

Demilitarisation and Peace-Building in Southern Africa: Understanding the Opportunities Lost

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Peter Batchelor and Kees Kingma, (eds.), *Demilitarisation and Peace-building in Southern Africa. Vol. I, Concepts and Processes*. Aldershot: Ashgate (The International Political Economy of the New Regionalism Series), 2004.

Peter Batchelor and Kees Kingma, (eds.), *Demilitarisation and Peace-building in Southern Africa. Vol. II, National and Regional Experiences*. Aldershot: Ashgate (The International Political Economy of the New Regionalism Series), 2004.

Peter Batchelor, Kees Kingma and Guy Lamb, (eds.), *Demilitarisation and Peace-building in Southern Africa. Vol. III. The Role of the Military in State Formation and National Building*. Aldershot: Ashgate (The International Political Economy of the New Regionalism Series), 2004.

Benign: how else might one described the two words, ‘Demilitarisation’ and ‘Peace-building’, which anchor this set of three books published on behalf of the Cape Town-based Centre for Conflict Resolution? Benign, yes; and yet, the unfolding tragedy in Iraq shows how quickly these (and other) key-words can be corroded. In the exercise of state power, words are often stripped of meaning to suit narrow political ends. Often, however, this process is corroborated by the set routines of academic discourse. Here, the accusing finger points, not at faceless decision-makers, but to the routines of organised knowledge.

While the contributors to these three books are not beholden to the power of power politics, to use a phrase from the American theorist, John Vasquez,¹ suggest that the routines of orthodox International Relations, especially its ontological focus on states, have corroded the good intentions of those who participated in the project from which these books were hatched.

Orthodox International Relations (IR) is fixated on what it calls ‘Realism’. Underlying this theoretical construct are five assumptions: international politics is about states; states seek (military) power because nothing else can guarantee their security; relations between states are guided by national interests; it is possible – no imperative – to distinguish between the political and the economic; and because the world is driven by calculations of power, states must prepare for war.²

Generalised statements like these are of course the staple diet of disciplinary routines where parsimony always weighs heavily on choice.³ As a result efforts to organise are invariably over-stretched, distorted, and twisted to fit into formal explanatory frames. This is an over-riding feature of Realist IR and accounts for its wholly simple-minded formulations of the social world.

Take the Realist belief that southern African states operate within a regional 'state system'. This idea was introduced into the region's political discourse in the late 1960s by the American political scientist Larry Bowman.⁴ Four years later the idea was imprinted in academic lore by the success of a book⁵ which first described the region within the conceptual framing of Realism. As it did so, both history and sociology were ignored: what mattered more was the necessity to force the region into policy frames that could be of use to practitioners.

The facts on the ground were somewhat different, however. At the time, all the states in the region were – as they remain, incidentally – wholly unformed. This explains why overlapping sovereignties, not to mention robust cross-border communities, flourish throughout southern Africa.

The essays in the three books under review are positioned within the broad framing of 'Peace Studies'. In its heyday, 'Peace Research' – as it was also known – was seen to be an antidote to Cold War Realism. Strongly normative in its calling, Peace Studies favoured social engineering over empirical and historical inquiry.

Understanding this teleology explains why these essays fail to ask deep-seated, first-order questions about the theoretical construction of southern Africa and its 'state system'. It also explains why these writers are not concerned with rescuing the key-words – even those which they champion – from their corrosion by the unbridled forms of Realist IR.

Peace Research has never made a deep impression in southern Africa. Institutionally, its only real home – in South Africa, certainly – has been the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR) which has been within the institutional fold of the University of Cape Town for forty years. In the 1970s and the 1980s, the CCR was associated with the work of H. W. van der Merwe, the Afrikaner sociologist and Quaker Peace-Activist; from 1992 to 2003, it was directed by Laurie Nathan, one-time student leader, anti-conscription activist, who has degrees in Business, Law and Peace Studies.

