Peace Research: An Agenda for the Future

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"Whether it is effective or not, our task is to clarify the ideological situation, to underline, beyond the paradoxes and contingencies the true terms of the human problem, to recall Marxists to their humanist inspiration, to remind the democracies of their fundamental hypocrisy, and to keep intact against propaganda the chances that might still be left for history to become enlightened again", Merleau Ponty is *Humanism and Terror*.

Peace Research (PR) has a simple *raison d'etre*: there exist a large number of conflicts in and between societies (and within and among nation-states) which seem to be intractable, almost incapable of being resolved. Neither conventional wisdom nor established academic disciplines seem to have been able to generate "solutions" which work in these difficult situations. Even while American pop intellectuals may celebrate the end of history, the parabola of strife that running from the Balkans to Kashmir through Central Asia is a painful reminder of how premature this partying is proving to be.

In other words, PR justifies its existence as a discipline on the assumption that existing tools within the fields of the social sciences are limited in their capacity to comprehend the complexity of conflicts and their escalation into different levels and forms of violence. These limitations in understanding manifest themselves in an inability to create viable mechanisms for conflict resolution and stable institutions for conflict management.

The conceptual tools at the disposal of the social sciences provide for only a particular understanding. A real understanding, *verstehen* as Weber would put it, calls for "holistic" analysis. For instance, (and this example is often used by Peace Researchers), a "real understanding of international relations includes more than an expert's acquaintance with the world of diplomacy notes/memoranda, position, papers, interplay of alliances in the classic game of *real-politik*. Attention must be paid to a deeper phenomenon of which International Relations, classically conceived are only symptoms, several orders of abstractions removed from reality".

There is, therefore, a need for approach, which will not merely be inter-disciplinary but trans-disciplinary. The distinction is subtle but crucial to understand the method of PR. Interdisciplinary eventually means the adding up of issues and concepts from various disciplines, while trans-disciplinarily ensures an overlapping of different disciplines "focussing on new problem definitions, which invest the subject of research with a new identity. Trans-disciplinary seeks a symbiosis of ideas rather than a mere borrowing from different fields.

It goes without saying that PR is an "applied" social science and not a "pure" social science. While a pure social science would be content with the accumulation of knowledge per se, an applied social science aims at its application to the fulfillment of specific goals. The twin goal PR sets for itself are those of preventing violence and promoting peace.

How, one may well ask, are Peace and Violence defined? Violence, it is evident, can articulate itself in either its more direct, manifest crude forms or through subtler mechanisms of exploitation. An interesting definition was provided some years ago by Johan Galtung: "Violence is present when human beings are influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realisations". Another explanation suggests that violence exist when "external forces prevent a man from developing what he desires". Both definitions are controversial and far from satisfactory, and the concept of violence needs to be further debated and we may finally arrive at definitions true only for particular societies.

Peace, of course, is the elimination of both direct and structural forms of violence. While negative peace or the absence of wars may be the immediate aim of PR, the creation of a just world order, marked by the absence of all forms of structural violence remains the final aim – a world integrated and cooperating where social justice is a reality, is "the guiding attribute" of positive peace. As one Peace Researcher suggests, if general and complete peace (GCP) and General and Complete War (GCW) are at two ends of the spectrum, "one may look upon peace research as research into the conditions for moving closer to the state of GCP or at least not drifting closer to GCW".

PR studies may be divided for purely analytical purposes into four areas, depending upon the geography and degree of violence they focus on: (i) Studies on direct manifest violence within the inter-societal or inter-state context have concentrated on the causes of wars with the aim of conflict avoidance, conflict resolution and conflict management, (ii) Studies of Direct Manifest intra-social or intra-state violence have focussed on civil war, terrorism, ethnic, religious and racial violence, (iii) Studies on structural violence within the international society have analysed the asymmetrically structured international relations, unequal international division of labour, institutional exploitative structures, and centre-periphery relations to "the systematic enrichment of the centre and the devastating misery of the periphery" (iv) Intra-societal and intra-state structural violence: these studies have concentrated on the mechanisms of exploitation in the developing world.

The use of the right method has become a constant source of strife and debate within the social sciences. The behavioural revolution, which its zeal to scientificize the disciplines, brought with it a strong tradition of empiricism. The method of logical positivist empiricism had a tradition going back to Galileo and Newton, and running through Descartes and Kant. In peace research, if found a new form which combined "ideological voluntarism and methodological empiricism" and expressed itself in quantified model building, simulation exercises and multi-variate analysis. Critics have emphasised the inability of man's behaviours to be empirically tested in a laboratory experiment. Not only are there far too many variables but PR would lose out on its main aim of being a critical science. As Marleau Ponty put it "Every significant proposition of empirical psychology anticipates a phenomenological truth. The methodological dilemma for the peace researcher is indeed very great". The question really is how to reunite the "telos of humanity with the occluded telos of science?"

Agenda

What agenda than, can we lay down for India and the rest of the developing world? (This list is not original, but compiled from various sources, and certainly not comprehensive).

1. Research on human nature and individual personality and the anatomy of human aggression.
2. Research on the role of pressure groups interest groups/political parties in the causes of communal violence.
3. Research on the dominant proprietary classes/intellectual elite as the societal basis for social violence.
4. Research on the role of the media, public opinion, education and rumour in the resolution and causes of violence.
5. Research on the role of the administrative machinery, the bureaucracy and law and order agencies.
6. Research on the role of national policies, programmes and accords in furthering social violence.
7. Research on the level of development strategies as a cause for social violence.
8. Research on the role of ecological destruction as a factor of social violence.
9. Research on the role of external aid, propaganda, MNC's as a cause of conflict.
10. Research on violence escalation processes but of conflictive or antagonistic patterns between social groups within and between societies.
11. Role of global developments on intrastate/societal violence.