The lyncher and the atom bomber are related. The first cannot murder unpunished and unrebuked without so encouraging the latter that the peace of the world and the lives of millions are endangered.

– Civil Rights Congress (1951) “We Charge Genocide petition.”

Peace is an enduring concern among geographers whose discipline has been so complicit in conquest, territorial and geopolitical hegemony, war, and racism. Elisée Reclus, for example, wrote in 1898 that “the words ‘order’ and ‘social peace’ sound quite beautiful to our ears, but we would like to know what these noble apostles, the rulers, mean by these words. Yes, peace and order are great ideals that deserve to be realized, but under one condition: that this peace is not that of the grave, and this order is not that of Warsaw!” (2013: 143).

Several decades later, following the Great War, Isaiah Bowman, director of the American Geographical Society, worked to construct a “scientific peace”. His proposal for a “new world” and the United States’ role in it included solidifying the geographical order through the nation-state and territorial boundaries (see Smith 2003: 120-125). This is the sort of peace that Reclus, no doubt, would have questioned, and the sort of state-centric definition of security, order, and liberal peace that contemporary critical geographers also question.

As Fiona McConnell, Nick Megoran, and Philippa Williams write in the introduction to their new volume *Geographies of Peace*, such examples belong to a long history of peace scholarship within geography, albeit one that is punctuated and divergent. The editors contend that the study of peace has been overshadowed by critical (and not-so-critical) attention to armed
conflict and political violence. *Geographies of Peace*, in turn, aims to rectify that unevenness and to advance theoretically-sophisticated, empirically-grounded studies and practices of peace.

*Geographies of Peace* comprises 13 chapters, including an introduction and an conclusion written by the editors that provide context and suggestive avenues for research. The book opens with a foreword by international relations scholar Oliver Richmond, and is divided into three sections: “Contesting Narratives of Peace”; “Techniques of Peacemaking”; and “Practices of Coexistence”. These themes are not so much discrete as descriptive of continuities that thread through the volume. Together, the contributors develop the principles that peace is a contested concept; that peace is a process; and that peace is contextual, or grounded in particular places, geopolitical conjunctions, and uneven social relations. My review will briefly detail each contribution before turning to a discussion of peace and violence research in geography.

Part 1, “Contesting Narratives of Peace”, offers three compelling chapters that illustrate how peace and violence are intertwined, conceptually and in practice. Simon Dalby argues that peace advocates must engage with shifting terms of politics and violence in order to delegitimize the use of violence as a mode of geopolitical order and rule. In this contemporary moment, this means contending with discourses of security and “responsibility to protect” (R2P) as two principle means through which imperialist military interventions are rationalized. Nicole Laliberte’s chapter draws on ethnographic research she conducted with a women-led organization, ADO, which works to create peace in northern Uganda. The political terrain of human rights that these activists must negotiate is tricky. Human rights discourses and practices, she writes, “are not innocent; they have been created in, and through, systems of violence” (p.47). This premise, echoing Randall Williams in *The Divided World* (2010), leads Laliberte to explore how the ways in which ADO positions itself as a human rights agent and peacemaker necessarily mean that they simultaneously end up reinforcing other state and structural relations of violence and oppression.
In the concluding chapter to this section, Patricia Daley also uses feminist theory to focus on the local contingencies of peace in the central African states of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, and Rwanda. She analyzes how the Western dominance in the region of “liberal peace”–defined as one that privileges security of territory and the state within a geopolitical order–rests on and reproduces gendered dichotomies and violences. Daley brings an intersectional feminist analysis to peace scholar Johan Galtung’s concepts of “negative peace” and “positive peace” (defined as the cessation of physical conflict as compared to social justice) in order to develop a transformative concept of peace. While Galtung’s reformulation is more holistic than the war-peace concept, Daley argues that it remains liberal in its failure to consider systemic gender violence. She writes: “A locally contingent peace needs to unpack the gendered dynamics of war and peace, and open up to the everyday lived experiences of people with respect to conflict resolution and peaceful co-existence in different geographical and cultural contexts” (p.77). Her intervention reveals not only the blurred lines between victim and soldier, but also how the framing of rape as “a ‘weapon of war’ among tribal peoples” obscures the expansion of sexual violence within “a liberal peace framework that promotes militarism and hypermasculinity” (p.75).

