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# Temporality and contextualisation in Peace and Conflict Studies: The forgotten value of war memoirs and personal diaries

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## Abstract

This article contributes to debates on appropriate levels of analysis, temporality, and the utility of fieldwork in relation to Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS), and International Relations more generally. It observes a recentism or privileging of the recent past in our studies and a consequent overlooking of the longer term. As a corrective, the article investigates the extent to which wartime memoirs and personal diaries (specifically from World War I and World War II) can help inform the study of contemporary peace and conflict. In essence, the article is a reflection on the epistemologies and methodologies employed by PCS and an investigation of the need for greater contextualisation.

## Keywords

Diaries, epistemology, history, memoirs, Peace and Conflict Studies, wartime

## Introduction

How many articles and student essays have we read that begin with the words, ‘Since the end of the Cold War . . .’? Among other things, this points to a decision on behalf of authors to make a temporal distinction between what went before and after the 1989–1991 period. This has important implications for how we contextualise peace and conflict. It is the contention of this article that many conflicts are the product of the *longue durée* and not solely linked to particular events or easily categorised as belonging to the Cold War or post-Cold War eras. While proximate factors may spark or reinvigorate violent conflict, a range of structural and historical factors (for example, linked with identity or colonialism) will also shape conflict (O’Bannon, 2012: 451). Added to this are convincing conceptualisations of

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conflict as complex adaptive systems and thus rejecting notions of definitive temporal start-points and end-points (de Coning, 2018a). Yet the ‘Since the end of the Cold War . . .’ phenomenon persists and imposes an artificial time imaginary on much of Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) and International Relations (IR). This article seeks to engage with the issue of the contextualisation of PCS in particular, and IR more generally. It does so by making the case that we should give serious consideration to the use of historical memoirs and personal accounts in the study of contemporary peace and conflict. At heart, the article is concerned with issues of epistemology and knowledge production. The hoped-for central contribution is to engender discussion on knowledge hierarchies and cognitive biases. The danger is that history is foreshortened in our analyses and thus our analyses are inaccurate and decontextualised.

The article makes an argument for, and demonstrates the utility of, the micro-sociological and material from ‘past’ wars to make claims about temporality and the contemporary study of peace and conflict. The article intersects with at least two debates in PCS. The first of these debates relates to the most appropriate level of analysis and a growing realisation of the need to adopt multi-scalar lenses in order to capture the complexity and dynamics of conflict (Stepputat, 2018). A growing number of studies have recognised the everyday (Berents, 2015), the individual, and the small group as appropriate levels of analysis and have recognised the value of capturing the micro-dynamics of peace and conflict (Justino et al., 2013). Relatedly, a number of studies have recognised how conflicts constitute multi-level and interconnected systems (de Coning, 2016, 2018a, 2018b). It invites us to think about how micro-sociological events, such as those captured in wartime memoirs and personal diaries, connect with, and co-constitute, wider systems. This ‘fit’ issue, or how micro-sociological perspectives can be seen alongside other levels of analysis, is crucial. It allows us to conceive of peace and conflict in a holistic manner (indeed, framed as ‘peace and conflict’), and to question categories, binaries, and exclusions that attend our studies.

A second set of debates relate to temporality and the study of peace and conflict, and IR more generally. As Hom notes, ‘temporal phenomenon lurk in almost every corner of global politics’ (Hom, 2018: 330), while McIntosh calls for ‘more fully temporalizing IR theory’ in order to emphasise the inter-subjective nature of politics (McIntosh, 2015: 469). For Hutchings, uncritical treatments of power, and its assumptions of ‘singular, progressive temporality’ will ‘reproduce and confirm the hegemonic pattern of international power’ (Hutchings, 2007: 72). Recent debates have sought to further unpack issues connected with memory and reporting (Mannergren Selimovic, 2020), and the construction of time in relation to events and crises, dealing with the past or institutional agendas. Holden notes how powerful institutions create ‘timescapes’ that can be imposed on others (Holden, 2016: 409). Relevant to this article is how World War I (WWI) and World War II (WWII) have been constructed and reconstructed as segments of history that are far-removed from contemporary conflicts. It is noticeable, for example, how rare it is for contemporary PCS literature to refer to WWI and WWII. Perhaps the notion of ‘new wars’ has patterned much thinking on how conflicts during and after the Cold War differed qualitatively and thus do little to inform one another (Kaldor, 2012; Münkler, 2005). There are, of course, exceptions to this (for example, Väyrynen, 2019), with Kalyvas’ seminal *Logic of Violence in Civil War* making extensive use of memoirs and

showing how they could be woven into wider theory-building (Kalyvas, 2006). In the main, however, literature on and from WWI and WWII, and indeed the Korean, Vietnam, Iran–Iraq and many other major wars, is often unmentioned with contemporary studies of peace and conflict.

