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# How Can Research Contribute to Peacebuilding?

## *Peacebuilding*

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**ABSTRACT**

How do we know whether or not research contributes to peacebuilding? And, what kind of positive or negative impacts may research have?  These two questions are conspicuous by their absence despite the large number of peacebuilding-specific research institutes, academic programmes, publishers, and funders.  Some of the reasons for the current state of affairs are examined:  the ambiguous, elastic, and politicized nature of 'peacebuilding' as a concept and as a practice; the inappropriateness of current approaches to the evaluation of research impact; and**,** the disconnection between the world of evaluators and the world of peace researchers.  The current article addresses these questions through an exploration of the intersection of research, evaluation methodology, and politics. The article concludes with preliminary framework for teasing out the specific kinds of peacebuilding impacts catalyzed through research.

## I:  Introduction

This article seeks to stimulate and sharpen critical discussion of the various ways in which research may support or undermine the cultivation of peaceful relations within violently divided societies. As discussed below, our focus includes all forms of research --not just that which is framed as, peacebuilding research.  Two Questions lie at the core of this article: ***how do we know whether or not research contributes to peacebuilding*? And*, what kind of positive or negative impacts**[2] *may research have*?**   These two questions are conspicuous by their absence despite the growing number of peacebuilding-specific research institutes, academic programmes, publishers, and funders.[3] The current article addresses these questions through an exploration of the intersection of research,

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[2] The term 'impact' is used in accordance with the definition offered by the OECD 2002: 'Positive and negative, primary and secondary, long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.'
[3]  A recent list of peacebuilding organisations may be found at the Peace and Collaborative Development Network:  http://www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org/profiles/blog/show?id=780588%3ABlogPost%3A158918&xgs=1&xg_source =msg_share_post#.Ub8WcKa9LCQ  . Accessed 19 June 2013

evaluation methodology, and politics.  This exploration requires us to bring together areas of research that have tended to be compartmentalized.  Drawing on examples of research used in Peace and Conflict Studies curricula in North American and British universities, the article concludes with a preliminary framework for teasing out the specific kinds of peacebuilding impacts that may be catalyzed through research.

There are a number of reasons for the current state of affairs including:  the ambiguous, elastic, and politicized nature of 'peacebuilding' as a concept and as a practice; the inappropriateness of current approaches to the evaluation of research impact; and**,** the disconnection between the world of evaluators and the world of peace researchers.  One of the motivations for writing this article is the observation that the absence of the systematic evaluation of research subsidizes peacebuilding funding and programming decisions that are based on selective anecdotal evidence or, worse, self-serving institutional and political interests.

We acknowledge that the societal impact of research is not black and white.  The same piece of research may have both positive and negative impacts simultaneously.  For example, a piece of research that illuminates the connections between structural violence and government policy or practice, may increase tensions as a necessary step towards positive societal change. Further, impact may fall into a gray zone – where further time and energy are required before impacts are more clearly evident.   We do not wish to create the impression that impact is dichotomously black or white.  Our use of the language of positive and negative impact, should be seen more as two antipodal points on a continuum, rather than a suggestion that impact is conceived (or experienced) as being uniquely dichotomous.

### *Peacebuilding, evaluation, and research*

 Over the last few years, the challenge of systematically evaluating the peacebuilding impacts of international interventions (projects, programs and policies) have begun to attract the attention of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers.[4]  However, in reviewing these, and other initiatives, a number of features become strikingly apparent.

**First**, conceptually and theoretically, there has been a conspicuous disconnection between the field of Peace and Conflict Studies on the one hand, and Evaluation Research and Practice[5], on the other hand.  This is well-illustrated by the absence of evaluation themes at the major conferences of Political Studies Associations and of Peace Studies Associations.  A similar absence is evident in the lack of attention paid to the challenges to peacebuilding evaluation -- and to evaluation in conflict zones more generally -- at major gatherings of professional evaluators.

**Second**, at a pragmatic level there has been very little interaction between peace researchers and 'hard core evaluators' – that cadre of professionally trained evaluators who make their living conducting evaluations as individual consultants, or as part of larger organizations.  Here, it is

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[4]  For examples, see: The Learning Portal for Design, Monitoring and Evaluation for Peacebuilding (http://dmeforpeace.org/); the Alliance for Peace Peacebuilding Evaluation Project (http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/?page=workpep); and the OECD Guidelines on *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility* (OECD 2012). See also:  Andrew Blum, *Improving Peacebuilding Evaluation – A whole-of-Field Approach*, US Institute of Peace, Special Report 280 (June 2011); Svein Erik Stave, *Measuring peacebuilding: challenges, tools, actions.* NOREF Policy Brief No.2, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (2011); and Monitoring and Evaluation NEWS (http://mande.co.uk/).

[5]  By 'evaluation research,' we are referring to that research which focuses on the theory and practice of evaluation as is published in such journals of the *American Journal of Evaluation*; *New Directions for Evaluation*; and *Evaluation - The International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice.*

important to distinguish between (1) external, independent evaluators who define themselves as a professional community, and are usually members of Evaluation Associations and (2) those who also undertake evaluations (often internal evaluations), but whose expertise is practice-based and shaped narrowly to the project or programme being evaluated – perhaps due to geographical or sectoral knowledge and experience.  This would include researchers, academics, former programme managers, policy makers, and so on.  This distinction in no way belittles the professionalism of this latter group or the quality of their evaluations.  However, this second group often has limited contact with the broader field of evaluation methods, research, and practice, and herein lays the problem.  This underscores a fundamental difference in the range and methodological scope of evaluation actors, approaches, techniques and tools at the disposal of evaluators, both professional or otherwise.[6]

**Third**, and most importantly for the purposes of this article, all of these new peacebuilding evaluation initiatives – developed and driven within the peacebuilding industry -- have focused uniquely on self-labeled peacebuilding projects and programmes.  *None of them have focused on research projects and programmes.*

### *Research impact*

There is no clear, or agreed upon, definition of research impact.  However, Sandra Nutley *et al* offer a useful distinction between the *conceptual use* of research which 'brings about changes in levels of understanding, knowledge and attitude,' and the *instrumental use* of research which 'results in changes in practice and policy making'.[7]  From this two-fold categorization, we are able to identify a variety of generic research impacts: changes in access to research; changes in the extent to which research is considered, referred to, or read; citation in documents; changes in knowledge and understanding; changes in attitudes and beliefs; and changes in behavior.[8]  The Academy of Social Sciences adds three further possible impacts to the list: research that produces counter-intuitive findings (i.e., that contradict 'common sense' views); 'research which has a clear cost-benefit calculation attached or which has led directly to a cost-saving prevention of ineffective spending; and research which has a direct impact on the formulation of legislation, or a change in the law.[9]  The current article seeks to focus this discussion onto the peacebuilding-specific impacts of research – intended and unintended..