The overall aim of these books, as Peter Batchelor and Kees Kingma suggest in their introduction to Volume One, 'is to support and facilitate the achievement of sustainable peace and human development in southern Africa, by analysing demilitarization and peace-building processes in the region and identifying policy options for peace-building. The central focus of the research is the extent to which demilitarization following the termination of wars has contributed to broad processes of peace-building in the affected region. Has the military in southern Africa downsized and refocused towards new roles? Has

there been a “peace-dividend”, allowing more investment in economic and human development, thereby dealing with some of the root causes of conflict? The research findings reported here have addressed these questions from several different angles, at several levels, and in a number of specific country settings’.

In the main, the goals they have set themselves have been achieved. In the first volume this is certainly so, but – and this is great disappointment of the entire set – these goals fail to describe the region in ways that are different from those offered by Realist IR. For this reviewer, this is the fundamental flaw in *Peace Research*. Interests, as I have argued elsewhere, will always trump ideas.⁶

Andre du Pisani’s chapter is the only one (of five) to be positioned, disciplinary-speaking, within the mainstream of International Relations (IR). His chapter on ‘concepts and discourse’ succeeds in tracking an unfolding series of ideas both within the region in the aftermath of the Cold War. He opens with Barry Buzan’s pioneering work towards the ‘widening and deepening’ of the idea of security:⁷ away from the state towards more rounded understandings of ways to understand the myriad of processes which surround ‘demilitarisation and peace-keeping’.

This said, du Pisani’s chronology often decomposes, and his emphases are difficult to understand. He also misses, in my view, important moments in the development of the critical literature which challenged Realist IR. (Ken Booth’s brief but seminal paper⁸ which turned thinking about security in southern Africa on its head, for example, is not mentioned at all!) Does this explain, one must wonder, why the idea of Human Security – which has recently made such of powerful impact in both theory and practise of IR – gets only one, and very passing, mention?

Laurie Nathan’s idea around the ‘structural causes of crisis and violence’ borrows from an early generation of peace researchers especially the pioneering ideas of Johan Galtung. Although often invoked, these concepts have not enjoyed a wide understanding in southern Africa. But the guise in which they appear here is not strongly sociologically located, as was Galtung’s work. Instead, Nathan locates them in democratic theory and suggests ten ways to manage ‘structural violence’ in Africa.

Gavin Cawthra’s ideas are located within state theory – Charles Tilly and Benedict Anderson, for instance – but he draws the argument about the provision of security continually back towards the limits of ‘state capacity’. Both History and Sociology might have helped him to suggest why this lack of capacity can be explained by the imported nature of the state in the region.

The defence economist Peter Bachelor sets out a strong ‘opportunity-cost’ argument for demilitarisation through the use of quantitative indicators. It is a convincing argument but, alas, one poorly understood by mainstream economists who look beyond militaries to markets to deliver peace to southern Africa. Bachelor does not address this issue. This is a pity because the alliance

between market economics and state-centred political power sustains most Realist IR thinking in the region.

Using a 'sociological lens', Jackie Cock's interests are with identities, institutions and ideologies. She ends, however, somewhere else – with violence, gender and the environment but only after picking from a rich theoretical base: Noam Chomsky, Jaques Derrida, Richard Falk, Anthony Giddens, Clifford Geertz, Eric Hobsbawm, Michael Igantieff, Fredrick Jameson, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Edward Said and Anthony Smith.

These thinkers offer interesting alternative perspectives on the southern African region but, curiously, Cock ignores the insights offered by history in the construction of the region and its political discourses. Nonetheless, this is the only piece in the entire series that is seriously interested in theoretical ideas and in sociology.

Kees Kingma's contribution is distant from the region. He mainly reports second-hand from workshops; he is more interested on what happens when Peace Studies meets management and implementation. Five quite flimsy, case-studies, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, anchor a plea for appreciating more deeply the plight of ex-combatants, and for assisting in their integration in society.

If Volume One of this Series hangs together, albeit by using different disciplinary points of entry, Volume Two is little more than a pastiche. What were the editors aiming at by drawing such diverse themes together?