In terms of structure, the article proceeds by discussing the extent to which recentism, or a disproportionate focus on the present and recent past, is an issue in PCS. The next section does not see the phenomenon as axiomatically pejorative. Academic disciplines are iterative (Harwood, 2009: 502) and (in an optimum scenario) constantly updated, and so a recent focus does not automatically translate into discounting the past. Context is important though, and thus a complementarity of methodologies can help contextualise studies. In its next section, the article assesses the methodological usefulness of wartime personal diaries and memoirs for the study of contemporary conflict. These sources are not without their drawbacks, but they have value in connecting with some current trends in PCS such as a focus on the local and micro-dynamics. In its third substantive section, the article illustrates how personal diaries and memoirs from WWI and WWII can shed light on three issues that are the subject of considerable contemporary academic research and practitioner work: gender; the blurring of distinctions between civilians and combatants; and micro-political economies. The issues are illustrative and it is possible to identify many other salient issues from wartime memoirs and diaries.

## Recentism and its perils

This section examines the extent to which recentism (or a privileging of the recent over a more historical view) is prevalent, and indeed problematic, in PCS, and IR. Other disciplines have been more concerned with the issue. Sluyter identifies a ‘temporal parochialism’ or a focus on recent time periods in the leading journal in Geography (Sluyter, 2010: 6). Following a content analysis of articles and an examination of pre-1800 data he noted, ‘recentism diminishes understandings of those and other long-term historical processes that still so profoundly impact the present’ (Sluyter, 2010: 10). For Jones, ‘while contemporary human geography has experienced a welcomed explosion in terms of its thematic breadth . . . it has also suffered from a considerable narrowing of time periods that inform its empirical and conceptual studies’ (Jones, 2004: 288). Archaeologist Michael E Smith noted how scholars of modern urbanism tended to ignore data from ancient cities or ‘the 96% of urban history prior to the Industrial Revolution’ (Smith, 2009: 115).

Explicit studies of recentism in PCS are rare. One bibliometric study did include the date of citations in a PCS journal (*African Journal of Conflict Resolution*) and found that 34.9% of material cited was less than five years old, and the total number of articles below 10 years was 59.6% – in the 2004–2011 period (Okere and Fasae, 2012).

Aside from bibliometric studies, it is possible to identify significant amounts of what might be termed ‘post-ism’ or the framing of studies so that they focus on events after a certain date. The *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, for example, has had special issues on post-conflict security sector reform, post-interventionary spaces, and post-conflict spaces (along with special issues entitled ‘Rwanda 20 years after’ and ‘Intervention and Statebuilding 10 years on’) (Ansorg and Gordon, 2019; Bell and Evans, 2010;

Bergamaschi et al., 2014; Heathershaw and Lambach, 2008; Hehir, 2009). The advantage of such temporal delimitation is clarity of timelines, but there is a sense of defining an era in terms of what it is not rather than what it is. Few article titles give the impression of a long-term historical gaze. In terms of a mainly quantitative journal, the *Journal of Peace Research* has published 29 Special Data Features between January 2015 and June 2020. These Special Data Features introduce datasets that other researchers can then access. Of these datasets, 15 contain data exclusively from 1989 onwards, with only three containing data from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There are, of course, legitimate reasons for this focus on the recent past. Data from earlier periods might not be available or it may be unreliable. It may also be that authors calculate earlier contexts to be so different that they would tell us little about the more contemporary era. Certainly, many of the aspects of the strategic and political landscape were very different after the end of the Cold War. It could also be the case that epistemic cultures develop within particular schools or methodological approaches and so a focus on the present and the future becomes normalised. Thus, for Goertz, the rational actor school, and formal and empirical research in IR, emphasise the present and future (Goertz, 1994: 171).

The intention in this article is not to automatically cast recentism in a pejorative light. Nor is it to say that recentism is endemic. Genocide studies, for example, has been adept at seeing the long lead time for violent 'incidents' (Brett, 2015; Straus, 2015). The article has no intention of erecting a straw man or woman. A focus on the recent is understandable in that many studies wish to be relevant and possibly useful to practitioners and policy-makers (Edmunds et al., 2014: 506). This trend has been reinforced by what might be described as 'project work' or studies that arise from funded projects that had to match research council priorities in order to gain funding. Research councils often follow government-mandated and value-for-money agendas and so may be steered towards assisting contemporary needs rather than more historical, blue-skies, or theory-driven research (IPS National Academic Council, 2014; McHardy and Allan, 2000). As one observer noted, 'Inundated with proposals, agencies tend to favour worthy but incremental research over risky but potentially transformative work' (Editors, 2011: 10). Researchers thus often find themselves implicated in complex political economies in which work is tailored to grant schemes that are policy-oriented and mostly focused on the future or recent past.