As noted above, we include all forms of research within the analytical scope of our inquiry, whether it is labeled 'peacebuilding' research or 'conventional' research.  That is, we include research that does not contain explicitly stated peacebuilding objectives, but which -- by virtue of <u>where</u> it is conducted (i.e., a conflict-prone setting, broadly defined), or <u>how</u> it is conducted, or its social, political, or economic <u>implications</u> -- will likely affect the structures and processes of 'peace' or conflict.

Monitoring and evaluating the peacebuilding or conflict-exacerbating impact of research in conflict zones requires a thick understanding of the social, political, security and economic context within which the research is set.  There are a number of implications that follow from this fact.  First, the assessment of peacebuilding or conflict-aggravating impact of research will require us to go beyond

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[6] For a glimpse of the range of this diversity of evaluation approaches, see the American Evaluation Association's  'AEA 365/ A Tip-a-Day by and for Evaluators: Aea365.org/blog/
[7] Sandra Nutley, Janie Percy-Smith, and William Solesbury, *Models of research impact: a cross-sector review of literature and practice (*London: Learning and Skills Research Centre, 2003).
[8] *Ibid*
[9]  ASS (2013). 'The impact of Social Science Research,' *Professional Briefings*. Academy of Social Sciences.

its stated or intended outputs of the research project (often, little more than reporting to a funder that a seminar has taken place, or that a monograph has been prepared).  Second, research may affect peace or conflict dynamics regardless of whether it is framed as peacebuilding research. And, lastly, monitoring and evaluation needs to consider unintended outcomes of research processes and products.   This is illustrated in the diagramme below.
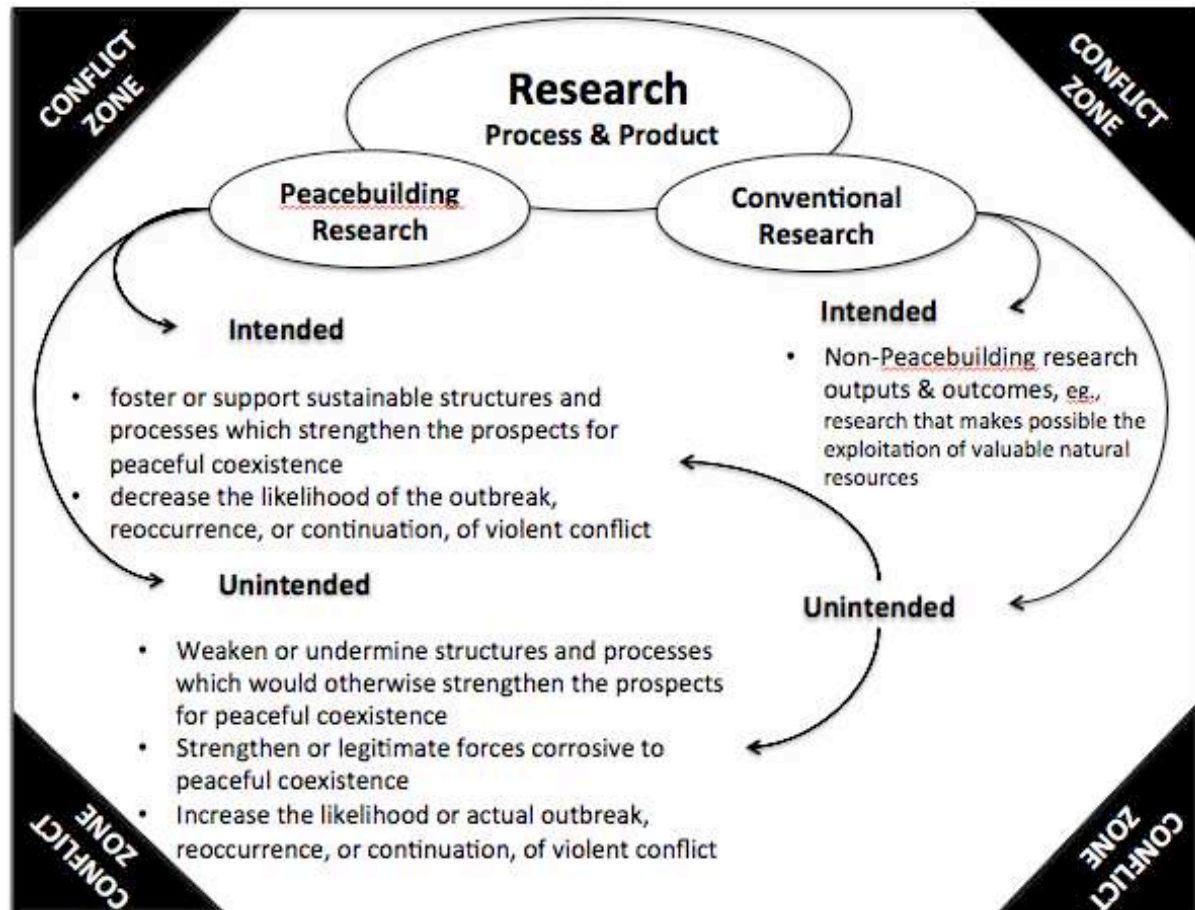


**Diagramme 1: Intended and Unintended Peacebuilding impacts of Research**

Research may be university based, or non-university based.  Indeed, there has been a notable proliferation of organizations undertaking research on pressing social problems over the last twenty-five years.  This includes independent Think Tanks, NGOs, specialized units within bilateral and multilateral organizations, private sector research units, independent research centres, and so on. Here, it is important to note that to the extent research is undertaken by 'practitioners-researchers,' then more systematic efforts are typically made to connect ideas to application – whether this is reflected in the selection and framing of research topics, the composition of the research partners (e.g., engaged stakeholders – not only traditional researchers), the nature of the research process (participatory, stakeholder-led), or the format of the research products (policy briefs, reader-friendly reports, video-based research products, and so on) .

