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Pluralism, temporality and affect – methodological challenges of making peace researchable

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ABSTRACT

Scholarly debates about how we conceptualise, theorise and measure peace have recently intensified, yet exactly how peace scholars translate these theoretical innovations into concrete methodological tools and practices is less clear. We argue that pluralism, temporality and the role of affect are three recent focal points in current scholarly debates that aim to further our conceptual understanding of peace. Taking these theoretical developments seriously requires us to consider our methodological tools to approach each one, but these concepts also point to methodological issues on their own. This special issue aims to investigate our assumptions about peace, and how these in turn shape the way we approach the study of peace, in terms of both research design and data collection as well as in the process of writing up and disseminating findings, all departing from these three specific challenges. As such, this special issue contributes to efforts of making peace beyond the absence of war more researchable.

KEYWORDS

Peace; pluralism; affect; temporality; method; research practices

Introduction

In recent years, scholarly debates about how we conceptualise, theorise and measure peace have intensified.¹ Noting that peace research have in fact devoted more analytical attention to conflict than to peace,² and pointing out the inadequacy of understanding peace as merely the absence of war, several scholars have developed new conceptual frameworks which aim to facilitate more nuanced, yet rigorous, analyses of peace.³ However, this resurgence of interest in how we theorize peace has thus far not been paralleled by the same level of engagement with methodological questions around how we go about empirically studying peace. This special issue aims to address this gap, with the overall aim of making peace more researchable. However, this is not the first wave of attempting to make peace more researchable. The first wave was centred on how to make negative peace researchable, and was spearheaded by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program and individuals such as Peter Wallensteen, among others.⁴ We would argue that moving beyond peace as the absence of war, we are faced with more and new methodological challenges; this is the second wave of making peace researchable.

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This entails asking questions such as: How do peace scholars translate their conceptual frameworks into concrete methodological tools and practices? How do these practices contribute to knowledge about the people and places we study? What innovations are we currently seeing within peace research? How do we best capture different meanings of peace as well as experiences of peace? How do we study peace at different levels of analysis? Our starting point is that the shift from conflict to peace, and moving beyond crude dichotomies and simplifications of conventional understandings of peace, does not only require us to rethink how we define and theorise peace, but also to develop the methodological tools and practices we employ to learn about peace in our research.

While there have been countless panels, papers and publications on the 'dilemmas' of fieldwork 'under fire' and on how researching armed conflict creates specific research challenges,⁵ this special issue aims to provide an opportunity for thinking about the specifics when we instead turn to the study of peace. Of course, the divide between doing research on peace or conflict contexts is not clear-cut,⁶ however, we still argue that there is a richness and complexity of peace research on its own, and that some topics and challenges are more specific to the study of peace. In addition, there are often assumptions that researchers looking at peace do not face the same ethical or moral dilemmas that researchers embedded in 'live' conflict contexts may, and as such, reflections on research challenges may seem less urgent. This special issue challenges these assumptions, and centres on the specific complexities and challenges of researching peace.

Specifically, we argue that three methodological challenges are especially visible in current research, and that these are important to think through in order to better capture the specificity and diversity of peace across empirical contexts: pluralism, temporality, and affect. Overall, these issues are of heightened relevance as we study peace. First, moving away from simplified notions of peace as 'not war',⁷ and from aggregated state-level measures where peace is assumed if the number of battle-related casualties are low enough, points us to the importance of pluralism and diversity. One aspect of pluralism in the study of peace is to recognise it as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon, which is 'unlikely to be rendered accurately through a single methodological, ontological, and epistemological lens'.⁸ This points to the overall importance of approaching peace from different perspectives and vantage points, including using different methodological approaches.⁹ In addition, as feminist peace researchers have long demonstrated, peace within any society is experienced differently depending on one's position in terms of power, gender, class, ethnicity, urban/rural location, and so on.¹⁰ Therefore, capturing a plurality of perspectives is needed if we are to understand peace in that specific society. This means we need to hear different voices and actors within a society when researching peace.

Second, recent theoretical advances have made clear that peace is not a fixed state of affairs or an event like the signing of a peace accord, but is better understood as a dynamic process of change or a web of fluid and changing relationships.¹¹ This means that temporality is an intrinsic aspect of an analysis of how peace is manifested, experienced and understood in a particular empirical setting. Understanding peace is often about understanding trajectories in time, and capturing how these shape people's lives. Approaching peace as a moving target, in this sense, also helps us move away from conventional temporal assumptions that locate peace after violence or war, as its dichotomous opposite. This neat, dichotomous and sequential conceptualisation of war and

peace does not hold up to empirical scrutiny.¹² Assumptions locating peace after the end of war and violence may obscure how peace and war can coexist, and prevent us as scholars from identifying and analysing expressions of peace in the midst of, or in the shadow of, violence and insecurity.¹³

Finally, recent conceptual contributions have attempted to move the study of peace away from battles, armed actors and elite negotiations, instead pointing to the everyday as the site where peace is made, lived, and breached.¹⁴ Methodologically, this shift requires the development of tools and strategies that can capture the micro-dynamics of everyday relationships, practices, and, in particular, emotions. Indeed, understanding the role of affect is key to capture how fear and insecurity, or security and trust, is experienced. In addition, studying peace often means that we engage with people's experiences and memories of trauma and violence, which demands that we reflect on our how our own emotions shape these research encounters.¹⁵

The contributions in this special issue address these three challenges in different ways and show how they can be addressed using specific methodological tools and strategies. The group of articles draw on different theoretical starting points in their understanding of peace,¹⁶ which have consequences for what method choices are particularly appropriate. But it also shows that these challenges are relevant across a number of the new theoretical approaches to peace – they are not the sole purview of one such theory. Thereby, this special issue aims to draw on the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary background of peace scholars and peace scholarship, and pushes the field of peace studies to both demonstrate an indebtedness to previous reflections on research challenges, while synthesising new findings and contributing insights that are both theoretically and practically relevant. Thereby it advances critical and timely conversations about how we can make peace researchable.

Next, we discuss each of the three challenges (pluralism, temporality and affect) in detail, connecting them with the current state of the art within peace research, and how each of the specific contributions in this special issue shed light on each of these challenges. Finally, we turn to the way forward, highlighting both what lessons we can learn from this special issue as a whole, and what questions remain for us as peace scholars to tackle.