It is also worth noting that studies need limitations, including a date range, so as to make them comprehensible. Explaining complex social processes might require inserting artificial temporal cut-off points such as the signing of a peace accord. Decisions to choose one cut-off point rather than another are not always well-explained. Instead, we have the phenomenon of many studies from 1989 or 1991 and paying little attention to what went before.

An important argument in favour of recentism, particularly in terms of citation bias, comes from the iterative nature of academic study. New research, perspectives and interpretations mean that literature is constantly updated. In an optimal scenario, recently published material is aware of already published material and builds it into its analysis. Thus, academic research would be a historically-aware palimpsest. The recent citation dates in the bibliographies of published works may be of no concern if those works were cognisant of contextual issues and built that into their analysis.

This sanguine attitude to recentism, however, needs to be leavened by some explication of the possible perils. A focus on the recent past pre-disposes observers to seeing the exceptionalism of the present and recent times. In a broader historical perspective, the recent may not seem so exceptional (Hjorth, 2014: 181). Recentism also risks separating events from structural factors. Large parts of the evidential trail might be missed, especially factors that might be inter-generational or embedded in a culture, such as caste or class. As Gat argues, pre-modern identity features, such as religion, have a long historical reach, often regenerating but retaining ancient elements (Gat, 2013: 9). A bias towards events rather than processes also precludes a full power analysis and a focus on those types of power that are subtle, layered, and might persist through shocks. Studies with linear conceptualisations of time, and definitive endpoints, overlook the systemic nature of peace and conflict and how a series of interlocking and co-constitutive processes combine to create and re-create assemblages of power, tension and order (Mac Ginty, 2019a). Moreover, the political economies (and vanities) of academia may encourage us to place the pro-nouns 'new' or 'neo' in front of phenomena that are actually established. These phenomena may merely be new to the scholars in question.

## The case for memoirs and diaries

Having discussed recentism, or the privileging of relatively recent time-frames and materials that have been published in the recent past, this article moves on to make a case for the use of military memoirs and personal diaries as a resource for PCS research. The particular focus of this article is on memoirs and personal diaries from the WWI and WWII era and how they might be able to inform contemporary PCS. While contextual factors may have changed, many of the experiences – fear, displacement, bereavement, dispossession – remain similar.

Personal documents (diaries, journals, letters and memoirs) have been a staple of many disciplines, and there is extensive methodological consideration of their utility (Harari, 2005). Such documents do not exist on their own. They conform often to, or are suppressed by, 'official narrative frameworks' (Maynes, 2011: 65). Sometimes memoirs and diaries, especially those from subaltern sources, might be considered 'subjugated knowledges' (Foucault, 1980: 82), or types of knowledge that are somehow 'illegitimate, disqualified, buried' (Léger, 2001: 82). The advantage of personal documents is that they 'provide subjective comments on events, interpret experiences, preserve facts and express feelings according to some personal sense of what is meaningful . . .' (Clifford, 1978: 186). While this article is particularly concerned with contextualising PCS, it is worth noting that personal documents themselves are from a moment in time and perspective. Diary keeping is probably not as prevalent as in earlier eras yet there are now multiple digital methods of record-keeping, with military blogs providing particularly good insights into the experiences of serving soldiers (Chouliaraki, 2014; Peebles, 2011).

Memoirs have been used in the study of IR, diplomacy, and leadership especially in the form of 'great men' (and increasingly great women) memoirs and diaries (Blair, 2010; Harari, 2005; Kissinger, 2011). Strategic studies have also benefited from personal accounts of senior military figures (Alanbrooke, 2001; Haig, 2005). The study of 'terrorism' and radicalisation has also been enhanced by memoirs (Nawaz, 2016). The rationale

for using these sources, in many cases, is that the individuals concerned are hard-to-access (Acharya and Muldoon, 2017; Hamdar, 2014). There have also been a number of very useful collations of wartime letters, diaries and oral histories although such volumes have not been directly related to PCS and its academic debates (see, for example, Aleksievich, 2018; Kempowski, 2020; Neitzel, 2012). The absence of military memoirs and personal diaries, especially those by rank-and-file combatants, from PCS is somewhat incongruent with the increased interest in the experiential, the everyday, and the local. Indeed some of the key voices in the discipline stressed the need to pay attention to the everyday embodiment and lived nature of peace and conflict (Boulding, 2000; Enloe, 1990; Nordstrom, 1997), a theme that resonates with more recent feminist literature (Partis-Jennings, 2017, 2019). Life histories and oral testimonies have been used in relation to war-affected societies (Ssali and Theobald, 2016), but the explicit use of military memoirs and wartime personal diaries has been rare in PCS.