*Research in conflict contexts*

 In orienting ourselves to the evaluation of societal impacts of research, we cannot overlook the cases where it has had profoundly negative social impacts: pseudo-science in the eugenics movement in the early 20th century; anthropological research in support of the Apartheid and Nazi regimes; intelligence testing using culturally inappropriate, or ideologically-driven, psychological

methods; dubious archeological and historical research to legitimate moral or legal claims to contested territory; to role of psychiatrists in 'refining' interrogation and torture techniques.[10]

However, it bears emphasizing that a research product (report, article, or book), *on its own,* does not have an automatic societal impact – even if it seeks explicitly to affect policy and practice, or is packaged in a manner that increases accessibility and possibilities for uptake and application. There are many steps between: the conceptualization and conduct of a piece of research; the fashioning of a research product; the social, political, and economic context within which research is undertaken; its dissemination; its up-take (use, application, commercialization, and so on) and finally, its impact - intended or unintended. It behooves us to consider the ways in which the research *process* [11] – as well as the research *product* – may itself may have positive or negative societal influences in subtle, and not-so-subtle, ways. Thus, for example, very basic issues, such as the ethnic, linguistic, or gender composition of a research team, may have positive or negative effects when set in a conflict zone where such identity traits have been politicized.

When considering peacebuilding impact, we need to take into account the fluid, volatile, and politicized nature of the environment within which research is undertaken or disseminated. Such 'environmental' or 'contextual' conditions shape the structures and processes through which research may be used for good (peacebuilding) or for ill (conflict creation or exacerbation). They may also create an environment within which research findings become a political football for those with vested interests within a conflict zone. These vested interests are as likely to be found in the Global North as in the Global South. Conversely, there may be moments within a conflict (or, more accurately, within a set of multiple, overlapping, conflicts) where there is greater receptivity to new ideas and research; where the 'old ways of thinking' are discredited; and where there are demands for new ways of understanding. This may be evident, for example, following the signing of a peace agreement, or following a fundamental structural transformation, as we saw in the early post-Cold War period when the definition of security was broadened beyond the myopically state-focused realist and neorealist lens to include such issues as environmental conflict, food insecurity, and so on.

Throughout the writing of this article, we returned repeatedly to the question: How does conflict context affect the process of evaluating the societal impact of research? We come to the conclusion that the fluid, unpredictable and volatile contexts that characterize conflict zones magnify existing challenges for the production and use of research, rendering them more 'extreme.'[12] For example, there is the perennial problem of scarce or nonexistent baseline data which stymies measurement of change. This is an issue that plagues most empirical research. However, this problem is amplified in conflict contexts, where hard data has often been destroyed or is simply inaccessible for a host of reasons related to insecurity, censorship, or neglect. But even if data of some sort is available, there are limits on the comparability of data within cases, across cases, and across space and time -- a more extreme manifestation of problems of generalizability or external validity. This is true whether

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[10] For a sampling of research in these fields, refer to: Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (Westport, CT: Dialogue Press, 2008); Elof Axel Carlson, *The Unfit: A History of a Bad Idea* (Cold Spring Harbor, New York: Cold Spring Harbor Press, 2001); Ruth C. Engs, *The Eugenics Movement: An Encyclopedia,* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005); Robert Gordon, 'Apartheid's Anthropologists: The Genealogy of Afrikaner Anthropology', *American Ethnologist* 15, no. 3 (1988): 535-553; Bettina Schmit, *Creating Order: Culture as Politics in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century South Africa* (The Hague: CIP-Gegevens Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 1996); Benedict Carey, 'U.S. psychologists debate role in military interrogations' *New York Times*, August 16, 2008.
[11] Indeed, some approaches to research, such as participatory action research (PAR), seek explicitly to empower and capacitate participants. A large volume of work on the methodology and practice of PAR has accumulated since its origin in the mid-1940s. For a review of current thinking, see the journal *Action Research* published by SAGE.
[12] Kenneth Bush and Colleen Duggan, ed. *Evaluation in Extremis: the politics and impact of research in violently divided societies* (Delhi: SAGE, forthcoming 2014).

we are working in regions of militarized violence (Palestine or Afghanistan), social violence (favelas) or criminalized violence (zones under the control of drug gangs throughout the Global North and South). Within such contexts, assessing peacebuilding impact without a clear sense of the baseline conditions is problematic.[13]

By and large, the international community is beginning to understand that it would be problematic, for example, to undertake an evaluation of the primary education system in Afghanistan which did not take into consideration the violently contested environment within which it is nested. The same sensibility has yet to take root within the realm of research evaluation.

## II: Conceptual-political challenges

### *The ambiguity, elasticity and politics of peacebuilding*

The first step to answering the question 'how does research contribute to peacebuilding' requires clarity about what is meant by *peacebuilding*. Knowing what kind of impact to look for is essential for knowing where to look for it. However, the conceptual and political debates over the meaning and operationalization of this term complicate efforts to answer this question. Different stakeholders have different understandings and expectations of peacebuilding impact. Peacebuilding impact might be used to denote: mutual understanding; attitudinal change; perceptual change; individual and/or collective behavioral change; policy change; social structural change; desegregation; violence reduction; and improvement in inter-group and intra-group interaction. Thus, delineating peacebuilding impact is not as simple as finding, formulating, and consistently using a specific definition of 'peacebuilding.'

Despite the ubiquity of the term, its meaning and application are both ambiguous and elastic. It is ambiguous in the sense that its meaning appears to chameleonize to fit very different kinds of activities – which may, or may not, have positive 'peacebuilding' impacts upon closer inspection.[14] However, the term 'peacebuilding' is also elastic in that it is stretched to apply to a diverse range of actions, by a heterogeneous group of actors, in a variety of conflict-prone environments, to suit pre-existing institutional interests.[15] In extreme cases, this produces incongruous situations where, for example, 'peacebuilding' funds are deployed by armed forces either for dubious self-proclaimed peacebuilding objectives – as when the UK Global Conflict Prevention Fund was used to purchase military supplies and aircraft for the Nepalese government during the Maoist insurrection.[16] This incongruity – if not disingenuity -- is also evident in the application of peacebuilding language to counter-insurgency strategies.[17]

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[13] Problematic, but not impossible. For examples of ways to overcome the absence of baseline data through the use of counterfactual methodologies and comparative cases, see: Kenneth Bush and Colleen Duggan, 'Evaluation in Conflict Zones: Methodological and Ethical Challenges', *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 8, no. 2 (2013): 5-25. See also Michael Bamberger, ,J. Rugh & L. Mabry, L. (2006). *Real World Evaluation: Working Under Budget, Time, Data, and Political Constraints* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2006).

