the United Nations. In relation to the particular regional conflicts described in this paper, there are important issues of regional and global citizenship and commitment to an international legal framework that impacts amongst other things, the human rights status and citizenship rights of disabled people (Boulding, 1990; Calder, 2002; Held, 2000; Monbiot, 2003).

Some Educational and Other Implications

The regional studies looked at through the interdisciplinary lens we have described suggest several key areas for new knowledge and development. Among these are:

- *The building of enduring partnerships* for research, education, youth and community policy development initiatives and projects amongst relevant local, national and international organisations.
- *Documented knowledge* relating to the causes and impacts of impairments that have resulted from the conflict in Bougainville and Cambodia involving individuals, families and communities. This will include relevant examples of community peace building and enabling-futures initiatives and projects.
- *Educational curriculum and resources* for educational development, policy and legal frameworks, and community building. Consistent with a collaborative and inclusive design and methodological approach, any such recommendations and resource development could be integrally linked to negotiated processes and outcomes with participants in local communities, including disabled people.

These resources could be suitable for university, Community College and senior secondary levels, professional development and organisational in-services. This could inform the training and preparation of personnel for work with local and international communities that is cross-culturally sensitive, conscious of innovative theory and practice in areas such as peace education and human rights education. It could be informed by the social demands of access and participation and human rights requirements of people with disabilities.

- *Personnel preparation* for local citizenship responsibilities and global citizenship to provide the knowledge and skills for building peaceful futures, which includes thorough-going understanding of the important role of inclusive and accessible environments in building peace.

Some of the educational and other potential benefits of applied scholarship may be understood at several levels. In terms of international relations, there are critical policy issues about the viability of current patterns and approaches to secure peace. There are key future-related issues about whether the conventional paradigm of “working for peace by preparing for war” and heavy reliance on responding to perceived threats to security by military means will continue to prevail or whether alternative, more enabling (less disabling) pathways may emerge and be strengthened. This is especially so when considering the legacies of armed conflict and structural violence on many young people, and what these disabling legacies may mean for the future if left unresolved.

At the level of multi-cultural and community relations, there are perhaps significant lessons to be derived in terms of enabling rather than disabling notions of identity and citizenship. There are also lessons for building ties of friendship rather than cultural stereotyping, hatred and xenophobic barriers. Such matters are, for example, very

much a part of contemporary discussions in Australia about its relations with its northern neighbours. These are discussions that are also occurring in many other parts of the world.

At the level of socially engaged, critical inquiry, such knowledge development seeks to get beyond tight disciplinary and epistemological boundaries. It offers opportunities for the furthering of constructive dialogue among communities of learners rather than reinforcing established disciplinary territorialities. It welcomes multi-cultural voices rather than monologue and cultural rigidity. There is, therefore, an invitation to humility and openness, while acknowledging the likely challenges and crucial importance of a strong ethical approach in working for enabling, decolonising methods.

Such critical and applied endeavours actively open up questions of a cross-disciplinary character as to whether, for example, the knowledge traditions of disability studies and peace and conflict studies may have something to offer each other. It also critically reflects on their possible joint contribution to our better understandings of issues such as the practicalities of building cultures and structures that are more inclusive, enabling and peaceful.

Future Developments

The literature and regional overviews serve as a basis for a more fully developed dialogue of the issues. We expect future collaborations in this area to:

- Assist in developing a new interdisciplinary perspective with significant potential for contributing to theoretical and conceptual aspects of disability and peace scholarship.
- Bring together the research and development interests of hitherto largely separate knowledge domains to address significant social questions and actions associated with disability that results from armed conflict, militarisation and the legacy of war.
- Seek to understand social systems that disable and that also enable, rather than assume disability is only an individual human problem. Such a focus would bring to this discussion the valuable lens of disability studies and the broad distinction between impairment and disability. We see this as a relative rather than an absolute distinction and emphasize the interrelationship of the individual and the social, impairment and disability.
- Focus on young people and others affected by war in ways that seek to transcend “victimology accounts” and “problem youth” stereotypes.
- Endeavour to make important links between the local and the global in matters of disability, war and war prevention, including issues of humanitarian concern, human rights and responsible global citizenship.
- Attach considerable significance to a creative futures and applied foresight dimension in which initiatives, actions and efforts, especially by young people, are explored for averting war, lessening the damaging consequences of armed conflict, and for building accessible, just, peaceful and enabling futures.

In summary, we think these developments should lead to not only a better understanding of the disabling effects of war and other forms of violence, but also to potential ways of creating more enabling, less violent futures for those people disabled by war. The regional studies could extend to include critical questions about the social and environmental dimensions that are central to a social model of disability and to effective peace-making and peace-building. This could include policy considerations and the role of education both formal and informal. We believe that these will be critical to the reintegration and citizenship interests of both the individuals concerned and the communities of which they are or might be a part. It is essential both for credibility and for basic justice that this work includes the active participation of disabled people themselves.

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