A number of factors recommend memoirs and personal diaries as a research resource. Firstly, they have a first-hand immediacy as the authors were present during, and often contributing to or participating in, the events described. This particularly relates to contemporaneous diaries, but also memoirs written soon after the events described. As one soldier put it, 'No words, however set together, can convey even a minute concept of the searing mental and physical impact of the shambles of infantry action unless one has personally experienced it' (White, 2004: xx).

Secondly, memoirs and diaries are epistemologically valuable in that they are often from individual or subaltern voices that go unheard or are aggregated with other voices. Thus, a memoir offers an individualised account of an event that may be described elsewhere in generalised terms. Rather than being contextualised in terms of geo-strategy or national political machinations, the context is often hyper-local in the sense of an immediate group of comrades, or commentary on the quality of makeshift sleeping arrangements. A careful review of multiple memoirs is able to identify a consistency of themes (see, for example, Reader, 1988). Indeed a review of sources from enemies on the same battlefield allows cross-referencing and the identification of the same phenomenon, for example, the same extreme weather affecting trench life (Barthas, 2014: 143–144; Jünger, 2004: 57).

Thirdly, memoirs and diaries may be in a vernacular and have a textural richness that other sources may not have. Diaries in particular are unlikely to have an affected tone and, as one diarist commented, were written 'with no thought of presentation in book form' (Fleming, 2003: v). Another WWII veteran noted how his memoir, written immediately after his release as a prisoner of war, lacked 'hindsight, maturity or sophistication' (Kee, 1989: 7). From the perspective of the researcher, this unmediated rawness might be an advantage. One of the surprising aspects of a number of diaries are the extent to which they deviate from official narratives. For example, some texts are subversive in their criticism of military and political leaders and are able to puncture the myth of a united nation or war effort (on the 'blitz spirit' see Render and Tootal, 2016: 30).

Fourthly, since these sources are not prompted by academic inquiry (for example, research interview questions) then they do not take the form of answers to questions. But they have the benefit of raising undirected points and thus bringing research in

potentially new directions. As one historian noted in frustration, ‘Most of these texts would seem to be interested in all the wrong issues’ (Harari, 2007: 307). Nor do they afford the opportunity for follow-up questions. Yet it is the record of the ‘ordinariness’ (Swaab, 2007: xi) that offers particular value, especially to those interested in the sociology of peace and conflict and the minutiae that constitute it. As Strachan notes, diary entries often capture ‘the minor horrors of war’ such as ‘flea bites, sore teeth, malaria, headaches and simple exhaustion’ (Strachan in Swaab, 2007: ix).

Fifthly, memoirs and personal diaries offer the possibility of personal, intimate and sociological details that are difficult to access through other sources. Potentially, these sources may include a description of an event, explanation of the thought processes leading up to it, and a reflection after the event. In some cases, diaries are annotated afterwards, sometimes decades afterwards, and so there may be inter-generational reflection and reflexivity (for example, Palmer, 2002). These sources may reveal a vulnerability and doubt that it may be difficult for interviewees to display in person (Väyrynen, 2019: 155). Face-to-face research often requires the patient building of relationships and trust (Celestina, 2018). With some memoirs and personal diaries, the affective and emotional dimension is more easily reached, especially as some were not written for publication.

It should be noted that there is great variation in the style and quality of war memoirs and personal diaries. Some are self-published (for example, Hartinger, 2019) and can deviate in style and content from what a professional editor may recommend. Some are published by small specialist presses, and some (particularly relating to recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and against Islamic State) seem marketed in a sensational way (Woodward and Jenkins, 2016). In a few cases, the authors of war memoirs went on to become prominent authors, poets and literary critics (Jünger, 2019; Lewis, 1978; MacDonald Fraser, 2000; Macgill, 2000). It is also worth noting that a number of the memoirs, particularly those published or reprised many years later do contain some historiographical reflection. In many cases, family members edited the diaries and memoirs of an elderly or deceased relative (for example, Hartinger, 2019) and there is the possibility that they have imposed more contemporary cultural and social mores on the work that they found (Niemann, 2015). One author, whose text is an uncompromising account of WWII on the Eastern Front, asked readers ‘for fairness in that those who judge me do not do so from under that banner of “political correctness”’ (Maeger, 2019: xiii–xiv).

Aside from the above discussed advantages of memoirs and personal diaries as a research resource for PCS, this article has set itself an additional task: can memoirs and personal diaries from WWI and WWII give insights into contemporary conflicts? At first glance, the differences between contexts are quite profound. The trench warfare of WWI and WWII, and the fixed battles between organised armies, seem far-removed from contemporary wars of drones and artificial intelligence. Yet, on a second glance there are significant similarities including the mobilisation of support bases, informational wars, large-scale displacement, the trialling and use of new technologies, the use of children, and the gendered nature of conflict. At the level of the individual, the similarities between contemporary and historical experiences of conflict and peacemaking efforts are stark: survival; separation from family; the need to fulfil basic needs; and hope for the future. At this level, it is worth asking if the experiences of a WWII soldier and a modern-day Houthi militia member cowering in a foxhole are very much different.