Certainty there are, as the sub-title suggests, 'national and regional experiences' of demilitarisation and peace-building in the region, but each of these themes could have produced a volume in, and of, itself. Parenthetically, this is where a chapter looking at the force, power and material basis of policy think-tanks would have made a welcome contribution to consolidating 'demilitarisation and peace-keeping' in southern Africa.

After apartheid ended, energetic writings and policy interventions from these groups helped to turn words into directions other than they were intended. Max Weber helped us understand how this happens during transitions: ideas that aim for '... change ... are worn down by historical process, codified and routinized by interpreters, gradually brought into line with the status quo'.⁹

Located in (foreign-funded) think-tanks, these interpreters have devoted themselves to the perfection of the management of the region through the ontology offered by states. They fought – and they won – a battle for the soul of the region by strategically positioning benign words at problem-laden conceptual intersections. In these places, progressive ideas were constructed as threats to rational ordering and any benign meanings that words may have enjoyed were stripped away in power politics.

As this happened, any hopes for another form for southern Africa was lost and the idea of 'peace and prosperity' was turned into an armed chain of Realism that links demilitarisation and peace-building to the imperative for

economic growth. South Africa's 1998 invasion of Lesotho stands as testimony to efforts to impose Realist order on the region by twisting words and their meanings; unfortunately, this event gets barely a mention in these three books.

If the second volume in the series was an opportunity lost, the final in the series is well directed: the role of the military in state-formation in Southern Africa. This is a return of the modernisation theme that militaries make nations.

Following an introductory chapter by Andre du Pisani and Guy Lamb which traces, but does not really critique, this modernisation trajectory, there are country chapters – Botswana (Bonolo Simon Ditiraw), Mozambique (João Paulo Borges Coelho and Paulino Macaringue), Namibia (Andre du Pisani), South Africa (Annette Seegers), and Zimbabwe (Walter Tapfumaneyi). These are interesting, albeit uneven, case studies: each points the way towards the need for further work. Again, what seems necessary is a regional perspective: this could, conceivably, again have been delivered by History and Sociology.

If all these criticisms sound a trifle hard: let me mute them somewhat. Any work that counters the deepening corrosion of social life that has been so powerfully driven by net-worked Realist think-tanks must be welcomed – no, must be roundly applauded. In important ways, and this follows from what has been argued, the absence of muscular IR is a singular strength of this volume; indeed, the entire project.

The contributors to these three books hope that neo-institutionalism will deliver to southern Africa's people all that has been denied them. But, Iraq suggests that neo-institutionalism, if stripped of its benign intent, can deliver great harm. The problem may lie elsewhere. It is a pity that the idea of states – their history, and their sociology – was subjected to too few searching questions by the twenty-five authors who fill these pages.

Notes

1. John A. Vasquez, (1983), *The Power of Power Politics*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.
2. These ideas have been distilled from Kim Richard Nossal, (1998), *The Patterns of World Politics*, London: Prentice- Hall, p. 15.
3. This comes from Donald J. Pachula, (2002), 'Introduction, Visions of International Relations: Project and Procedure', in Donald J. Pachula, (eds.), *Visions of International Relations: Assessing an Academic Field*, University of South Carolina Press, p. xv.
4. Larry W. Bowman, (1968), 'The Subordinate State System of Southern Africa', *International Studies Quarterly*, 12, 3, 231-261.
5. Christian P. Potholm and Richard Dale, (eds.), (1972), *Southern Africa in Perspective: Essays in Regional Politics*, New York: The Free Press.
6. Peter Vale, (2004), *Whatever happened to the post-apartheid moment? Past hopes and possible futures for southern Africa*, London: Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR Comment Series), 37p.

7. Barry Buzan, (1991), *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, (Second Edition), Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner.
8. Ken Booth, (1994), 'A Security Regime in Southern Africa: Theoretical Considerations', Bellville: Centre for Southern African Studies (Working Paper Series No. 30).
9. Cited in John Abromeit, (2004), 'Remembering Adorno', *Radical Philosophy*, 124, p. 27.