[14] This argument is developed from a field perspective by Denskus 2007.

[15] Michael Barnett, Hunjoon Kim, Madalene O'Donnell, & Laura Sitea, 'Peacebuilding: What Is in a Name?', *Global Governance* 13, no.1 (2007): 35–58.

[16] 'Peace fund used to buy military planes,' *The* Guardian 23 January 2004. http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2004/jan/23/uk.military/print This process is described by some analysts as the militarization of peacebuilding in Kenneth Bush, ' Commodification, Compartmentalization, and Militarization of Peacebuilding,' in Tom Keating and Andy W. Knight, ed, *Building Sustainable Peace.* (UN University/ University of Alberta Press, Tokyo & Edmonton, 2004), 97-123.

[17] Jamie A Williamson, 'Using humanitarian aid to 'win hearts and minds': a costly failure?' *International Review of the Red Cross* 93, no. 884 (2011): 1035-1061.

Our examination of the conceptual parameters of peacebuilding is assisted by the study by Barnett et al. which finds that: 'different agencies use a wide variety of terms that are related to but are not necessarily synonymous with peacebuilding. Even more confusing, some use the same term, peacebuilding, in slightly different ways…. This differentiation [owes] partly to the prevailing organization mandates and networks.  The organization's mandate will heavily influence its reception to, and definition and revision of, the concept of peacebuilding'.[18]

The ambiguity and elasticity of 'peacebuilding' have proved useful to development organizations looking for ways to to off-set shrinking ODA budgets. An initiative that might have once been identified as an education project or food security project in a conflict-prone area, may be re-cast as a peacebuilding project.[19]  It has, for example, been a common refrain throughout the PEACE Programmes in Northern Ireland and the border region (1995-2013) that peace funds were used for non-peace related projects that should have fallen within the purview of normal government spending.[20]  Further, once a peacebuilding industry is established, processes of institutionalization and organizational self-perpetuation are set in motion *independently of impact*.   As Mitchell and Kelly point out: "This is one of the ironies: on one hand, promoters of peacebuilding are pressured to show the ''success'' of their efforts by erasing evidence of conflict; but on the other, they must use this evidence to secure their own futures'.[21] This is not new; nor is it particular to peacebuilding.  The argument is an extension of the field-based work of Hancock[22] on the development industry, and Polman[23] on the humanitarian industry.  However, it does point to the establishment of a peacebuilding industry driven by a political economy characterized by mixed motives and 'dysfunctional, even pathological, behavior.'[24]   For the purposes of this paper, it underscores a particular challenge to conceptualizing 'peacebuilding' within the zero-sum context of the political-economic competition of the peacebuilding industry.

One of the striking features of mainstream understandings of peacebuilding appears to be unintentional.  As Barnett *et al* write: 'peacebuilding is generically understood as *external* interventions that are intended to reduce the risk that a state will erupt into or return to war' (2007: 37, emphasis added).  This points to an awkward truth in the mainstream research and programming in peacebuilding: namely, the top-down, externally-driven and foreign funded, character of the exercise; and the concomitant ignorance of Southern or local engagements in the exercise, other than as a 'target' population of victims.

In an effort to avoid integrating this top-down bias into our use of the term 'peacebuilding,' the current article adopts the approach employed in the PEACE III Programme in Northern Ireland, based on an evaluation methodology called Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) or 'Aid for Peace.'[25]  Peacebuilding is 'not about the imposition of 'solutions,' it is about the creation of

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[18] Barnett et al, *What's in a Name*, 37

[19]  And indeed, these *may* be peacebulding projects.  However, the absence systematic monitoring and evaluation of these projects for potential peacebuilding impacts, and the continued blue print approach to programming, should induce caution about accepting them as peacebuilding projects.

[20] Brian Harvey, *Review of the PEACE II Programme* (York, UK: Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, 2003), 26, 102; Catherine Lynch, 'Evaluating the Peace-Building Impact of Structural Funds Programmes - The EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland', *Evaluation* 13, no. 1 (2007): 8- 31.

[21] Audra Mitchell and Liam Kelly, 'Peaceful Spaces? "Walking" through the New Liminal Spaces of Peacebuilding and Development in North Belfast', *Alternatives* 36, no. 4 (2011), 316.

[22] Graham Hancock, *Lords of poverty : the power, prestige, and corruption of the international aid business* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998)

[23] Linda Polman, *We Did Nothing: Why the Truth Does not Always Come Out When the UN Goes In* (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

[24]  A phenomenon addressed broadly by Michael Barnett,and Martha Finemore, 'The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations', *IO* 53, no. 4 (1999): 699-732

[25]  The most vigorous debates over this approach were hosted by the Berghof Centre and published in its Handbook for Constructive Conflict Management, see: http://www.berghof-handbook.net/

opportunities. The challenge is to identify and nurture the political, economic, and social space, within which *indigenous* actors can identify, develop, and employ the resources necessary to build a peaceful, prosperous, and just society'.[26]  Peacebuilding is understood *as an impact* or *outcome.* That is, the emphasis is *not* on a particular 'type' of activity such as those listed by Boutros Ghali -- human rights projects, security sector reform, democratic institution strengthening, public sector reform, and more nebulously, 'good governance' projects. Rather, 'peacebuilding' refers to *any* activity that fosters or supports sustainable structures and processes that strengthen the prospects for peaceful coexistence and decrease the likelihood of the outbreak, reoccurrence, or continuation, of violent conflict.  This is a two-fold process that seeks to deconstruct the structures of violent conflict, and construct the structures of peace.[27]

By aligning oursalves with this particular definition, the current article similarly includes research initiatives that would not conventionally be assessed through a peacebuilding lens. By the same token, this approach eschews the uncritical acceptance of research activities as 'peacebuilding' initiatives by definitional fiat. If a peacebuilding-as-impact is adopted, then the failure of a research project may be more than the failure to produce research outputs.  It may be the creation or exacerbation of conflict, possibly, with lethal consequences.