The second part of the book, “Techniques of Peacemaking”, continues threads from the first section on the local contingencies of peace and interrelations between peace and violence. John Donaldson’s chapter on nation-state boundary practices aims to intervene in the dominant conceptualization of boundary making as a one-time event, which he argues rests on “a very specific geopolitical situation and…a very specific–negative–concept of peace” (p.92). To shift from attention from boundary dispute resolution as discrete to a more processual orientation, he highlights practices of peacebuilding and the long-term implications these have for borderlands’ residents (not just states). While questions of sovereignty and territoriality are not undermined, this approach does offer possibilities for recognizing the many people engaged in “ongoing
responsibilities for ensuring everyday peace within borderlands areas” (p.103). The contribution that Sara Koopman makes draws on ethnographic research and conceptual mapping exercises that she conducted with international peace accompaniers in Colombia. She employs Galtung’s theory of a “chain of nonviolence” to analyze the work by Colombians and international accompaniers to create spaces of peace within the country. This approach enables her to theorize peace as “a socio-spatial relation that is always made and made again” (p.126). Spaces of peace in Koopman’s analysis are not so much fixed, but produced. That is, “accompaniment can best be understood as part of the constant creation of space, by all of us, in and through interaction” (p.120). Thinking about space relationally affords opportunities for peace activists to better understand and mobilize their multiply-scaled social networks to make spaces for peace.

The question of geographic scale also informs Fiona McConnell’s chapter on Tibetan practices of satyagraha, Gandhi’s principle of “insistence on truth”, and ahimsa, or active refusal to do harm. McConnell situates collective practices and discourses of satyagraha at the global scale, national scale, and scale of the everyday. This approach illustrates tensions among different meanings of nonviolence: at the scale of Tibet as an imagined community of world peace, to more national-scale and pragmatic efforts of self-rule vis-à-vis China, and in terms of the individual through the Lhakar cultural movement and self-immolation protests. Despite the evident tensions among meanings and practices of nonviolence across these scales, McConnell concludes that, “nonviolence can be seen as both a pragmatic strategy in a situation where the tools of hard power are unavailable and a key ideological framework from which international legitimacy can be sought” (p.146). This case study underscores the necessity of researching peace in terms of “situated knowledges within distinct social and cultural settings” (p.145). The final chapter of this section, by Lia Shimada, focuses on peacebuilding efforts in Northern Ireland. To move beyond the idea of a “post-conflict” time, peace scholars have developed three approaches to conflict–resolution, management, and transformation–each of which, Shimada
observes, also suggest unique conceptualizations of peace. In order to explore the idea that peacebuilding requires both structural change and individual- and community-scale change, Shimada examines two paramilitary members’ attempts to shift meanings associated with Eleventh Night loyalist bonfires. The everyday scale of their practice suggests for Shimada that peacebuilding necessarily “involves the creation of shared place-based identities among the conflicting parties” (p.155).

Part 3 concerns “Practices of Coexistence”, and focuses on everyday life practices that foster peace. It opens with a chapter by Stuart Schoenfeld and colleagues on environmental peacebuilding in the eastern Mediterranean. The piece draws on Galtung and Megoran’s work on positive peacebuilding to inform their case study of the Arava Institute, which hosts environmentalists from Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and beyond the region to study together on a kibbutz near the Jordanian border for a period of one to two semesters. The authors contend that the Institute plays an important role in fostering cooperation on environmental issues in a deeply divided region by purposive attention to co-existence at the center. Intentional relationship-building work, the authors argue, holds the possibility of “transforming adversarial relationships into empathetic ones” (p.174). Philippa Williams’ chapter considers how Hindu and Muslim communities in Varanasi, India, responded to a set of bomb attacks on a Hindu temple and city train station not with communal reprisals, as many expected and some actively supported, but instead with the “active reproduction of inter-community peaceful relations” (p.194). Like Laliberte and Daley, Williams turns to feminist geopolitical methods to reveal the “uneven politics of maintaining everyday peace” (p.205) by inter-community associational networks, particularly in the city’s silk sari industry. This approach illustrates both everyday civil relationships and the conditions of economic and political marginalization that Muslim residents continued to face.
The third chapter in this section, by Nick Megoran, focuses on the unlikely story of a well-known Uzbek singer and his relationship with the Uzbekistani Jewish community in Israel. He argues that this singer not only knits together different communities living in states in central Asia and Israel, but in the process transforms Muslim and Jewish understandings of each other. The case of this elite actor is significant for Megoran because he serves to illustrate that transnational relations are forged not just by states, but also by individuals, thereby illustrating the “pacific contributions of migration” (p.224). These relationships were forged still within conditions of ongoing conflict where many Palestinians are not able to return, underscoring how “peace for one group of people may not be good news for another” (p.225). Jonathan Darling’s contribution shifts scale to local spaces of asylum in Sheffield, England, in order to explore “less-than-violent geographies”. By this term, Darling aims to emphasize the “impossibility of untangling relations of violent and nonviolent actions, spaces and times” (p.229) and to shift attention to the “situated practices of relations which occur across and within ever-present modalities of violence” (p.237). Prosaic acts of care and welcome are less-than-violent because they rarely explicitly challenge the “objectively violent” (after Žižek) geography of asylum, even as they have the potential to transform daily relations. Thus, Darling, like Shimada, emphasizes the importance of everyday relationship-building that has the potential to transform everyday violence. Finally, the editors close Geographies of Peace with a discussion of the shared and distinct ways that contributors approach the relationship between violence and nonviolence; the situatedness of agency; and the power relations of peace. This analysis is useful for deepening the conceptual discussion that the editors wish to advance within geography. They reiterate their contention that geographers must do more than criticize violence, but also be part of researching and being part of the work of constructing peaceful geographies.

