Introduction: Exploring Varieties of Peace in Asia

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The process of moving from violent conflict to sustainable peace is usually long and difficult. Several countries in Asia have suffered from large-scale violence and the region is particularly prone to subnational conflicts. Some conflicts are ongoing, while others have been brought to an end. However, the creation of peace in these conflict-affected settings is a dynamic, complex process, which frequently remains unfinished even decades after the end of the war. Moreover, the peace that is created can take many different forms and be expressed in various ways (Firchow and Mac Ginty 2018; Jarstad et al. 2019).

Taking Indonesia as an example, the peace in Aceh is significantly different from the peace in Ambon. In Aceh, fifteen years have now passed since the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement between the armed separatist Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) rebels and the Indonesian government (GoI) forces. The conflict was as a center versus periphery struggle over natural resources and state revenues. Although tensions and (new) challenges remain today, a commonly held view among scholars is that the story of peacebuilding in Aceh is a

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positive one. In contrast, the conflict in Ambon was a communal conflict with significant inter-group rivalries. Ambon City has been known as an area with strict segregation, both socially and spatially, between Christian and Muslim populations. Christian-Muslim clashes began in 1999 and a peace agreement was signed in 2002, but Ambon continued to face episodes of large-scale violence for several years more.

Today, sporadic violence continues to occur in Ambon, but the general security situation has improved significantly. Yet, inter-community relationships and interactions continue to be tense, and segregation has increased during the post-war period (Barron 2019). In the case of Aceh, the degree of trust between political leaders in Aceh and Jakarta has increased over time, further consolidating peace and stability, while Ambon remains in a state where there is no armed violence, but where grievances, tensions and deep social divisions remain. Thus, while both Aceh and Ambon are cases of peace, the nature of key relationships and the everyday realities of people’s lives in the two locations differ significantly. How can these differences in peace be analytically captured and explained?

The Varieties of Peace program was established with the purpose to explore and enhance knowledge about how peace varies, and how this can be explained.1 This special issue is an outcome of the Varieties of Peace Asia Conference, held in Jakarta in October 2019. The conference was arranged by the Varieties of Peace research program, Umeå University, and the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Jakarta. The three-day event gathered over fifty scholars and practitioners from all over the world. The aim of the Varieties of Peace program, and the conference is to foster research that can help us better understand and explain the diverse manifestations of peace that can be empirically observed.

For decades, peace and conflict studies have devoted more attention to conflict than to peace, and despite its centrality, peace itself has been under-conceptualized (Gleditsch et al. 2014; Mac Ginty 2006; Höglund and Söderberg Kovacs 2010; Diehl 2016; Regan 2014). Ever since Galtung introduced the distinction between negative and positive peace, these have constituted the two basic categories of peace employed in the field (Galtung 1969). However, the utopian idea of positive peace is so elusive that is becomes analytically useless (Klem 2018), and the concept of

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negative peace does not tell us anything about the character and quality of peace beyond the absence of war. Indeed, over the past several years, the need for more nuanced conceptualizations of and approaches to peace—able to capture the many real-world situations that exist between the ideal-typical negative and positive peace categories—has been increasingly recognized and debated (Wallensteen 2015; Davenport et al. 2018).

In response to this knowledge gap, the Varieties of Peace research agenda focuses on developing conceptual models, methodological approaches and empirical analyses that theorizes and explores the complexity and diversity of peace, thus contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how peace is manifested, experienced and understood (Jarstad et al. 2019). The Varieties of Peace Asia Conference constituted one effort in this direction, with the specific purpose of exploring varieties of peace in an Asian context, and building networks of peace researchers who can continue to advance this research agenda in the region.

The conference showcased research that explores peace at various arenas and analytical levels, from the local dynamics of peace in Indonesia to the dynamics of international peacebuilding interventions; as a feature of relationships between a diversity of actors, from local communities to political leaders and armed groups; and as ideas or discourses about what peace is or should be. Themes, such as local resistance and alternative peace practices, the arts as an arena for peacebuilding, and the role of religious actors in conceptualizing and constructing peace illustrate how conference contributions and discussions pushed the boundaries of the state of the art of peace research.

The three articles included in this special issue engage with peace in Indonesia and its immediate regional context and contribute to advance the varieties of peace research agenda in various ways. They span global, regional, national, and local arenas, and engage with peace in the realms of international norms and regional institutions, state policy and law, and local practices for conflict resolution and peacemaking. Moreover, these contributions highlight how ideas about the content and meaning of peace shape institutions, practices, and relationships in these different empirical settings.

Analyzing the regionalization of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, the article by Fitriani explores how global norms around peace evolve and how they travel to different regional and national contexts. Constituting not only a milestone in recognition of women’s rights in relation to peace and armed conflict, the United Nations Security Council
Resolution 1325 and the subsequent resolutions of the WPS agenda has also contributed to redefining the meaning and content of peace. However, as these norms travel to new institutional and policy contexts, their meaning continues to be reshaped. In her analysis, Fitriani argues that the dominant organizational culture and norms of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) hamper the implementation of the WPS agenda. Notably, its principles of non-interference and preference for non-binding mechanisms combined with the varied levels of commitment to women’s empowerment among its member states shape which issues that come to take preference as the agenda is regionalized. This illustrates the interplay between global and regional norms in shaping concepts of and policies in pursuit of peace in Asia.

Focusing on the nation-state level, Benjamin Pwee examines the relationship between minority rights and peace in Muslim majority countries. Drawing on a case study of Malaysia, Pwee traces ideas about minority-majority relationships in political and religious texts over time. The findings show that the political and theological concept of “common good” has been a prominent idea in many Malaysian academics’ and theologians’ thinking about majority-minority conflicts and relationships in Muslim Malaysia. Pwee argues that this ideational heritage provides a basis for articulating policies and visions for peace that address the interests and needs of religious minorities as well as the majority population. Like Fitriani’s article, Pwee thereby demonstrates how the institutionalization and experience of peace in a particular context is shaped by dominant ideas and norms that make the meaning of peace intelligible.

Finally, Asmawitha Fithri draws our attention to the local dynamics of conflict resolution and peacemaking. Her analysis examines the history of ethnic conflicts and peacemaking efforts in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, from 1950 and onwards. The findings of the analysis demonstrate that traditional dialogue and mediation have been the most successful strategy to resolve conflict and prevent further outbreaks of violence. Through traditional dialogue, violent conflict between the Dayaks and Madurese has largely been halted since 1999. In contrast to traditional mediation by informal local leaders, the government has been less able to effectively intervene due to low trust amongst the local population. This demonstrates the importance of understanding local relationships and power dynamics to understand how peace can be promoted. Consequently, the article recommends that traditional forms of dialogue
should take place regularly in West Kalimantan to provide forums to address conflict issues non-violently and at an early stage and prevent future eruptions of violence.

Together, these contributions highlight how notions of peace, as well as institutions, practices and relationships that can foster peace, are shaped by and need to be anchored in their specific context of implementation. Moreover, all three contributions show that the experience of peace differs between people in the same location along axes of inequality and difference such as gender, ethnicity, and religion. In exploring how peace varies, we thus need to attend to variation across space and place as well as to variation between differently positioned individuals and groups within society. Shedding new light on these issues in their respective empirical settings, these three articles constitute important contributions to an ongoing research effort aiming to provide a fuller picture of what peace is, how it is manifested, experienced, and understood, and how this varies.

References