### III:  Political-methodological challenges to evaluating research impact

#### *Within the university*

Calls for the systematic evaluation of research follow a trajectory similar to the calls in the 1960s for the evaluation of public programmes in the United States.[28] In the 1980s, with the rallying cry of 'Value for Money' (without really defining value),  government funders began to demand 'evidence that [research] funds met the 'three Es' of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness'.[29]   In the UK, this resulted in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)[30] followed by the Research Excellence Framework (REF).[31]   The Australian equivalent was the Research Quality Framework.[32] While these initiatives opened the possibility for considering research impact beyond the narrow academic realm, they also created the space for the overt politicization of research through the selective allocation public funds.  Consequently, the social value and relevance of research was 'imposed on academia from outside, largely driven by economic concerns,' which led to 'wild swings' in government policy and funding of public research.[33]

Government-led calls for accountability stimulated debate within the university setting about the question of how best to assess the quality of research and its 'extra-academic' impacts (*i.e.* the contribution of research to social and economic betterment).  The intensity of this debate is tied more to the funding implications of the exercise, than to a desire to optimize societal impact as illustrated in a comment from a director of a research institute in a UK university: 'This work may be making the world a better place, but it is not contributing to the [financial] bottom line of the

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[26] Bush, *The Commodification of Peacebuilding.*

[27] *Ibid*.

[28]  P.H. Rossi, and M.W. Lipsey, *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach.* (London: Sage, 2004).

[29] Ben R. Martin,  'The Research Excellence Framework and the 'impact agenda': are we creating a Frankenstein monster?' *Research Evaluation* 20, no. 3 (2011): 247–25.

[30]  Research Assessment Exercises were undertaken in 1986, 1992, 1996, 2001, and 2008.  The Research Excellence Framework will be held in 2014.  See: http://www.rae.ac.uk/aboutus/history.asp (Accessed, 22 june 2013).

[31]  See http://www.ref.ac.uk/ (Accessed 22 June 2013).

[32]  See: Claire Donovan, 'The Australian Research Quality Framework: A live experiment in capturing the social, economic, environmental, and cultural returns of publically funded research', *New Directions for Evaluation* 118 (2008): 47-60.

[33] Paul Nightingale and Alister Scott, 'Peer review and the relevance gap: ten suggestions for policy-makers', *Science and Public Policy* 34, no. 8 (2007), 544.

university.[34]  Mendez notes that one of the consequent pathologies of this process is that 'tying funding to research evaluation may generate incentives for researchers to focus on topics where they can have faster results, [thus] compromis[ing]academic freedom and the production of research that can have long-term effects'.[35]

Ultimately, the game-playing for government funding can undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the evaluation exercise, while inhibiting the conduct of the kind of research that might effect positive social change.  A few examples will suffice.  There is the case where the response by British researchers to a Science Minister's use of university spin-offs as an indicator of technology transfer, was to launch ghost 'start-up' companies – most of which 'never amounted to much more than a registered company name and a single employee (the founder).[36]  So too, is this evident in the ' "phantom" foreign academics paid substantial sums of money by UK universities to provide their publications for the [RAE] audit, but who rarely, if ever, attend the university'.[37]  These two examples point to the institutional chicanery that becomes possible through – indeed incentivized by – inappropriate approaches to research evaluation.

A much more conspicuous characteristic of the evaluation of university-generated research is the use of methodologies which privilege academic impacts, rather than contributions to societal change.  Consequently, a very narrow approach to the evaluation of research has been adopted, relying upon: (1) *bibliometrics*, which essentially consist of totting up the number of citations or bibliographic references to a piece of research being 'evaluated';[38] and (2) *peer reviews,* undertaken by the gatekeepers of the academic industry.[39]  The former relies on objective, quantifiable, indicators. The latter relies on (frequently idiosyncratic) peer opinion. In neither case, does societal impact constitute an explicit feature of the evaluation of research.[40]   Within the university context, it is not surprising then, that there is no systematic consideration of how research may affect, or is affected by, the structures and processes of conflict or peace.  Indeed, to the extent that professional advancement is predicated upon publication in 'the right' academic journals, then the finely wrought, English-language, pedantry required of such texts, renders them inaccessible to most of those outside of the university setting – even if they possessed the considerable financial resources necessary to access this material in electronic or paper form.

### *Beyond the University*

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[34]  Name withheld.  See also L. Yates, 'Is Impact a measure of Quality? Some Reflections on the Research Quality and Impact Assessment Agendas', *European Educational Research Journal* 4, no. 4 (2005): 391-403; and and Martyn Hammersley, 'Troubling criteria: A critical commentary on Furlong and Oancea's framework for assessing educational research.' *British Educational Research Journal* 34, no. 6 (2008): 747-762.

[35]  IDRC, *What's in Good – Evaluating IDRC Research Excellence,'* (Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre, 2012). prepared by Ethel Mendez IDRC Evaluation Unit.

[36]  Ben R. Martin,  'The Research Excellence Framework and the 'impact agenda':, 250.

[37]   Paul Nightingale and Alister Scott, 'Peer review and the relevance gap: ten suggestions for policy-makers', *Science and Public Policy* 34, no. 8 (2007), 247.

[38] For a well-grounded methodological critique of applying bibliometrics to Social Sciences and Humanities Research, see SSHRCC, *The Use of Bibliometrics in the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Ottawa: The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2004).

[39] According to Coryn, few rigorous studies have been undertaking of the 'workings of peer review,' despite its 'importance as the basic mechanism for judging the merits of most research.' In one of the most complete and critical analysis of the peer review system, Ciccetti found that 'the reliability of most reviews is no better than would have occurred by chance.' Cited in Chris Coryn, 'Editor's Note,' in *New Directions for Evaluation* 118 (2008): 1-3.

[40] For balanced discussions and critiques of how the evaluation of research (particularly its 'impact') has developed in the UK university system see: Martin, *The Research Excellence Framework and the Impact Agenda*;  Nightengale and Scott, *Peer Review and the* Relevance; and Ben R. Martin and Richard Whitley, 'The UK Research Assessment Exercise: a case of regulatory capture?' in *Reconfiguring Knowledge Production: Changing Authority Relationships in the Sciences and their Consequences for Intellectual Innovation*, ed. Richard Whitley, J. Gläser and L. Engwall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 51–80.