In short, established and newer scholars in the field alike will find a compelling array of conceptual and methodological approaches to studying peacemaking practices, relationships
between peace and violence, and the unevenness of peace. This volume particularly illustrates the strength of ethnographic approaches to studying geographies of peace and theoretical contributions made by feminist geopolitics. And for these reasons I recommend it. Lest geographic studies of peace sound a little too…well, peaceful and uncontentious, I would also like to draw attention to a tension I see in the book, and in the discipline, regarding the relationship between how peace is conceptualized and peace as a normative concept. In short, must the discipline claim “peace” to be against violence, and what are the normative terms being used to define geographies of peace?

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On the one hand, I see the discipline critically exposing how liberal definitions of peace routinely uphold systemic relations of violence, and some in turn documenting, analyzing, and advocating for counter-hegemonic practices of peace. As contributors to this volume demonstrate so well, conceptualizations of peace—defined relationally, along a continuum of violence, or as less-than-violent—are fundamentally contingent geographically and historically, and are often indexed in filial terms such as coexistence, mutuality, justice, care, and hospitality. On the other hand, I see dualistic notions of peace (i.e. nonviolence) being privileged and used to categorize scholarship into critical studies of violence or peace and to consider progress.

For example, Dalby contextualizes contemporary geographers’ aspirations for “a peaceful world—one beyond war and at least the most egregious injustices of structural violence” (p.41)—by citing two studies which “suggest that violence is declining overall” (p.29-30). The first is Steven Pinker’s book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2011), and the second is the Human Security Report Project’s *Human Security Report 2009/2010* (2011). Pinker’s book tells a sweeping 12,000-year history of worldwide decline in violence–warfare, murder, and inhumane
practices like torture and slavery—that he attributes to state-making, rights revolutions, and the
decline of interstate conflict following WWII and various decolonial wars. HSRP issued its first
report compiling and analyzing global datasets in 2005 (and their 2013 report weighs in on the
debate over Pinker’s argumentation and evidence). Their, and other researchers’, contention that
violence is declining is significant at a moment when states and other organizations mobilize
apocalyptic narratives of innate, increasing, or immediate violence to bolster their claims to
provide security, protection, and peace.

While I have no interest in upholding fearful portrayals of pervasive and unchangeable
violence, I find it deeply ironic and troubling that the narrative of declining violence that Pinker
traces—such as the “pacification process”, or “civilizing process”, used to describe the slow
emergence of the nation-state—reproduces the violent terms of the nation-state, colonialism, and
imperialism that have been used to systematically erase many of the forms of state and structured
racial, gender, and sexual violence, including ongoing settler colonialism. So do geographers
need a progressive teleology like this to justify the study of and advocacy for peace? If critical
geographers continue to study and criticize the forms of violence that don’t count in such reports
and whose erasure is produced by the state and resisted by those who are subject to it, does this
mean that the discipline remains overly fixated on studying violence rather than its alternatives?
The question is not as rhetorical as it sounds. The editors of Geographies of Peace contend that
while the discipline has been “doing the important task of challenging the moral logic of war, it
has failed to develop equally sophisticated theoretical engagements with, and devote sustained
empirical research to, peace” (p.1). They continue in the conclusion: “To be against violence is
not necessarily the same as being for peace” (p.256). This seems like the kind of either/or
proposition that contributors to the volume and others in the field reject.