Methodological challenges in current peace research

In the following section, we discuss how recent theoretical developments in peace research requires renewed reflection on how we make peace researchable, as well as the development of new methodological tools and strategies. Specifically, we discuss the methodological questions and challenges that are brought to the fore by the need to capture pluralism in approaches to and experiences of peace; by an emerging 'temporal turn' in peace research; and by an increased recognition of the important role of affect in shaping research on peace as well as the making of peace. These challenges are both of a theoretical nature, but also raise direct methodological questions as to how these aspects should be studied. The various contributions in this special issue deal with these specific challenges in different ways. While several have a focus on one specific challenge, most also show how these challenges are interconnected and feed into each other. Overall, these different contributions address the issues of pluralism, temporality,

and affect in different ways, and show us how they matter for their work on peace, and how they can be addressed in order to advance the study of peace.

Pluralism

A number of contributions to current peace research clearly notes the importance of paying attention to a plurality of voices, as well as the importance of studying peace in diverse ways, and indeed pluralising the discipline of peace research.¹⁷ Möller and Shim make clear how the lack of consensus around peace definitions (as a universal definition is unlikely to be forthcoming), but also tensions across different interpretations, are in themselves useful when we study peace. This leads them to argue for a pluralistic approach in their study of peace (in their case, through photography).¹⁸ In a similar way, Firchow and Mac Ginty argues that top-down and bottom-up approaches to measuring and theorising peace need to be seen as complementary, as the complexity of peace cannot be captured through one single methodological approach.¹⁹ In a similar vein, Jarstad and colleagues have proposed three different avenues for theorising and studying peace: as a feature of the conditions in a particular area or location (situational peace), as a feature of relationships between conflict actors and groups (relational peace), and as political ideals, aspirations, or visions of the good society (ideational peace). These different vantage points can together render a fuller understanding of peace, but also call for different methodological strategies.²⁰

A nuanced understanding of how peace is manifested in a particular empirical context relies on us being able to capture a plurality of voices and perspectives within this specific context.²¹ However, the difficulty is often knowing whether or not we have covered the needed and existing perspectives and divides in a given case. This matters for how we think about recruitment, and how we ensure that who we speak to, and our samples, are diversified. Researching peace to us means that we need to hear different voices and actors within a society. What material is particularly relevant if we want to grasp a plurality of perspectives? Are there new tools needed to approach this material? Contributions to this special issue point to a range of innovative methodological strategies and types of data. For example, Thorne explores the potential of participatory action research (PAR), coupled with arts-based methods, to explore archival data and facilitate inclusion of excluded voices in research on peace. Using the archive of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) as an example, Thorne argues that arts-based, participatory methods applied to legal archive material have significant potential to engage with a plurality of lived experiences over time, and that attending to this can aid a more inclusive future for post-conflict communities. In particular, Thorne argues that these tools can facilitate plural dialogue, intergenerational memory, and young people's active participation in post-conflict communities. This approach then lets us connect with diverse experiences across time, and explore how generational gaps and different temporal perspectives on the genocide in Rwanda continues to shape post-conflict political relationships.

If we are interested in a plurality of perspectives, it also means we need to think about how we study silence, resistance, and marginalisation, and indeed to what degree there is room for deliberation in a society.²² Such lines of division may speak to old conflict patterns, but they are also likely to change over time, and we thus need to ensure that we

are continually open to rediscovering such lines of division and silencing. This also relates to the idea that studying peace means studying how group relations are re-defined.²³ This means that power dynamics during data collection is something peace researchers need to be extra sensitive to, also because our methodological tools and how we decide to use them may in turn have repercussions on such dynamics.

In this special issue, Dijkema discusses the challenges of including marginalised voices, thereby better accounting for a plurality of perspectives on and experiences of peace, and navigating the power inequalities of these research encounters. In her research in marginalized neighbourhoods in France, Dijkema has experimented with participatory forms of research, attempting to move from hierarchical to more horizontal research relations. Her contribution to this special issue discusses how a commitment to include marginalized research participants on their own terms has an impact on the practical details of our research methods, such as the physical configuration of research settings, but also on the knowledge about peace that is produced, as well as the associated difficulties. She also makes an argument for viewing public debates as a meaningful way to engage with marginalised groups without being intrusive: instead of limiting the dialogue to one on one interviews, this invites a wider group of participants to share their experiences and allows for mutual learning for the entire group, and where the resulting knowledge production is a shared resource for all those who participated, not just for the researcher who at the end of all individual interviews can make aggregated conclusions. Her contribution also highlights how trust is perhaps especially important and fragile in research encounters around peace; it is an unavoidable complication as changing power dynamics are intricately involved when we study peace.

Thus, as the article by Dijkema exemplifies, capturing pluralism means collecting voices from marginalised groups too. This may require more effort, and entail more difficult ethical questions. For example, we need to be aware of to what extent people we want to hear from are already targeted by other researchers, possibly suffering from research fatigue, or if they have been heavily exposed to various humanitarian workers, journalists, or even security officials. These experiences may shape how people interact with yet another researcher, how they respond to specific questions, and how they perceive questions about consent to participate in the research. As Parkinson has noted, potential research participants sometimes perceive researchers as 'part of a larger body of outsiders who are often better educated, wealthier, more mobile, and culturally or politically distinct from the milieu in which they work'.²⁴ Having been exposed to various actors forming part of this category will inevitably shape how participants perceive the purpose or desirability of interaction with yet another researcher.

While overexposure is quite common in some conflict contexts, we suggest this is potentially even more so in certain peacebuilding contexts. For example, McMullin's contribution discusses how, in a highly researched post-war context such as Liberia, people like ex-combatants are frequently targeted by peacebuilding efforts that conceptualise their lives in terms of pre-conceived 'reintegration trajectories'. Research interventions can easily be just another such encounter. Complementing the arguments of Thorne and Dijkema, McMullin's study on motorcycle taxi drivers in Liberia shows how participatory action research approaches prioritise pluralism; collating diverse cyclists' narratives and experiences foregrounds research as representation, where the

research encounter brings issues of social stigma, objectification, relationality, and marginalisation to the fore. Participatory forms of research thus have the potential to not only render a more diverse understanding of peace, but also contribute to mutual recognition and benefit by centring participants' own ideas about peace-building strategies and solutions.