Are efforts to evaluate the peacebuilding-specific impact of research any more robust *outside of the university?* Here, we face a number of daunting methodological challenges. **First**, evaluating the extra-academic or societal impacts of research is arguably more difficult than measuring the more easily quantifiable types of impacts involving the totting up of citations. **Second**, to the extent that evaluation of any type is undertaken in violent, volatile environments, it is confronted by obstacles imposed by the most extreme operational, ethical and political challenges that a researcher or evaluator could expect to encounter. **Third**, there is the problem of the longer-term timeframe typically required to affect unambiguous and measureable change (sometimes called 'the timeline of impact problem') as well as fact that societal change is tangled up with a multiplicity of factors or variables (the 'multiple pathways problem').[41] **Fourth**; research funders need to 'show results' within institutional time frames that are considerably shorter than what is typically required to see tangible change. And lastly, there is the perpetual problem of attributing specific changes to specific pieces of research (the 'attribution problem').

Researchers reported that funders either did not require evidence of the 'extra-academic' influence of their research -- or that such requests lacked conviction, coherence, or follow-up.[42] Typically, research council funders required confirmation that a specific research output had been produced -- a book, article, and so on. On the other hand, research funded by bilateral or multilateral aid agencies or by private philanthropy, was more likely to encounter an evaluator – albeit, as part of the evaluation of a larger programme. In such cases, evaluation focused not on the research *per se*, but on the project or program within which the research was undertaken – often development or humanitarian initiatives. Thus, the focus for evaluation was the administrative or operational mechanisms within which research was embedded ('the project'), rather than research quality or effectiveness, such as the reach, influence, use or societal impacts of the research itself. There are two possible explanations: First, in the absence of frameworks that assess research effectiveness, research funders still rely on traditional approaches to assessment, namely bibliometrics and peer review.[43] Second, the development and humanitarian agencies which may fund research as part of a peacebuilding intervention, are also locked into evaluation frameworks and approaches that are ill-equipped for evaluating the effects of research.

While bibliometics and peer review are the overwhelmingly dominant methods to the evaluation of research, other methodologies within conventional programme evaluation may lend themselves to a more societally-focused assessment. This would include: (social) network analysis, case studies, tracer methodologies, spillover analysis, data-mining and visualization, econometric and other statistical modeling techniques.[44] These methods have yet to be applied systematically to efforts to tease out societal impacts of research – and still lack a systematic consideration of the impact of violent context on these methods, and vice versa.[45]

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[41] For a recent review of these challenges with reference to Development Research, see Andy Sumner, N. Ishmael-Perkins and , J. Lindstrom, 'Making Science of Influencing: Assessing the Impact of Development Research', *IDS Working Papers 335.* Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, (2009).

[42] Bush and Duggan, *Evaluation in Extremis*.

[43] IDRC, *What's in Good?*

[44] See: R. Ruegg and I. Feller, ed. *A toolkit for evaluating public R&D investment: Models, methods, and findings from ATP's first decade.* (Washington D.C: U.S. Department of Commerce, Technology Administration, National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2002); and R. Ruegg and G. Jordan, *Overview of evaluation methods for R&D programs: A directory of evaluation methods relevant to technology development programs*. (Washington D.C: U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, 2007).

[45] Andy Sumner, N. Ishmael-Perkins and J. Lindstrom, 'Making Science of Influencing: Assessing the Impact of Development Research', *IDS Working Papers 335.* Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, (2009).

Unless we evaluate research through a broader societal lens, we have no systematic or empirical understanding of when, why, and how, it may inform programming, policy, or practice.  Societally-focused evaluation of research in conflict contexts, is not a luxury – it is essential.  The final section in this article offers some suggestions as to the nature of peacebuilding impact that may be catalyzed through research.

**IV: From critique to possibility: learning from experience**

The final section of this article shifts from what Henri Giroux calls a 'language of critique' to 'a language of possibility' by identifying a wide range of examples in which research *appear* to have had positive peacebuilding impacts.[46]  A number of caveats are in order here.  Regarding the criteria of text selection: each is selected from among over 30 syllabi developed and used in various graduate and undergraduate programmes of Peace and Conflict Studies in North America and the UK. Second caveat: a full understanding of societal impact of each of these examples of research would require a full, systematic, and comprehensive evaluation.  In the absence of such an evaluation, the indicative nature of these examples needs to be emphasized.  While they point to possible impacts – and contribute to the drafting of a taxonomy of peacebuilding impacts – we must exercise humility by recognizing both the complexity of a violence-prone environment, and multi-causal factors involved in societal impact and change.

We identify seven modalities through which research may have peacebuilding impacts. While space constraints inhibit a full examination of each modality, when collated together, they suggest the outline of a framework for delineating and exploring the peacebuilding impacts of research. The seven modalities are:

1. Analysis of the Complexities of Conflict and of Peace
2. Problem-Solving
3. Problematization
4. Programme Development and Input
5. Policy Development and Input
6. Capacity Building
7. Creation and Protection of Neutral Intellectual Space

*Analysis of the complexities of conflict and of peace*

Research can make the connections between different, and simultaneously occurring, forms of conflict – such as militarized violence, organized crime, social violence (such as social cleansing), gendered violence, and so on.  It can help us to understand when, why and how non-violent conflict becomes violent; and conversely, how cultures of violence may move towards cultures of peace. There can be no conflict resolution without a clear understanding of the nature of the problems to be addressed, and the opportunities that may be available (or that may need to be created), in order to transform conflict and to nurture peaceful outcomes.  For example, comparative research may introduce new ideas into efforts to address seemingly intractable problems in conflict zones, such as when efforts to address post-conflict demands for justice and reparation draw lessons from other cases where different transitional justice mechanisms have been developed and implemented.[47] Conventional research too, may affect the cost-benefit calculations of the costs of war, or the

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[46] Henry A. Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin Garvey, 1988).

[47] See for example, the work of Priscilla Hayner (2011) on truth commissions.

dividends of peace or cooperation – in so doing they contribute to the recontextualizing peace or conflict.