Take, for example, the seemingly trivial case of soldiers adopting a dog during their wartime campaigns. WWI and WWII memoirs contain many such examples and show tenderness in the midst of war that help leaven, contextualise, and humanise subjects that are often involved in considerable violence. Thus, for example, a WWII German tank commander noted of his adopted dog, 'He accompanied me everywhere and placed his head on my feet at night' (Carius, 1992: loc. 1784). If we fast forward over fifty years to post-Taliban Afghanistan, then war memoirs reveal US troops adopting a puppy, '... the little dog raised morale ... Ares lived in the tent with the team leaders, and we treated him like he was our child' (Kasabian, 2018, quote from <https://www.tckpublishing.com/war-memoir-veteran-afghanistan/>). A US soldier blogging from Iraq referred to his unit's temporary canine companion as 'a return to the ordinary' (Gallagher, 2008b). These examples, and many others like them, show micro-sociological similarities across time. Their human, indeed humane, quality contrasts with the military campaigns the protagonists were involved in.

The advantages of using memoirs and personal diaries as a research resource should be leavened with caveats (that also apply to many other research methodologies). Firstly, wartime is rarely an optimal time for diary-keeping, with entries often hurried, occasional and subject to interruption (owing to injury or leave) or an abrupt end (owing to death or capture) (May, 2015). Indeed, diary-keeping was 'strictly forbidden' (Rehfeldt, 2019: iv) in most militaries. Secondly, memoirs may suffer from memory issues. Some memoirists may have written decades after the events described. As MacDonald Fraser, who served in WWII, observed:

Looking back over sixty-odd years, life is like a piece of string with knots in it, the knots being those moments that live in the mind forever, and the intervals being hazy, half-recalled times when I have a fair idea of what was happening, in a general way, but cannot be sure of dates or places or even the exact order in which events took place. (MacDonald Fraser, 2000: xiv)

Thirdly, many diaries and memoirs may suffer from self-censorship (Hampson, 2001: viii). This is especially the case in relation to gratuitous instances of violence. It is a challenge to credulity that many WWII German memoirs and diaries make no mention of the treatment of Jews (Hartinger, 2019; Koschorrele, 2011). John Stieber, observed, 'I must say in all honesty that I never experienced any lack of discipline in any German unit or any individual soldier during all my time on the Russian Front. No prisoners were shot, there were no reprisals and I never heard of anybody who had been raped' (Stieber, 2016: 111). This is even though the 1941 Nazi 'Commissar Order' mandated the execution of captured Soviet commissars (Burds, 2018). Against this though, a few memoirs are open about the murder of Jews and partisans, and the policy of not taking prisoners. Roth recalls entering a town in Ukraine following a battle with Soviet forces: 'Meanwhile, a few comrades have pulled the remaining *Rotarmisten* [Red Army soldiers] and Jews from their hiding places. A solo gun performance echoed across the square ...' (Alexander and Kunze, 2010: loc. 329). In general, however, it is prudent to be alert to *post hoc* rationalisations and self-censorship in memoirs.

Fourthly, there is a distinct ethnocentrism in available sources with a bias towards Atlanticist sources. This reflects a wider 'whitewashing' of WWI and WWII where the

contribution of non-White troops is under-played (D'Costa, 2014). Fifthly, since armed forces in WWI and WWII were overwhelmingly male, military memoirs and combatant diaries tend to reflect the male experience. There are, however, excellent memoirs, diaries and collections of letters from female service personnel (Brittain, 2014; Ranfurly, 2018) and civilians (Bielenberg, 1984; Origo, 1985). These in particular are able to give a picture of war beyond battlefields and military organisations, and convey the political economies of warfare. An exception to the non-martial aspect of many female memoirs is the marvellous *Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II* (Aleksievich, 2018).

Sixthly, it is worth questioning the motivations behind memoir writing. In many cases, the motivations may be personal and cathartic. But there could be political motivations as well. In some cases, those on the losing side sought to re-write history. For example, it is noticeable that a number of post-WWII German memoirists sought to emphasise the pre-Nazi martial tradition and cast their own role in the war as part of an honourable military tradition. In some cases, their former Allied adversaries abetted them in this endeavour. The foreword of German fighter ace Adolf Galland's memoir, for example, is written by Douglas Bader, a famed British airforce pilot. Narratives like that promoted by Galland risk depoliticising, absolving and making all sides equivalent. As Galland noted at a public re-union event in the US, 'We didn't start a war. As always, the political leaders and politicians start wars, not the military. We just did our duty as you did your duty on your side' (Harris, 1984). Finally, some war memoirs have attracted controversy following accusations that they have been faked or embellished (Garrity, 2010; Kirsch, 2014).