This discussion points to the importance of critical reflection on our own positionality as researchers in relation to the places and people we study, and several of the contributions in this special issue offer multiple perspectives on how to do this, as well as what complications it can involve. The above observations illustrate some of the ethical and practical issues of being an 'outsider' when doing research. To a significant degree, peace research is still conducted in conflict-affected contexts in the Global South, by researchers from the Global North.²⁵ Dijkema's contribution therefore is an interesting demonstration of the diversity of empirical cases in current peace research, and highlights the value of studying peace in the context of violence and inequality in the Global North, and not exclusively in post-war contexts in the Global South. While an individual scholar may not be able to shift this pattern through their work, it is crucial that we are aware of the unequal power relations that peace research as a field is implicated in sustaining, and reflect on how this may shape our research encounters and knowledge production (during and after data collection). In this special issue, several scholars grapple with their positionality in relation to the places and people in the Global South that they study, notably Anctil Avoine (Colombia), Pepper (Myanmar) and McMullin (Liberia). However, these contributions, along with recent scholarly conversations on the implications of being an 'outsider' or an 'insider' researcher, also show that there are no clear-cut lines here, nor any positionality that absolves the researcher from the need for reflexivity.²⁶ Thus, we argue, taking on the challenge of capturing pluralism also means that we recognise the partiality of our own knowledge production, and remain open for the perspectives of our interlocutors to challenge our points of departure, epistemological biases, and theoretical frameworks.

Relatedly, we argue that pluralism, in the sense of epistemological scepticism, is especially pertinent when it comes to research on peace. Pluralism, as Levine and McCourt show, can and has been defined in many different ways.²⁷ Peace is inherently political,²⁸ and thus it is difficult to completely remove or transcend politics when studying peace, this makes it particularly important to apply multiple perspectives (theoretical and methodological) in the study of peace, and continue to be aware of the limitations of any one perspective. Thus, we would agree with them, when they note that

Pluralism matters, not because of what it adds to our understanding of world politics, but because of what it takes away: the pretension [...] that the entirety of the world can be placed under a single scheme of interpretation or explanation²⁹

We would paraphrase this and say that pluralism matters, not because of what it adds to our understanding of peace, but because of what it takes away; it introduces an awareness of indeterminacy, and reminds us that we only have partial truths. Overall, pluralism challenges us to think harder about how we approach the question of who should be studied, as well as how we pinpoint what voices need to be heard on peace. It

also reminds us that we need to think about how we handle different voices once collected, how they should be aggregated and grouped or juxtaposed.³⁰

Temporality

Another central element in recent peace theorisation relates to the question of time. While time has frequently been discussed in relation to peacebuilding and post-war reconstruction in terms of the timeframe of the process and the appropriate sequencing of interventions,³¹ peace research has, until recently, rarely explicitly engaged conceptually with time and temporality. Now, several scholars seek to conceptualise how time is recorded, experienced and understood in diverse ways, and explore how these temporal dimensions shape the politics and power relations of post-war societies.³² Building on an earlier 'temporal turn' in International Relations,³³ and a longer sociological tradition of critically exploring the politics of time,³⁴ this emerging literature has made visible the temporal assumptions inherent in conventional perspectives on war and peace. The transition from war to peace is often 'presented as a move from madness to sanity, or from evil to good' – or more specifically, in the shape of the liberal peace project, as a forward movement in time from chaos and violence towards liberal democracy and market economics.³⁵ As discussed by McMullin in this special issue, these linear temporal assumptions are clearly visible in DDR interventions seeking to integrate former combatants after war. Unsettling dominant temporalities is therefore necessary in order to recognise alternative narratives and learn from the experiences of our research participants.

Thus, conceptions of peace conventionally rely on temporal assumptions about its relationship to war and violence. However, feminist theorists and other critical peace scholars have demonstrated that this neat, dichotomous and sequential conceptualisation of war and peace does not hold up to empirical scrutiny. The forms of peace that emerge after war are often pervaded by forms of violence, repression and disorder not unlike those found in war.³⁶ Moreover, assumptions locating peace after the end of war and violence may also prevent us as scholars from identifying and analysing expressions of peace in the midst of, or in the shadow of, violence and insecurity.³⁷

Emerging research has also drawn attention to how ways of measuring, using and experiencing time differ, and are connected to power relations. In her research on long-term trajectories of reconciliation in South Africa, Mueller-Hirth demonstrate how dominant temporal frameworks – for example, a narrative that states that apartheid is now in the past and its victims ought to 'move on' – serves to legitimise the continued marginalisation of some groups in society.³⁸ In their study of the implementation of the United Nations Women, Peace and Security agenda in Rwanda, Madsen and Hudson also emphasise the co-existence of plural temporal frameworks, and adopt a 'heterotemporal' approach in their study of peace.³⁹ They note that the way time needs to be understood is 'more than the sum total of past, present, and future; multiple temporalities are all found together in one moment'.⁴⁰ Söderström, in her work on former combatants, shows that while 'the legacy of the war and coming home from the war is not constant and overtly present in their lives [it] is continuously available for political positioning later on in life', and how intrinsically the past and the future are continually connected.⁴¹ Thus, recent contributions such as these show that time, and the

way time structures the politics of peace, is far from objectively existing or commonsensically 'just there'. This calls for more sustained methodological conversations about how temporal dimensions of peace can be captured in empirical studies.⁴²

In their contribution on everyday experiences of war and peace in rural Myanmar, Hedström and Olivius also highlight how lived experiences of war and peace are intertwined with temporal assumptions and frameworks. Using life history diagrams as a methodological tool, they trace 'temporal conflicts' between overarching narratives of political transition, and everyday experiences of insecurity, arguing that this facilitates a deeper understanding of how relationships between war and peace, and between past, present and future, are manifested and made sense of in people's everyday lives. Hedström and Olivius suggest that methodological tools that can capture temporal dimensions of peace are critical to move beyond the supposed linear temporality of peace processes, and make visible alternative temporal frameworks that shape everyday experiences and contestations around peace in conflict-affected contexts. Other contributions in this special issue point to the usefulness of other kinds of data when studying time, for example Bramsen and Austin discuss the use of videos.

