



11-2020

Introduction to the Special Issue: Power and Conflict

Daniel Rothbart

School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, drothbar@gmu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/pcs>



Part of the [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rothbart, Daniel (2020) "Introduction to the Special Issue: Power and Conflict," *Peace and Conflict Studies*: Vol. 27 : No. 2 , Article 1.

DOI: 10.46743/1082-7307/2020.1828

Available at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/pcs/vol27/iss2/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Peace & Conflict Studies at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Peace and Conflict Studies by an authorized editor of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.

Introduction to the Special Issue: Power and Conflict

Abstract

Excerpt

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.

Keywords: *power and conflict, power dynamics, state power*

Author Bio(s)

Daniel Rothbart is professor of conflict analysis and resolution at the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution, George Mason University. He specializes in prevention of mass violence, ethnic conflicts, power and conflict, the ethics of conflict resolution, civilians in war and the psycho-politics of conflict. He currently serves as co-director of the Program on Prevention of Mass Violence. Professor Rothbart's academic writings include more than fifty articles and chapters in scholarly journals and books. Among his ten authored or edited books, his recent publications include the following books: *State Domination and the Psycho-Politics of Conflict* (2019); *Systemic Humiliation in America: Fighting for Dignity within Systems of Degradation* (2018). He is currently exploring the intersection of power, psychology and conflict. Professor Rothbart received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Washington University, St. Louis, and taught in the department of philosophy at GMU. He also held positions as visiting research scholar at Linacre College, Oxford, University of Cambridge and Dartmouth College.

Peace and Conflict Studies
Special Issue: Power and Conflict
Issue Editor: Daniel Rothbart,
Professor of Conflict Analysis and Resolution,
The Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School of Peace and Conflict Resolution
George Mason University

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.