It is worth noting that all research methodologies and sources are deserving of critical scrutiny and that researchers must make judgements on the authenticity of data, the agency of the researched to subvert research processes, and ethical and practical implications of the research. Moreover, it seems prudent that we see data sources as complementary rather than singular.

## **Demonstrating the utility of memoirs and diaries**

Having made the case for consideration of military memoirs and personal diaries as a research resource for contemporary PCS, the task now is to demonstrate their utility. This section seeks to demonstrate how such sources help shed light on three issue areas: gender; the blurring of distinctions between combatants/non-combatants; and micro-political economies. The section uses historical and more contemporary examples to show the continuities of experience across time, and indeed geography.

In terms of gender, memoirs and diaries usually reflect gender norms of the martial male and the civilian female. Females are often entirely absent from action-oriented memoirs, or appear as family members (usually assuming very traditional roles) or in service roles (for example, as nurses). There are, of course, exceptions to this. Sexual and gender-based violence is represented, but doubtless under-represented. Few memoirists and diarists recognise their own comrades as perpetrators (Kopelev is an exception on Russian atrocities at the end of WWII (Kopelev, 1977: 54 and 539) but many

note horrors inflicted by the enemy (Hartinger, 2019: 105). The ‘grey zone’, so well captured by Primo Levi’s reflection on his Holocaust experience, is often left unexplored (Lee, 2016).

One issue that shines through is female intersectionality and the multiple roles and identities that females often have to maintain to navigate through difficult situations. There are relatively few references to sex workers (Bottinger, 2012: loc. 373). There are, however, numerous references to soldiers having girlfriends or ‘fraternising’ in occupied territory, sometimes in situations where soldiers are billeted with families (Coutts, 1991: 90). This raises questions about the power dynamics, and the agency of women in contexts of martial law, armed men and few legal protections. In terms of micro-dynamics, the following excerpt well describes the tactical agency and emotional intelligence required to navigate through socially awkward, and potentially dangerous, circumstances. The excerpt comes from a letter by the mother of a two-year old boy who lived in Guernsey during its occupation by the Germans in WWII:

One day last week when I was rambling in these parts with junior, we looked up from picking wild flowers to behold a German soldier standing a few paces away. Peter, always ready for a new thrill, eagerly rushed into his outstretched arms as though he were a long-lost uncle. Imagine my dilemma with or without the possible raised eyebrows in the upper windows along our lane! There was our little renegade fingering the epaulettes and hat displaying the eagle of the Third Reich . . . The German, with his broad smile revealing gold filled teeth, looked for all the world as though ready to include me in his fond embrace.

. . . With, I thought, an admirable mixture of good nature, firmness and aplomb, I said to Peter John: ‘Say Good-Afternoon’: which he did. I then said: ‘Now say Goodbye’, which he also did, somewhat reluctantly. This done, the German took the hint, put him gently down and, clicking his heels, Heiled Hitler and departed, seemingly unoffended and quite unabashed.

The slightest sign of encouragement and the German would have accompanied us back home and probably become a frequent visitor: we would then have certainly been branded as fraternizers, if not actual collaborators, which we decidedly are not. Needless to say, like a dutiful wife, I told my husband of this encounter. His only comment was: ‘The poor devil – he is probably missing his own youngsters’ (Bachmann, 1972).

The excerpt illustrates the insights diaries, memoirs and letters can offer. The firsthand description of a single micro-incident captures embodied intersectionality and the multiple roles that the author must take: mother, wife, and non-threatening civilian who, at the same time, is anxious not to be seen as collaborating with the Germans. We see a repertoire of emotional skills and a quick-witted social awareness that was required to navigate through a potentially dangerous context. The excerpt also invites commentary on the power relationships and moral economies in operation during wartime. The deftness and tactical agency required by the female in WWII Guernsey is reflected in modern accounts of conflict. For example, a US veteran from the Iraq war recalls a female interpreter working with the US military: ‘When I’d catch her sitting by herself and reading, I’d hit her up for free Arabic lessons. She always happily obliged. We’d talk

about politics, Iraqi culture, books and Iraqi customs' (Buzzell, 2014). Eventually the interpreter stopped working for the US military after her sister was murdered. One can imagine very similar thought processes to those in the WWII Guernsey example: a female navigating a militarised, male environment with the possibility of accusations of collaboration ever present.