Making sense of peace often entails understanding trajectories in time. Past trauma and experiences of violence, and peace transitions are carried with people and changes their present,⁴³ but peace is fundamentally also about how we understand the future, expectations about feeling safe or insecure.⁴⁴ Thus, ideas of the future are not insignificant, and expectation gaps with respect to the future can be a key way to understand peace.⁴⁵ This raises important questions about how we go about studying ideas about the future in a meaningful and fruitful way. What role do ideas about the future have for peace as a concept, and how do notions about time in general play into how different groups evaluate peace, and how this should be researched? Temporality is also connected with generational shifts, and how peace may be perceived differently across different cohorts.⁴⁶ In this special issue, Thorne's contribution engages with the temporality of how peace is experienced, and researched. Using the archive of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), Thorne argues, allows us to capture intergenerational experiences of conflict and expectations for peace.

Increasingly peace scholars are theoretically recognising peace as a dynamic process, stressing a *longue durée* perspective on peace rather than seeing peace as a single event.⁴⁷ This means we need to study peace as trajectories in time and highlights the importance of considering temporality when we study peace. These shifts indicate that a longer time perspective is often needed for a deeper understanding of peace. Adding to this argument, Mac Ginty has recently suggested that peace and conflict research tends to focus on the recent past: 'recentism or privileging of the recent past in our studies and a consequent overlooking of the longer term',⁴⁸ stressing the importance of the field as a whole to be more aware of its take and choices related to time.

Temporality is thus another central theme that needs to be factored in when we engage in empirical studies on peace. What role does temporal dynamics play for peace, and how far back in time do we need to go to capture this? Some see stability as part of how they theorise peace,⁴⁹ which is yet another reason to pay attention to temporal dynamics of both stability and change. Overall, how do we take time into account when we conduct our research, what strategies and tools can help us, and to what degree do we need to understand how time shapes our research participants relationship with peace?

The issue of time, however, also influences our studies in more ways. Studying peace means often mean that we are studying ongoing processes, and how we decide to report on our empirical work in one instance, may at another turn become more problematic, and for instance less safe for our research participants. Similarly, Thaler argues that ‘the shadow of the future and our inability to know how conditions might change, mak[es] seemingly insensitive information suddenly dangerous or promises of confidentiality void due to government pressure’.⁵⁰

Temporal assumptions also structure conventional ideas about the research process itself. In this special issue, Anctil Avoine problematises the linearity of the research process through her employment of friendship as a research method. She argues that taking affect seriously when we do research leads us to reject the period of fieldwork as a stand-alone phase, and rather we need to understand fieldwork as a continuum as well as adopt a more circular approach to the gathering of data. This means that we need to be open to data disturbing and unsettling the research process at multiple stages, and that it is not necessarily something that can be clearly delimited in time.

The centrality of time for the research of peace should also make us reconsider what relation the material we collect have with time. How and when was the material created, and what is the temporal context in which data was produced, for instance through interviews? Certain types of material that are more clearly produced and located in a specific time frame may also be particularly useful when we are trying to study processes. Some have therefore argued that we need to make more use of archival material, as well as personal diaries and memoirs.⁵¹ But when we work with such diaries it is also important to be aware of the specific time horizon they were produced in; this can both be an advantage, as they directly reflect the time period we are interested in, but also a challenge, as our ability to interpret and understand documents situated in a specific time may be diminished as compared to contemporary documents. But we agree with Mac Ginty when he notes that the centrality of understanding ‘the everyday embodiment and lived nature of peace and conflict’ should lead us as a discipline to pay more attention to such sources,⁵² and we are glad to see this approach is growing. And in instances when such personal documents were not produced in the moment, life histories offer one way to work around this.⁵³ As noted above, the use of life diagrams are further reflected on by Hedström and Olivius in this special issue.

Affect

Finally, we argue that the third crucial element that has begun to surface in current peace theorisation we need to start taking seriously is the role of affect. Studying affect has become increasingly important and common,⁵⁴ particularly in light of how peace is now being re-conceptualised, for example, in scholarship on everyday peace,⁵⁵ feminist peace,⁵⁶ and relational peace.⁵⁷ Attention to affect and emotion in peace studies has been prefaced by broader developments in international relations, drawing attention to the role of passions and emotions in world politics.⁵⁸ Research in this vein has often been grounded in feminist and poststructuralist traditions, and has generated greater insight into the workings, dynamics and effects of emotions in world politics.⁵⁹ Another precursor is also research on the role of emotions for cognitive processes in behavioural

research.⁶⁰ The role of emotions for peace, and consequently how best to study emotions in peace research, is therefore beginning to attract attention.⁶¹

The study of peace and conflict has often focused on macro-politics, as well as the armed actors, whereas the micro dynamics, and the everyday practice of peace inevitably also contains interactions that are influenced and coloured by emotions and affect. However, emotion and affect have also been given more attention in relation to conflict, in particular intractable conflict, and often this has meant paying attention to how anger, fear and anxiety play into conflict dynamics.⁶² But, this needs to be matched by a similar interest among peace scholars. How is emotional transformation enabled? And how do we go about studying it? What emotions, if any, take the place of anger and fear, as societies move towards peace? How do emotions shape action, and mobilisation, or support for various policies? And how do emotions matter for how we reconsider our relationship with our former enemy?

Taking affect seriously as peace scholars, means we need to consider several methodological issues. Are emotions harder to study than behaviour and attitudes, how do we access them in appropriate and considerate ways? How do emotions shape the research encounter between researcher and research participants? How far should we go in encouraging emotional reactions during an interview, simply because it might generate good data? Can we, and should we, use emotional stimuli in interviews to explicitly generate data? Depending on how we theoretically relate emotion and peace what are the methodological consequences of such theorization? What do we miss if we are not sensitive to affect, both in the research encounter itself, for the researcher (before and after), and for how affect shapes peace experiences in the real world?

In this special issue, Bramsen and Austin argue that using videos as a source of data, we can study the micro-dynamics of human interaction to understand peace, but also mediation, violence, and peacebuilding. The authors demonstrate what is lost compared to the ethnographer's advantage of being on site, but also what can be gained from using such data. Specifically, the authors demonstrate how video data analysis can facilitate exploration of the emotional and affective dynamics of particular situations, and thus add empirical substance and nuances to the study of emotions in peace research. For instance, through focusing on the timing and rhythm of human interaction, video data analysis can make visible how emotive responses shape the way these processes unfold. The ability to replay events in slow-motion is especially important when we want to capture the subtle dynamics of timing, interaction, and affect.

