

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

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### **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 conflict that consider them to be complex adaptive systems and thus reject notions of definitive temporal start and end-points (De Coning 2018a). Yet the 'Since the end of the Cold War ...' phenomenon persists as a framing device 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 in our study of peace and conflict. The danger is that history is foreshortened in our analyses and thus our analyses are inaccurate and decontextualized.

The article makes an argument for, and demonstrates the utility of, the micro-sociological and material from the '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, and IR more generally. 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 dynamic of conflict (Charbonneau 2012; 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 in order to glean wider lessons (Justino, Brück, and Verwimp 2013). Relatedly, a number of studies have recognised how conflicts constitute multi-level and interconnected systems. This systems thinking, most notably work by Cedric de Coning on complex adaptive systems and conflict, has been anxious to see conflicts as multi-scalar, connected, and with adaptive capacities (de Coning 2016; de Coning 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, and to question categories, binaries, and exclusions that attend out 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 (Selimovic 2020), and the construction of time in relation to events, 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 the World Wars 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 the World Wars. 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 *The logic of violence in civil war* making extensive use of memoirs and showing how they could be woven into a wider text and used for theory-building (Kalyvas 2006). In the main, however, literature on and from the World Wars, and indeed Korea, Vietnam, Iran-Iraq and many other major wars, seems unconnected 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 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 of the trends contemporary PCS such as a focus on the local and micro-dynamics. In its third substantive section, the article draws on these sources to illustrate 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). This involved a content analysis of articles and an examination of the extent any used data from the pre-1800 period. For Sluyter, '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 2016: 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). A further study of publications from the Conference of Latin American Geography indicated that the trend towards recentism was declining, possibly because Regional Studies scholars recognised the importance of the long-term lenses and were convinced of the merits of the cultural turn in the social sciences (Sluyter and Spencer 2019: 31).

Explicit studies of recentism in PCS are rare. Certainly there have been a growing number of bibliometric studies, particularly in relation to the gender of authors and those cited (Maliniak, Powers, and Walter 2013; Zigerell 2015). These have occurred within a wider context of discussions on the positionality of the discipline and its biases (most notably Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2020; Wæver and Buzan 2020). There has also been network analysis to illustrate a clustering of citation networks (Maliniak et al. 2018) and state-of-the-discipline work that illustrates the siloed nature of many studies and how the study of peace and violent conflict are often separate (Gledhill and Bright 2019). 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 5 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') whose temporal delimitation is the in recent past (Ansorg and Gordon 2019; Bell and Evans 2010; Bergamaschi et al. 2014; Heathershaw and Lambach 2008; Hehir 2009). The advantage of such an approach 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 be judged unreliable. It may also be that authors calculate that earlier contexts are 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' (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, Gaskarth, and Porter 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 time is taken up with fitting research agendas into grant schemes that are policy-oriented and therefore 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 a change in government or 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 beginning in 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 its analysis.

This sanguine attitude to recentism, however, needs to be leavened by some explication of the possible perils of recentism. 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 phenomenon that are actually established. They may, however, 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 (Yuval N. Harari 2005). Such documents do not exist on their own. Often they conform 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), or occupying a subordinate position on a knowledge hierarchy. 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). Moreover, in terms of the context of particular forms of documentation, the war poetry that emerged from WWI reflected types of privilege embedded within class and culture.

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 (Harari 2005). Strategic studies has 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. Recent studies, especially feminist studies, have emphasised how peace and conflict are lived and embodied experiences (Partis-Jennings 2017, 2019), and point to the need for detailed, sometimes ethnographic, studies that seek to understand living conditions and experiences in war-affected societies (Millar 2018). 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.