Moving onto micro-political economies during wartime, military memoirs and personal diaries provide multiple first-hand, often intimate, accounts of how families and individuals sought to survive the privations of wartime. The abiding wartime memory of some soldiers was hunger, and many frontline military memoirs and diaries contain accounts of looting and theft – often to supplement military rations (von Rosen, 2018: 57). In addition to theft through necessity, diaries and memoirs record trophy-hunting (Miller, 1999: v; Rehfeldt, 2019: 222). One WWII tank commander recalled that 'by the end of the campaign seeing an Allied soldier wearing several [stolen] watches on his wrist was not an uncommon sight' (Render and Tootal, 2016: 138). There were also numerous tales of bartering with locals (Lewis, 1978: 124). Indeed, in many war memoirs these are the only accounts of interaction with locals, albeit interaction of a purely transactional nature (Jünger, 2019: 159). The picture that emerges from many of the accounts is the normalisation of informal economies within militaries and between militaries and local populations. While doubtless there was profiteering, venality and gratuitous theft, there were also multiple acts of sustenance and survival (Givens, 2014). Military organisations that may appear, from the outside, as monolithic and able to support their personnel are rendered, in these accounts, as inefficient and uncaring. Thus, individual soldiers and small groups of comrades were forced to take action that probably was outside of their pre-war moral code. As one airman reflected, 'We had grown hard in this pitiless war' (Johnen, 2018: 186). These accounts, together with those by civilians, give us insights into the tactical agency and micro-decision-making necessary to navigate through difficult contexts. Such tactical agency among traders and soldiers can be found in blogs by US soldiers from post-Saddam Iraq (Gallagher, 2008a).

A third area of focus found in WWI and WWII military memoirs and diaries, and one that offers insights into contemporary debates in PCS, is the blurring of distinctions between civilians and the military. There is a misconception that WWI and WWII only involved organised militaries allied with nation states. Alongside these national military forces were a range of partisans, auxiliaries, deserters (Glass, 2013; Jünger, 2019: 401), armed civilians and child soldiers. Mass displacement, large-scale aerial bombing and the mobilisation of economies meant that these wars were mass participation events (whether that participation was voluntary or involuntary). The memoirs and personal diaries reveal a complex array of roles, with individuals and groups of individuals inhabiting multiple roles simultaneously or transitioning from one role to another. Thus, the memoirs invite us to consider the nature and scale of the conflict. As well as WWI and WWII being viewed as global conflicts, they can also be seen in terms of nationalist and identity-driven struggles, of personal distaste for militarism, and a simple struggle for survival.

More contemporary war memoirs have multiple instances of a blurring between civilian and military actors, and the split-second decisions soldiers often had to make based on their reading of a situation. Thus, for example, a British soldier in Afghanistan

recounts how a car approached his patrol, 'I could see a man get out of the vehicle and pull something from the back seat. I immediately trained my rifle partly to be able to react to anything dangerous . . . The bundle he was carrying in his arms was clearly a small child' (Wiseman, 2014: 93).

This section has illustrated that many of the issues covered in wartime personal diaries and military memoirs resonate with the contemporary study of peace and conflict. Although the modern academic and policy vernacular had yet to be invented, post-traumatic stress disorder, ethnic cleansing, human shields and many other familiar concepts are to be found in the literature. This raises a number of issues. The first is a useful reminder of the limits to novelty in human history. Organised violence, and attempts to staunch it, are many thousands of years old and it is worth asking if recent conflicts are qualitatively different from what went before (Kaufman, 1997: 175). A second point is to question why previous accounts of conflict and peacemaking seem to be excluded from much of the contemporary literature. Part of the reason lies in the specific developmental trajectory of academic disciplines. But it is worth conjecturing if (perhaps subliminally) temporal boundaries exist that see WWI and WWII, and conflicts before the 1989–1991 period, as being somehow unrelated to contemporary conflicts. Thirdly, it is worth considering how the study of events and processes in memoirs can be systematised and so be insulated from claims that they are 'anecdotal'.

## **Conclusion**

For its concluding discussion, the article returns to two debates in PCS that were mentioned in the Introduction: the appropriate level of analysis; and temporality.

The military memoirs and personal diaries are particularly useful in conveying quotidian details that might be missed by aggregated accounts. On their own, however, this granularity might tell us little about wider narratives of group struggle or grand strategy. Thus, there is a need to think about how the micro-details contained in memoirs and diaries might be aggregated with wider explanatory vehicles. Such processes are difficult as broader intellectual schemes, for example structuralist explanations, risk imposing meaning on micro-events. For this author, analytical schemes based on peace and conflict as constituting systems are particularly convincing, and allow us to escape top-down impositions whereby the national, international, or structural always trumps the hyper-local, anecdotal, or proximate. Although individual memoirs and personal diaries might be concerned with the often prosaic and highly localised, they contribute to wider systems of peace and conflict. In these systems, actors co-evolve and are involved in constant adaptation. Multiple parallel actions, at different levels, are in operation simultaneously (de Coning, 2018a: 305). De Coning draws on complexity theory to gain insights into the systemic nature of peace and conflict. A key characteristic of complexity theory, holism, means that 'the system needs to be understood as a whole' and 'is a community of elements that, as a result of their interconnections, form a whole' (de Coning, 2016: 168). Mac Ginty uses the notion of circuitry, biological and manufactured, to imagine a complex assemblage of factors, some major and others minor, as constituting a dynamic, messy and enduring system (Mac Ginty, 2019a). Other studies have questioned the framing of conflict and cooperation as 'mutually exclusive states at opposite