In her contribution, drawing on data from the Myanmar peace process, Pepper advances an 'emotion-aware approach' to studying women's participation in peacebuilding, one that can capture the affective dynamics and gendered emotional labour that goes into the negotiation and construction of peace. Pepper argues that ignoring emotions in our analysis will lead to incomplete and distorted understandings in our fieldwork. Overall, her article recognises that emotions are simultaneously politically meaningful and gendered, and shows how this has implications for both scholarship and policy.

Pepper also shows us the challenges of taking affect seriously in the study of peace with regards to how it shapes the research encounter and our own positionality. It is clear that emotions and affective responses are important in the interview encounter. In fact, Parashar calls this 'affective encounters',⁶³ and they shape the data generation and collection process. Parashar sees this as a process that includes both the interviewer

and the interviewees, and it is a joint process.⁶⁴ The research encounter elicits emotional reactions and responses on the part of both the researcher and the respondent. This is particularly so when we research topics that evoke narratives of violence, trauma, and loss. In an in-depth methodological reflection on their encounter with Agnes, an ethnic minority woman in Myanmar who narrated terrible experiences of violence and abuse, Hedström and Zin Mar Phyو demonstrate how our own reactions to such narratives shape the interview process, and bring to the fore important questions around solidarity, power, and research ethics.⁶⁵ Reflecting on the role of emotions in such encounters, Zin Mar Phyو argues that emotions can facilitate solidarity as well as aid the production of knowledge about conflict and post-conflict realities:

When we hear traumatic stories, like the one Agnes told us about the shelling, we may feel like we can't speak – we feel like we have something in the throat, or like something in the chest is blocked. I think these feelings are good because they help us understand and know about the real impact of conflict on people's lives – they build knowledge about conflict and how it is felt and experienced in the everyday.⁶⁶

From this perspective, our emotions are an important tool in conducting research in a way that does justice to the experiences of our interlocutors. While it is not a desirable goal to 'turn off' our own emotional responses to what we hear and experience when doing research, it is critical to be aware of and reflect on how emotions such as fear, exhaustion, identification or confusion shape the process of generating data.⁶⁷ In this special issue, we see examples of this type of much-needed reflection in several of the articles, notably Anctil Avoine and McMullin, and many of the other contributions, address the importance of analytically capturing the role of affect and reflecting on the emotional politics of the research encounter itself.

The emotional politics of the research encounter has bearing on how we think about researcher positionality as well. Parashar argues that:

The rigid demarcations of positionality are transgressed through these affective encounters as the collective 'we' tend to superimpose some of the individual preferences, emotions and feelings on the other. Thus, affective encounters often lead to affective performances where the clear boundaries of inside-outside are blurred.⁶⁸

Most importantly, these insights encourage us to reflect critically on our own positionality in relation to the people and places we study, but also on the affective dynamics of the knowledge production that we engage in together with our research participants. In this special issue, Anctil Avoine employs an interdisciplinary body of work to account for affect and friendship as feminist methods for peace research.⁶⁹ Drawing on her research with *Farianas*, female ex-guerrilleras from the Farc-ep, she argues that affective feminist conversations, practices and actions through friendship can drastically change the way we think about post-war settings, and thus alter our knowledge about peace. Challenging ideas about 'objectivity' that prescribed a degree of emotional distance between researcher and research participants, Anctil Avoine argues that it is epistemologically and methodologically productive to cross over those boundaries in order to understand how peace is lived, made, and made sense of. Moreover, she argues that friendship and affect as methods opens up for an 'insurgent' form of peace research, which can also contribute to alliances that build everyday peace.

Affect and emotion are often used interchangeably, although the term affect tends to stress the unconscious and often bodily processes.⁷⁰ In this special issue, we make arguments about both concepts, and note that they both pose challenges for peace research. Some authors in the special issue clearly separate the two, and others do not. What is clear is that in peace theorisation, certain emotional responses are increasingly being recognised as important. For instance, many have argued for the importance of trust when studying peace, and Bramsen and Poder highlight that '[t]rust implies a feeling that one can rely on others' unknowable action. The basis of trust cannot be knowledge or calculation but, instead, includes an affective or emotional acceptance of dependence on others'.⁷¹ Söderström et al. note that part of their relational peace definition is about the emotional responses one has towards the other, but also that the idea of the relationship needs be infused with emotions of positive valence (if *friendship peace* is to be achieved).⁷² And Wæver and Bramsen argue for taking the emotional dimensions of conflict into consideration, by replacing attitude (A) in Galtung's ABC triangle, with tension (T), thereby allowing relational elements to further come to the fore.⁷³ These are just a few examples of how closely connected emotions are to definitions of peace beyond the absence of war.

The way forward

Overall, we argue that there are currently three challenges we as peace scholars need to consider methodologically if we are to take on central theoretical developments of late. Plurality of perspectives, temporality and the role of affect are three recent focal points in current scholarly debates that aim to further our conceptual understanding of peace. Taking these theoretical developments seriously requires us to consider our methodological tools to approach each one. This special issue brings together a wide group of scholars, who in various ways have been researching peace in their own work. The articles reflect both ongoing work and thought processes and reflections that grow out of continued and persistent work within the field. Discussions around our methods, and ensuing difficulties as well as ethical decisions are questions that appear at various stages of the research process, and which oftentimes shift in importance and appearance across the arc of this process. The special issue as a whole investigates our assumptions about peace, and how these in turn shape the way we approach the study of peace, in terms of both research design and data collection as well as in the process of writing up and disseminating findings, all contributions departing from these three specific challenges. The special issue as a whole showcases the new thinking and the progress made to improve research around peace, but it also engages in a critical debate and pinpoints particular challenges facing peace researchers and scholars. Indeed, what are the pitfalls the field as a whole need to be aware of, and are there ways of mitigating or at least ensuring transparency around such pitfalls? Engaging in such discussions will undoubtedly forward not only peace research, but in the long run it will also aid peacebuilding policy and practice.

