Introduction to the Special Issue: Power and Conflict

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This Special Issue of *Peace and Conflict Studies* focuses on the power dynamics that drive participants of protracted violent conflicts. Such dynamics undergird every act of brute force by militants of such conflicts, every state policy that diminishes the lives and life prospects of marginalized people, and every public speech by a political leader that degrades a segment of the population as inferior, dangerous or impure. Despite the ubiquity of power to violent conflicts generally, this subject matter lacks primacy as a central topic of prevailing conflict theories. Power is cast tacitly as secondary to the cardinal categories of violence, conflict and peacebuilding. This subordinate positioning is mistaken. A robust understanding of protracted violent conflicts requires attending to power’s complexity, its many forms, and its inseparability in the interactions and potential transformation of conflict actors.

All the articles in this issue address protracted conflicts between state governments and their political subjects. In the first article, “The Paradox of State Power in the Dynamics of Conflict,” I argue that the deep meaning of state power of modern governments reveals the presence of contradictory forces, some of which seek to advance the state’s legitimacy as rightful ruler of the nation while others seek to undermine such legitimacy. In the next article “Struggle and Martyrdom: Abusive Power and Root Narrative in the Aftermath of the Eritrean Revolution,” Solon Simmons examines the power dynamics driving the conflict in Eritrea. For this case study he deploys his root narrative theory, which represents an original perspective for understanding political conflicts through reflection on conflict actors’ discursive practices. The next article by Karina Korostelina, entitled "National Resilience to Protracted Violence in Ukraine" offers a case study of Ukraine’s resilience in the face of marshal forces attacking this nation. She defines resilience as the capacity of a collectivity to resist the marshal forces of conflict perpetrators, heal from the collective trauma following periods of mass violence, and transform themselves in ways that prevent a return to violent conflicts. In the article that
follows, entitled “Words and Power in Conflict: Rwanda under MRND Rule,” Allan T. Moore reveals how the Rwandan government of former President Juvenal Habyarimana orchestrated a propaganda campaign in the years preceding the 1994 genocide to dehumanize Rwanda’s Tutsis. In another case study of governmental power, entitled “A Weapon of Legitimacy: China’s Integrative Power and its Impact on its Reactions on Domestic Conflicts,” Kwok Chung Wong examines the various powers exerted by the government of China in their relations with Hong Kong, powers that are driven by the principle of “One Country, Two Systems”, while responding with repressive means to the perceived threats of the 2019 protesters in Hong Kong.