ends of the spectrum' (Martin et al., 2011: 621). For Mac Ginty, it seems prudent to render 'peace and conflict' into 'peaceandconflict' as they constitute the same system (Mac Ginty, 2019b: 267). Indeed, many wartime memoirs and personal diaries record periods of peace within violence and vice versa. So, for example, Charlie May, a British infantry officer serving on the Western Front in WWI was able to confide the following in his diary in March 1916:

Ram [a fellow officer] and I strolled by ourselves along the Somme this evening. There was a glorious sunset, all flaming pinks and greys stretching the full extent of the heavens and the broad, smooth waters of the river reflected this till the world seemed alight with a soft, still radiance most peaceful and witching to behold (May, 2015: loc. 1896).

A little over three months later, May was killed in the Battle of the Somme. The memoirs and personal diaries have numerous accounts of soldiers enjoying home leave days after partaking in brutal violence, or enjoying the pleasures of bars, fresh bedding and plentiful food in reserve areas behind the frontlines. Similarly, civilian accounts are tinged with the militarism and mobilisation that marked warfare. The picture that emerges is one in which it is impossible to hermetically compartmentalise one phenomenon from the other. Instead, they leach into the other temporally and experientially. This well-illustrates the value of historical and micro-sociological accounts in abetting the theorisation and conceptualisation of contemporary peace and conflict.

The second set of debates of interest to this article concerns temporality. Aside from methodological issues concerning memoirs that were often written long after the events described, there are important epistemological issues. One of these concerns the academic delimitation of historical events. Indeed, their categorisation as 'events' rather than processes illustrates the issue. The 'Since the end of the Cold War . . .' phenomenon means that many analyses of peace and conflict are separated from their historical hinterland, with the result that WWI, WWII, and other conflicts up to the 1989–1991 period are regarded as somehow unrelated to contemporary conflicts. This issue of temporal artificiality connects with the previous point of the utility of regarding peace and conflict through systemic lenses. Just as the different scales (hyper-local, local, national, international, transnational and everything in between) are connected it seems feasible that we emphasise temporal connectivity. Thus, WWI, WWII, and Cold War conflicts and processes, can be seen as contributing to subsequent processes and conflicts, and interpretations thereof. This is not achieved through a neat, linear process. Instead, through forgetting, misremembering and privileging some accounts over others, we are likely to have a messy understanding of how the past informs the present. We may maintain a fiction of an 'idealised linearisation' (Beyerchen, 1992: 63) for reasons of comprehensibility, but non-linearity seems a more accurate method of capturing social phenomena. Such an understanding is useful in evaluating the usefulness of historical sources for PCS.

This is not necessarily a call for an interest in long history and time frames so long they might be termed 'deep past' or the 'incommensurable past' (McGrath, 2021: 2). Instead, it is a call to think of how conflict processes have antecedents that are usually centuries long and pre-date current violence. Thus, conflict in Colombia might usefully

be seen as part of a dysfunctional statebuilding that began in 1810 with independence from Spain, but has deeper roots in Spanish colonialism. Or contemporary division in Northern Ireland can usefully be seen through the lens of the peculiar political economies and geographies that developed from the sixteenth century onwards and manifest themselves in politico-religious segregation to this day. It is not the case that these histories are unknown. It is the case, however, that these histories have been ignored or foreshortened in some analyses in contemporary PCS. The a-historicism in peace and conflict scholarship is curious as many foundational scholars of tension, war and peace took an overtly historical approach (Scott, 1976, 2017; Tilly, 1990). Students of genocide, transitional justice, and conflict heritage are, of course, historically-minded but often constitute specialist groups within PCS.

None of this is to especially privilege history. It is prone to the same frailties of other disciplines. History or histories can be multiple, confusing, inconvenient, inaccurate, and ignored. There is no guarantee that history brings redemption, emancipation, or progress (Scott, 2020: 87). Yet it is legitimate to see peace and conflict across time. This does not necessarily mean signing up to a metanarrative of ‘progress’, a necessarily unilinear direction of travel – nor taking European modernity as a central waypoint. Instead, it means accepting that insights from history are likely to be as messy as our understandings of the present. It also means recognising the deep power that attends our epistemologies and the hierarchies of knowledge that we construct and maintain. A critical contextualisation can help guard against that.

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