Together, this special issue as a whole and its individual contributions help us see the importance of a plurality of perspectives and positionalities; better accounting for temporal dynamics; and exploring the role of affect and emotions in the study of peace. It also points to a number of methodological tools and strategies for how this

can be studied in practice. How we theorise peace have consequences for what method choices are particularly appropriate, but as these contributions show, these questions are likely to be relevant irrespective of our starting point. In this special issue, we demonstrate how these three challenges are relevant to consider, both in terms of their methodological consequences, as well as their methodological solutions. Overall, the special issue demonstrates some adjustments we can make to our data collection strategies, and what methodological strategies we can employ as we study peace in light of these three challenges. As such, we hope that this special issue will help to forward the methodological discussions that are peculiar to current peace research and the current second wave of making peace more researchable, so that the recent push in peace theorisation is met with an equal commitment to methodological clarity and prowess. However, we do recognise that these three methodological challenges are not the only ones facing current peace scholarship; they are not meant as an exhaustive list. This special issue focused on these challenges as we believe these are the challenges made most visible of late in recent peace theorization and scholarship. However, there are other pertinent challenges also raised by recent advances in the field. For example, the 'spatial turn'⁷⁴ has prompted methodological questions around how we can account for the relationship between peace, space, and place, and begun to experiment with methods drawn from political geography, such as walking methodologies⁷⁵ and cognitive mapping.⁷⁶ While important, these developments fall outside of the scope of this special issue, but should be further attended to as well.

While each article makes a range of specific methodological contributions, sometimes targeting specific debates or sub-fields within peace research, a number of themes stand out as prominent collective contributions of the special issue. First, the importance and potential of participatory forms of research is highlighted. Participatory research can facilitate the inclusion of a plurality of voices and perspectives on peace. In particular, as Dijkema, Anctil Avoine, Thorne and McMullin demonstrate, it can help us hear the voices of marginalised groups on their own terms. However, this requires attention to power and positionality, and to very tangible aspects of the research encounter, such as the physical configuration of spaces of interaction. Sometimes, this also requires that we have the ability and bravery to question prescribed solutions and templates from universities. Participatory research, through taking the perspective and life world of the research participants seriously, can also help us see and understand temporal dynamics of peace, making visible intergenerational divides as well as alternative temporal frameworks that our research participants use to make sense of peace.

Engaging in participatory research also brings to the fore the important role of affect in the research encounter. Participatory research does this as a key element is to recognise the importance of treating the other as an equal and truly take on their perspective, but of course other ways of doing research can also achieve this. Breaking down any neat insider-outsider binary, our own emotions, and those of our interlocutors, inevitably enter into the research process as we generate data together with research participants. This is clear in Anctil Avoine's as well as Pepper's research, drawing on feminist methodologies, but also in several of the other special issue articles. The articles in this special issue also highlight the importance of paying attention to the co-production of knowledge that happens in the encounter between the researcher and the researched. But this requires that we pay attention to power relations, and to how we navigate one

another's traumas and concerns. Reflecting on our positionality, and on how the research encounter is structured by prior expectations before the encounter, on both sides, and by the interactions in the interview or meeting itself, we may be able to understand the role of affect but also the plurality of peace experiences better. While there are important lessons from participatory (action) research, it is not the only way to get at these crucial issues, but there are tools and perspectives from this field of research that we can borrow, even when our research projects are not fully in keeping with participatory (action) ideals.

A second prominent theme in the special issue is the use of visual methods, research tools and forms of data. This builds on and advances a recent 'visual turn' in international relations, which is also beginning to take hold in peace studies.⁷⁷ There are a number of methodological avenues for how visual research on peace can be taken forward. Bramsen and Austin suggest video data analysis as a new methodological strategy in peace research, and argue that this method is especially apt at capturing the affective dynamics of interactions during peace negotiations or street protests. Thorne demonstrates how arts-based and visual methods can be used as parts of a participatory research strategy, and Hedström and Olivius show how life history diagrams, as a tool for visual elicitation in interviews, can help make visible the temporal dynamics of how research participants experience peace, and how this sometimes clashes with dominant temporal assumptions about peace processes and political transitions. Ultimately, these contributions, and their use of other ways of knowing and communicating, challenge us to think beyond ordinary methods to help us see new things about peace. Thus, the contributions through the special issue point to the potential of visual methods and data for addressing the three challenges of pluralism, temporality and affect when researching peace.

Relating to the emphasis on visual methodologies, the articles in this special issue show us the importance of expanding our take on what can be considered data. The contributions help broaden our gaze, from paying attention to the visual, including moving images, but also the graphic elicitation that can happen during interviews, or how consent procedures in themselves also generate insights and data that we can in turn use to understand peace processes better. Particularly, in terms of capturing both affect and emotions, turning to novel kinds of material can be key. Paying attention to various forms of remnants and artefacts helps us realise the goal of encompassing a plurality of voices in our research, as not all groups are equally involved in all kinds of knowledge production. But these varying kinds of material can also be important to capture temporal dynamics, both large and small – from the micro-dynamics in a conversation that was filmed, to the macro-dynamics of a life entangled with years of war and peace attempts – perspectives which are all important when we study peace.

This special issue has provided more impetus to the discussion of what specific methodological challenges we face as we research peace, and provided some suggestions for how we can tackle them. Many questions and challenges certainly remain. Some of the articles have pointed our attention to ethical and moral questions that need more attention from us. For example, when seeking to capture the role of affect in how peace is built and experienced, how should we engage with and try to uncover emotional and affective states among those we interview, without directly and possibly intrusively asking about intimate and potentially traumatic experiences and emotions? As Pepper argues, 'we researchers must carefully examine our desires for useful and novel data and weigh

them against the dignity and humanity of the person'. And when we engage in participatory research or embrace friendship as a research method in order to capture a plurality of perspectives on peace, including marginalised voices, how do we ensure that our relationships to research participants are characterised by mutual benefit rather than unilateral data extraction? And how do we manage expectations – our own and those of others – about what research can reasonably give back to the people and places we study? While these questions are not new, their urgency is heightened by the methodological strategies proposed by many of the articles in this special issue. As McMullin makes clear, a commitment to participatory methodologies and mutual relationships does not inoculate peace researchers from difficult questions. However, for him, 'the solution is not to eliminate fraught research encounters, but to reduce the distortions and acknowledge the power imbalances that inhere in these encounters'.