This is an especially important tension for those of us who study the interrelations among
multiple forms of systemic and state violence that are often erased or not accounted for in official
calculations of violence. A single example will suffice. In 2014, a Chicago-based intergenerational grassroots group called We Charge Genocide submitted a petition to the United Nations with documentation they collected on the routine police abuse and torture to which young people in the city are subject. They drew inspiration for this approach from a petition by the same name that was submitted to the UN in 1951. The epigraph above is a quote from the 1951 petition which makes clear that the Civil Rights Congress made an analytical connection between systematic extrajudicial killings of Black Americans and architects of nuclear war. In 2014, the Chicago group reiterated the link the 1951 petition made between state and extrajudicial racial violence: “Once the classic method of lynching was the rope. Now it is the policeman’s bullet”.

At the time of this writing in 2015, no Federal agency collects data from local and Federal police agencies across the country on killings by police agents. Police officials, politicians, and the mainstream media consistently and insistently portray police violence as exceptional, and the work of police officers as exceptionally dangerous—discourses that should sound familiar to scholars of militarism. The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement’s 2013 study concludes that every 28 hours a Black person is killed by the police or vigilantes. These conflicting understandings of violence have clear implications for divergent terms of peace and underscore why the protest chant “No Justice, No Peace” has been so enduring. The point is two-fold: the same communities that are trying to end interpersonal violence are also trying to end police violence, and dominant discourses on policing rely on narratives of pervasive, unrelenting violence to legitimate sustained police presence and killings. Indeed, such grassroots, critical analyses of state violence are actually erased in some of the metrics used to support the declining violence thesis. Pinker’s discussion of the “flood of violence from the 1960s through the 1980s” (2011: 107) in the US, for example, rehashes conservative narratives of “decivilization” (2011: 106) that have been used to castigate Black families (citing Daniel Patrick Moynihan, author of
The Negro Family [1965], as “initially vilified but ultimately vindicated” [2011: 116]). Such discourses have been central elements in the dismantling of social welfare and massive investment in law-and-order. On this point, Pinker cites uncritically a key architect of “broken windows” policing, James Q. Wilson, to bolster his narrative, attributing declines of violence to the police state.

Ending police violence is typically not thought of as an antiwar or peace movement, but organizers in cities across the country are calling for disarming the police, organizing alternative forms of community safety and accountability, and in the process challenging the daily, structured violence that passes for domestic peace. I am concerned that imaginations of being “for peace” are being narrowly framed as nonviolence and as a “movement along the spectrum between violence and peace” (p.256) in ways that are at odds with other conceptualizations advanced by the editors, the contributors to the book, and others in the field. To reiterate, I regard this as a tension—my observation is not meant to undermine the formation of a field, but to broaden its terms.

One direction for future research suggested by this collection is attending more carefully to temporalities of peace. Common conceptualizations—such as categorizations of nonviolence and violence, and a continuum of war to peace—tend to bring along with them an implicit teleology of progress, of before-and-after conflict. Again, while many contributors to this volume question these terms, how do they become part of the narrative we as critical, radical, or peacemaking geographers tell ourselves about our discipline? Do we treat our moment and selves as exceptional and the past as compromised? What do we lose by telling a story of progress rather than one of discontinuity and punctuation, of geographies of peace as geographies of violence? Directions for this work might come from critical studies of settler colonialism, which have analyzed the ideological work of settler time. Further, I suggest that feminist theory and methodological approaches, whether framed explicitly as feminist
geopolitics or not, will continue to provide means for fine-grained, transformative scholarship on ending interrelated forms of violence.

In 1965, Irving Stolberg proposed several directions for peace research in *The Professional Geographer*. At the top of the list were population, distribution of resources, the organization and function of the state, and disarmament. He concluded that, “[i]t is likely that more than any other single topic, race relations in its areal aspects offers virtually limitless possibilities for ‘applied’ research” (1965: 11). Of course, some of these issues have been reframed and are on the contemporary agenda for peace. Ending racism remains a pressing peace issue, but tends to be framed outside of peace research as a “domestic” one (Loyd 2014). 50 years later, the cycle of protest against police violence since Ferguson and less visible movement-building responsible for the recent We Charge Genocide petition pose challenges to this “liberal peace” and its agenda of pacification (Neocleous 2010). As such, they offer rich sources of theory, analysis, and practice that geographers can learn from, document, and to which they can contribute.

References


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