*Examples*

- Historical research on the linkages between 'what was' and 'what is,' OR between 'what happened' and 'what is happening'  -- as is evident in the work of Peter Shirlow on the paramilitary realities in the post-Peace Agreement Northern Ireland.[48]
- Psychological research on conflict-induced psycho-social trauma – as in the work of Shalhoub-Kevorkian in Palestine and Israel.[49]
- Research on the political structures and processes that might accommodate competing interests of different communities, for example, the work of Donald Horowitz political institutions and ethnic conflict.[50]
- Anthropological research on 'cultures of violence' and 'cultures of peace' *e.g.,* the phenomenon of 'recreational riots,' or segregated schooling.[51]
- Survey research tracking changing perceptions and attitudes over time (Northern ireland Life and Times Survey[52])

### *Problem-solving*

This particular modality refers to research that makes explicit connections between the nature of a problem, and how it may be resolved.  A distinction should be drawn between research which is theoretically-focused (i.e., draws on and builds theory), and that which is action-focused and applied. The largely university-based, theoretically-focused, research may make important contributions to the conceptual delineation of structures and processes of peace and conflict. However, on-the-ground impact is sometimes limited by researchers' lack of practical or lived experience on the ground – whether within a conflict zone, or within a policy making environment. 'Action-focused, or applied, research,' on the other hand, is rooted in both theory and practice. While this may be undertaken within the walls of the university, it is more likely to be generated by non-university-based researchers. This latter source of research tends to be more grounded in the experiences and needs within violently divided societies – and is more likely to be driven by a desire to address problems on the ground, rather than problems in the literature.

*Examples*

- This may include the 'problem-solving' workshops that bring together Palestinian and Israelis or Turkish and Greek Cypriots[53]; and the 'Getting to yes' workshops seeking to find common ground between adversaries.[54]

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[48]  Peter Shirlow, 'A Prosperity of Thought in an Age of Austerity: The Case of Ulster Loyalism', *The Political Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (2012): 238-246.

[49]  Nadeera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 'The Political Economy of Children's Trauma', *Feminism & Psychology* 19, no. 3 (2009): 335–342.

[50] Donald Horowitz, 'Making Moderation Pay: The Comparative Politics of Ethnic Conflict Management' in *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies*, ed.  Joseph Montville (Lexington and Toronto: Lexington Press, 1990), 451-476.

[51]  Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, 'Introduction,' in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, ed. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 1-32.

[52]  Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey may be found at: http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/

[53]  Benjamin J. Broome, *Designing the Future of Peace-Building Efforts in Cyprus*. Report of Design Workshops held during Fall 1994 and Spring of 1995 with Conflict Resolution Trainers and Project Leaders. Workshops Sponsored by Cyprus Fulbright Commission. Nicosia, Cyprus. Prepared 12 January 1996.

[54]  Roger Fisher, William Ury and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving in* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992).

- Research on the post-conflict question of how to redress the wrongs perpetrated by state and armed actors on civilians, such as Dinah Shelton's *Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity*.[55]

*Problematization*

It is often not appreciated how important – and threatening -- it is to question taken-for-granted, and therefore unquestionable, truths.  However, this is a way in which research may contribute to the generation of alternative ways of thinking, knowing, and doing in the broad field of peacebuilding. This is illustrated in the way ignored (but pressing) issues find their way onto the political agendas through research. 'Problematization' is about the way in which research may highlight problems that have been ignored.  Problematization places pressing issues into public consciousness, and onto political agenda, from local to international levels.

*Examples*

- The Irish Peace Centres  project on the evaluation of storytelling as a peacebuilding methodology exploring the unasked question: how do we know whether the story telling initiative is contributing to reconciliation or reinforcing difference?[56]
- The research challenging uncritical, one-dimensional, understandings of core concepts, or practices such as 'peacebuilding', 'reconciliation', and 'fragile states'.[57]
- The research that thrust the previously ignored practice of rape as a weapon of war onto the international agenda – leading to its inclusion in UN resolutions and to its eventual legal recognition as a war crime.[58]
- The research on the previously ignored issues of anti-personal landmine treaty[59]; and the children and war agenda.[60]

To be clear about the difference between problematization and problem-solving:

*Problematization* is research that forces us to rethink and re-examine an issue that was previously seen as 'unproblematic' (e.g., feminist research that challenged the systematic invisibility of gender in cultures of violence);

*Problem-solving,* on the other hand, is research that generates options for addressing recognized problem.

Put another way, 'problematization' focuses on finding problems, while'problem-solving' focuses on finding solutions.

**Programme development and input**

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[55] Dinah Shelton, (2005). ed. *Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity*, 3 volumes (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference, 2005).

[56] Irish Peace Centres, *The Evaluation of Storytelling as a Peace-building Methodology*, ed, Kenneth Bush, Paddy Logue, Stephanie Burns, Irish Peace Centres Experiential Learning Paper Series, no. 5 (Belfast: Irish Peace Centres, 2011).

[57] On 'peacebuilding', see Barnett et al, *What's in a Name*; on 'reconciliation', see IIDEA, *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict—A Handbook* (Stockholm, Sweden: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2003); and on 'fragile states', see Sultan Barakat and Anna Larson, ' Fragile States: A Donor-serving Concept? Issues with Interpretations of Fragile Statehood in Afghanistan', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, (2013) Forthcoming**.**

[58] Alexandra Stiglmayer, ed. *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

[59] See, for example, the work of the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor at http://www.the-monitor.org/

[60] Gracia  Machel, *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* (the *Gracia Machel Report*). 1996, UN Doc A/51/ 306.

There are some areas of research that may feed more directly in the formulation and implementation of peacebuilding interventions.   As noted above, for this to happen, research needs to be structured to suit the particular (pragmatic) needs of the groups involved in peacebuilding projects/programmes.  Organizations such as OXFAM and the Overseas Development Institute conduct or commission research that is specifically designed and disseminated to inform and improve programming in conflict settings.  Research topics include: food security, climate change, gender, human rights, the private sector, urban displacement, child labour, and much more.[61]

*Examples*

- Field-based research by operational NGOs in conflict zones, such as Medecins Sans Frontieres' study of sexual violence in post-conflict Liberia.[62]
- The World Bank Institute's efforts to encourage its country teams to incorporate 'knowledge exchanges' into country programmes.[63]

### Policy development and input

Research has played a central role in informing the formulation (or change) of government policies related to, or affecting, dynamics of peace and conflict.   This applies to the broadest range of policy issues in violence-prone settings, including: development policy; foreign policy; education policy, natural resource policy.  One of the most direct ways in which research may exercise policy influence is through governmental actors:

*Examples*

- During the immediate post-apartheid period in South Africa, the new government was particularly receptive to the ideas generated by universities inside and outside the country in such policy areas as health, education, migration, national security, and economic development.[64]
- There are many cases where academics take up political positions: as elected officials, as policy advisors, as academic fellows within government departments (though this is not, technically, a political position). This is illustrated in programmes such as the the Cadieux-Léger Fellowship Programme of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, which incorporates academic researchers into its Policy Research Division for up to nine months.[65] The biographies of many university-based academics in the field of peacebuilding often include periods working in policy-making environments.
- Academics are often recruited on a consultant or consultative basis to inform the drafting of policy in bilateral and multilateral settings -- For instance, peacebuilding policy in development agencies; foreign ministries, international financial institutions, the OECD and so on).