Finally, an important lesson from truly taking on the plurality challenge, is the reminder that any attempt at understanding peace and peace processes, is likely to be incomplete, and only partial. Again, this highlights the importance of employing multiple tools, perspectives and theories when we study peace. Likewise, increased attention to temporality as a key dimension of peace leads us to question taken for granted assumptions about how trajectories of peace processes and peace building unfold, and makes visible how these assumptions, as well as our own temporal position in relation to the events and processes we study, shape our findings. We need to recognise that what we are researching tends to be moving targets, continually shifting and developing, in part in dialogue with the research itself. What we can do as researchers then is to recognize the incompleteness of our accounts of peace, and be more transparent about the scope of our research. That said, we argue that deepening our methodological engagement with questions of plurality, temporality and affect are key steps for translating recent conceptual advances into methodological innovation in peace research.

Notes

1. See e.g. Diehl, 'Peace: A Conceptual Survey', Väyrynen et al., *Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research*, Stephenson, 'The Forum: Defining Peace', Olivius and Åkebo, 'Exploring Varieties of Peace'.
2. Gleditsch et al., 'Peace research – Just the study of war?'.
3. See e.g. Firchow and Mac Ginty, 'Measuring Peace: Comparability, Commensurability, and Complementarity', Wallensteen, *Quality Peace: Peacebuilding, victory, and world order*, Davenport et al., *The Peace Continuum*, Jarstad et al., *Three Approaches to Peace*, Smith et al., 'Illiberal peace-building in Asia', Söderström et al., 'Friends, Fellows, and Foes'.
4. See e.g. Wallensteen, *Peace Research: Theory and Practice*, 3, Gleditsch et al., 'Armed conflict 1946–2001: A new dataset', Wallensteen, *The Growing Peace Research Agenda*, Höglund and Öberg, *Understanding Peace Research: Methods and Challenges*.
5. Mac Ginty et al., *The Companion to Peace and Conflict Fieldwork*, Bliesemann de Guevara and Bøås, *Doing fieldwork in areas of international intervention*.
6. Mac Ginty, 'Complementarity and Interdisciplinarity in Peace and Conflict Studies'.
7. Diehl, 'Exploring Peace: Looking Beyond War and Negative Peace'.
8. Firchow and Mac Ginty, 'Measuring Peace', 23.
9. Olivius and Åkebo, 'Exploring Varieties of Peace', 4, Jarstad et al., *Relational Peace Practices*.
10. See e.g. Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic, *Methodologies for Feminist Peace Research*.

11. Söderström et al., 'Friends, Fellows, and Foes', see also Jarstad et al., *Varieties of peace: presentation of a research program*.
12. Mac Ginty, 'Temporality and contextualisation in Peace and Conflict Studies', 12–13.
13. Nordhag, 'Exploring Peace in the Midst of War', Cárdenas and Olivius, 'Building Peace in the Shadow of War'.
14. Jarstad and Segall, 'Grasping the empirical realities of peace in post-war northern Mitrovica', Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict resolution and the everyday politics of international intervention*, Söderström, *Living Politics After War: Ex-Combatants and Veterans Coming Home*, Randazzo, 'The paradoxes of the "everyday": scrutinising the local turn in peace building', Mac Ginty, 'Everyday peace: Bottom-up and local agency in conflict-affected societies', Blomqvist et al., 'Care and silence in women's everyday peacebuilding in Myanmar'.
15. Hedström, 'Confusion, Seduction, Failure: Emotions as Reflexive Knowledge in Conflict Settings'.
16. Such as Söderström et al., 'Friends, Fellows, and Foes', Jarstad et al., *Three Approaches to Peace*, Firchow and Mac Ginty, 'Measuring Peace', Höglund et al., *The Peace Triangle: Capturing Peace After Military Victory in Sri Lanka*, Davenport et al., *The Peace Continuum*, Wallenstein, *Quality Peace*, Shinko, 'Agonistic peace: A postmodern reading'.
17. Diehl, 'Looking Beyond War and Negative Peace', 7, see also Möller and Shim, 'Visions of Peace in International Relations', 248, Richmond, *Peace in international relations*, 273.
18. Möller and Shim, 'Visions of Peace in International Relations', 248, 253, 260.
19. Firchow and Mac Ginty, 'Measuring Peace'.
20. Jarstad et al., *Three Approaches to Peace*, see also Olivius and Åkebo, 'Exploring Varieties of Peace'.
21. See e.g. Åkebo and Thurairajah, *Winner's and loser's in peace, and beyond?*, Irvine and Hansen, *Missing discourses: Recognizing disability and LGBTQ+ communities in conflict transformation*.
22. Söderström et al., 'Friends, Fellows, and Foes', 489–492.
23. Ibid.
24. Parkinson, '(Dis) courtesy Bias: "Methodological Cognates", Data Validity, and Ethics in Violence-Adjacent Research', 5, 12.
25. Mac Ginty, 'Complementarity and Interdisciplinarity in Peace and Conflict Studies'.
26. For more on this, see e.g. Suwankhong and Liamputtong, 'Cultural Insiders and Research Fieldwork: Case Examples From Cross-Cultural Research With Thai People', Ryan, "Inside" and "outside" of what or where?', Horowitz, 'Remaining an Outsider – Membership as a Threat to Research Rapport', Parashar, 'Research Brokers, Researcher Identities and Affective Performances', Paechter, 'Researching sensitive issues online', Njeri, *Race, Positionality and the Researcher*, Tschunkert, *Working with Translators*, Koppensteiner, *Transrational Methods of Peace Research: The Researcher as (Re) source*.
27. Levine and McCourt, 'Why Does Pluralism Matter When We Study Politics?'.
28. Klem, 'The problem of peace and the meaning of "post-war"', 236.
29. Levine and McCourt, 'Why Does Pluralism Matter When We Study Politics?', 103.
30. For a more general discussion on pluralism and method, also see Chamberlain et al., 'Pluralisms in Qualitative Research'.
31. Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*, Langer and Brown, *Building sustainable peace: Timing and sequencing of post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding*.
32. See e.g. Mueller-Hirth, 'Temporalities of Victimhood: Time in the Study of Postconflict Societies', Read and Mac Ginty, 'The Temporal Dimension in Accounts of Violent Conflict', Christie and Algar-Faria, 'Timely interventions: Temporality and peacebuilding', McLeod, 'Back to the future: Temporality and gender security narratives in Serbia', Söderström, *Living Politics After War*, 6–9.
33. See e.g. Hutchings, *Time and World Politics: Thinking the Present*, Hom, 'Hegemonic metronome: the ascendancy of Western standard time', Chamon, 'Turning Temporal: a Discourse of Time in IR'.