The advantages of fieldwork and seeking the authentic voices of individuals and communities affected by conflict are well-advertised (Millar 2020). Fieldwork is not without its ethical and practical problems, however. Among these are the possibilities that fieldwork might be intrusive, extractive and re-traumatising. There have been calls for a rebalancing of

the power relationships between researchers in the global north and those in conflict-affected areas (usually in the global south) but the political economies associated with academia and publishing seem unlikely to change significantly (Nilsen 2016; Walsh, Brugha, and Byrne 2016). There has also been concern at over research (Kelly 2020). In addition, there are also problems of access for researchers to conflict zones and authoritarian states. These problems, compounded by COVID-19, have not gone unnoticed by university ethics committees with the result that the space for fieldwork might be diminishing (Perera 2017). This places an onus on researchers to consider supplementary data sources, such as military memoirs and personal diaries. At a minimum, archival and documentary sources can help contextualise fieldwork and crucially, allow us to historicise conflicts that may be long-standing.

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, 143–44; 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, diaries and memoirs 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 and experiences are quite profound. The trench warfare of the World Wars, and the fixed battles between organised armies, seem far-removed from wars of drones and artificial intelligence. Yet, on a second glance there are significant similarities between the World Wars and contemporary warfare, including the mobilisation of support bases, informational wars, large-scale displacement, the trialling and use of new technologies, the challenges of reconstruction, 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 intimacy and 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 2008, 16 May). 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, and prompts arresting questions of how such banality first within wider political and military schemes.

The advantages of using memoirs and personal diaries as a research resource should be leavened with caveats, although many of these caveats also apply to many other research methodologies. Firstly, wartime is rarely an optimal time for diary-keeping and so diary entries are 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 memoirs may be 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)

Another former soldier noted how 'some recollections are retained in vivid Technicolour detail, as if they only happened yesterday, others are masked by obscurity and I only have a vague sense of the time and space in which they occurred' (Render and Tootal 2016: 6)

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) or express surprise at discovering the Holocaust after the end of the war (Bottinger 2012: loc. 1502). 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). Indeed the 1941 Nazi 'Commissar Order' mandated the compulsory execution of captured commissars



from the Soviet military (Burds 2018). Against this though, a few memoirs are open about the murder of Jews and partisans, and the policy of not taking prisoners. Hans 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 the World Wars where the contribution of non-white troops is under-played (D'Costa 2014). Fifthly, since World War armed forces 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 *The unwomanly face of war: An oral history of women in World War II* (Aleksievich 2018).

Fifthly, 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 in at a public reunion 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 with one female WWII Soviet soldier recounting how German prisoners were treated, 'We didn't shoot them, that was too easy a death for them; we stuck them with ramrods like pigs, we cut them to pieces. I went to look at it ... I waited! I waited a long time for the moment when their eyes would begin to burst from pain ... The pupils ... They burned my mother and little sisters on a bonfire in the middle of our village' (cited in Aleksievich 2018: xxxii). 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; Rehfeldt 2019: 147). 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 first-hand 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. Many of the accounts refer to the privations of war and attempts to secure basic needs of food and shelter. 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 [stolen] several 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; Rehfeldt 2019: 139). 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. 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 World War 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 the World Wars 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 the 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 the World Wars 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. Consider, for example, the options facing a Ukrainian conscript in the Soviet army, who is captured by the Germans and offered the chance to serve as an auxiliary (*Hilfswilliger*), and then faces the prospect of a Soviet offensive and re-capture.

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 Disorder Syndrome, 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 the World Wars, 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 it is 'anecdotal'.

### **Conclusion**

For its concluding discussion, the article returns to two debates in Peace and Conflict Studies 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 the First World War 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 the World Wars 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 the World Wars, and the pre-end of the 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 phenomenon. 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 violence that might currently manifest itself. 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 peace and conflict studies. The a-historicism in peace and conflict scholarship is curious as many foundational scholars to tension, war and peace took an overtly historical approach (J. C. Scott 1976, 2017; Tilly 1990). Students of genocide, transitional justice, and conflict heritage are, of course, historically-minded but often constitute specialist groups within Peace and Conflict Studies.

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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