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[61]  For an overview of topics and publications for OXFAM, see: http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications; for ODI, see http://www.odi.org.uk/  (both accessed 24 June 2013)

[62]  Tayler-Smith et al. 'Sexual violence in post-conflict Liberia: survivors and their care', *Tropical Medicine and International Health* 17, no. 11 (2012): 1356–1360 .  Co-authors: K. Tayler-Smith, R. Zachariah, S. G. Hinderaker, M. Manzi, E. De Plecker, P. Van Wolvelaer, T. Gil, S. Goetghebuer, H. Ritter, L. Bawo and C. Davis-Worzi; MSF/ Medecins Sans Frontieres Special Report: Shattered Lives: Immediate Medical Care Vital for Sexual Violence Victims. (2009.)  Available at http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publica- tions/reports/2009/MSF_Shattered-Lives_Sexual-Violence.pdf (accessed 26 July 2011).

[63]  For details, see: http://wbi.worldbank.org/wbi/about

[64]  For a masterful overview, see Haroon Bhorat and Ravi Kanbur, 'Poverty and Well-being in Post-*Apartheid* South Africa: An Overview of Data, Outcomes and Policy', in *Poverty and Policy in Post-Apartheid South Africa* ed. Bhorat and Kanbur, (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council Press 2005).

[65]   For details, http://www.international.gc.ca/cip-pic/fellowship-bourse/cadieux-leger.aspx?view=d

Research input is not limited to government policy. It may also apply to non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations: OXFAM, for example, has its own research section that addresses policy and practice specifically[66]; and, of course, organizations with a concerted research-advocacy focus both draw on, and generate, policy-specific research -- Mines Action Canada, Human Rights Watch, the Asian Human Rights Association, UNICEF, the Community Relations Council (Northern Ireland), and so on.

### Capacity building

Research has a central role to play in nurturing and developing peacebuilding capacities across the full spectrum of actors in the Global North and South. This includes the production of practical handbooks and manuals, as well as training programmes and professional development courses offered by universities, colleges, research centres, mulitilateral organizations, NGOs, community groups, for-profit business, and many other groups.

*Examples*

- Peacebuilding handbooks have been developed by: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance; the Berghof Centre for Constructive Conflict Transformation; Caritas; UNHabitat, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation – to list but a few.  Sector-specific handbooks have also been prepared for peacekeepers, human rights monitors and the media.
- The development and strengthening of peacebuilding capacity is the objective of a proliferating number of university-based and non-university based courses, programmes, and summer schools.  This would include the Summer Peacebuilding Institute of Eastern Mennonite University; the Peacebuilding and Development Institute of American University, the ODI Specialized Course on Conflict, Crisis and Transitions, and many others.  In the case of the Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit of the University of York, funding from the Al Tajir Trust and the Open Society Foundation has funded the training of dozens of Afghan Students who are now conspicuous as advisors, administrators, policy makers and politicians the highest levels of government in Afghanistan.

### Creation and protection of neutral intellectual space

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

*Examples*

- This may be illustrated in the kinds of issues addressed through peacebuilding research and teaching within a university – or through training in non-university settings (such as those listed immediately above).
- This may be illustrated in the selection of students, and the hiring of faculty, research staff, and visiting scholars from conflict-affected regions. Example: the IDRC programme in the 1980s to provide funding to a Canadian university to 'host' Latin American academics who were being systematically threatened and murdered in their home countries. Another

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[66]  For details see: http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-people/research

example is the work of WUSC (World University Services Canada) to sponsor Refugees to study in Canada.  By contrast In the UK today, there is a marked movement towards a significant 'de-internationalization' of the university system as a direct result of foreign-unfriendly policies and practices by UK border authorities towards foreign staff and students, through Big Brother style monitoring that now includes the fingerprinting of foreign students to prove class attendance at the Universities of Ulster and of Sunderland -- the result of which is the intellectual constriction of research – and learning - space.[67]

- This may be illustrated by the Chevening programme (http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-us/what-we-do/scholarships/)  where participants escape the day-to-day pressures of life and work in war-zones like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Southern Philippines to collectively reflect on their experiences through the intense immersion into research settings which allow the systematic comparison with the experiences of other participants.

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

**Concluding comments**

This paper seeks to stimulate thought about the intersections of research, politics and peacebuilding.  It is intended to be catalytic, rather than comprehensive. It is but a starting point for bringing together hitherto separate conversations into a common project to address a pressing set of questions.  Recent initiatives augur well for developing appropriate ways to evaluate peacebuilding projects.  However, as discussed above, a specific focus on the peacebuilding impact of research has been absent from the flurry of activity.  This absence is as conspicuous as it is important, in light of the considerable financial resources allocated to research, and the centrality of research to our understandings of conflict, and our approaches to peacebuilding.  By broadening the diversity of voices involved in this discussion – from the Global South and North – we will be better able to harness the intellectual and experiential resources necessary for the development and application of appropriate and effective monitoring and evaluation methods required for sustainable peacebuilding.

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[67]  Examples abound, including foreign staff at the University of Warwick who were asked to 'state [their] physical location on each day' to help the institution to comply with its "highly trusted sponsor duties for non-EU staff and students." Jack Grove, 'Warwick's foreign staff may now see London without telling "Big Brother", *Times Higher Education*. 31 Jan 2013. At the University of Ulster, teaching staff is required to collect attendance data for the (now-dismantled) UKBA as part of the university's compulsory foreign student monitoring programme.  Instructors are required to ensure that 'any breach of conditions or policy by the student is reported to UKBA within 10 working days.'  University monitoring includes calling foreign students on their mobile phones day and night, weekdays and weekends – despite the fact they are required to register weekly with the university.  See: Matthew Taylor, 'Immigration crackdown deterring foreign studies, says universities chief,' *The Guardian*, 9 Jan (2013(a);  Matthew Taylor, 'Non-EU postgraduate numbers in UK fall for first time in 16 years,'*The Guardian*, 11 Jan 2013(b).  Anna Fazackerley, 'Visa Changes mean foreign students turn their back on 'unfriendly' Britain,' *The Guardian*, January 7, 2013.