34. See e.g. Adam, *Time and social theory*, van Noort, 'Strategic Narratives of the Past: An Analysis of China's New Silk Road Communication'.
35. Keen, 'War and peace: What's the difference?', 10.
36. Gusic, *Contesting peace in the post-war city: Belfast, Mitrovica and Mostar*, McLeod, 'Configurations of post-conflict: Impacts of representations of conflict and post-conflict upon the (political) translations of gender security within UNSCR 1325', Porter, 'Feminists building peace and reconciliation: beyond post-conflict'.
37. Nordhag, 'Exploring Peace in the Midst of War', Cárdenas and Olivius, 'Building Peace in the Shadow of War'.
38. Mueller-Hirth, 'Temporalities of Victimhood: Time in the Study of Postconflict Societies'.
39. Madsen and Hudson, 'Temporality and the discursive dynamics of the Rwandan National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security from 2009 and 2018', 553.
40. Ibid., 566–7.
41. Söderström, *Living Politics After War*, 186–187.
42. See also Diehl, 'Looking Beyond War and Negative Peace', 8, Söderström, *Living Politics After War*, 7–9, Mac Ginty, 'Temporality and contextualisation in Peace and Conflict Studies'.
43. Söderström, *Living Politics After War*.
44. Burgess et al., 'Rebels' Perspectives of the Legacy of Past Violence and of the Current Peace in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland', Dugan, *Imagining the Future: A Tool for Conflict Resolution*, Lederach, *Building peace*, Nilsson, *A comparison of Colombian Civilian and Military Actors*'.
45. See e.g. —, *Relational Peace among Elites in Cambodia?*
46. See e.g. Söderström, *Interviewing (a) post-war generation(s): peace and role identities*.
47. Jarstad et al., *Three Approaches to Peace*, Mac Ginty, 'Temporality and contextualisation in Peace and Conflict Studies', 5, Diehl, 'Just a Phase?: Integrating Conflict Dynamics Over Time', Söderström et al., 'Friends, Fellows, and Foes'.
48. Mac Ginty, 'Temporality and contextualisation in Peace and Conflict Studies', 1.
49. Wallensteen, *Quality Peace*.
50. Thaler, 'Reflexivity and temporality in researching violent settings', 33.
51. Mac Ginty, 'Temporality and contextualisation in Peace and Conflict Studies', 2.
52. Ibid., 6.
53. Söderström, 'Life diagrams: a methodological and analytical tool for accessing life histories', —, *Living Politics After War*, —, *Life histories and life diagrams*.
54. See e.g. —, *Politics of Affection: Ex-Combatants, Political Engagement and Reintegration Programs in Liberia*, Nussio, 'Emotional Legacies of War Among Former Colombian Paramilitaries', Costalli and Ruggeri, 'Politics Symposium: Emotions, Ideologies, and Violent Political Mobilization', Hedström, 'Confusion, Seduction, Failure: Emotions as Reflexive Knowledge in Conflict Settings'.
55. Randazzo, 'The paradoxes of the "everyday"', Mac Ginty, 'Everyday peace', Blomqvist et al., 'Care and silence in women's everyday peacebuilding in Myanmar', Lee, 'Understanding Everyday Peace in Cambodia: Plurality, Subtlety, and Connectivity'.
56. Åhäll, 'Affect as Methodology: Feminism and the Politics of Emotion', Hedström and Zin Mar Phyo, 'Friendship, intimacy, and power in research on conflict', Wibben et al., 'Collective discussion: piecing-up feminist peace research'.
57. Söderström et al., 'Friends, Fellows, and Foes'.
58. Bleiker and Hutchison, 'Introduction: Emotions and world politics'.
59. Clément and Sangar, *Researching Emotions in International Relations*, Koschut, *The Power of Emotions in World Politics*. see also Bramsen and Austin this issue
60. See e.g. Erisen et al., 'Affective Contagion in Effortful Political Thinking', Groenendyk, 'Current Emotion Research in Political Science', Marcus et al., *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment*, Neuman et al., *The Affect Effect: Dynamics of emotion in political thinking and behaviour*.
61. See e.g. Bramsen and Poder, 'Theorizing Three Basic Emotional Dynamics of Conflicts'.

62. Halperin, 'Emotion, Emotion Regulation, and Conflict Resolution'. Halperin et al., 'Anger, Hatred, and the Quest for Peace: Anger Can Be Constructive in the Absence of Hatred', Bar-Tal, 'Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts'.
63. Parashar, 'Research Brokers, Researcher Identities and Affective Performances', 254.
64. Ibid., 254–5.
65. Hedström and Zin Mar Phy, 'Friendship, intimacy, and power in research on conflict'.
66. Ibid, 768.
67. Hedström, 'Confusion, Seduction, Failure: Emotions as Reflexive Knowledge in Conflict Settings'.
68. Parashar, 'Research Brokers, Researcher Identities and Affective Performances', 255.
69. Åhäll, 'Affect as Methodology: Feminism and the Politics of Emotion'. among others.
70. Bramsen and Poder, 'Theorizing Three Basic Emotional Dynamics of Conflicts', 55.
71. Ibid., 60.
72. Söderström et al., 'Friends, Fellows, and Foes', 493, 496.
73. Wæver and Bramsen, *Introduction: Revitalizing conflict studies*.
74. Björkdahl and Kappler, *Peacebuilding and spatial transformation*.
75. Robinson and McClelland, 'Troubling places: Walking the "troubling remnants" of post-conflict space'.
76. Greenberg Raanan and Shoal, 'Mental maps compared to actual spatial behaviour using GPS data'.
77. Bleiker and Hutchison, 'Introduction: Emotions and world politics', Premaratna, 'Dealing With Sri Lanka's Demons'.

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