Engaging the opposition inside Syria

In Revival 29, Sultan Barakat and Sansom Milton discussed the risk of the West viewing Syria as an opportunity to penalise Iran, since when there have been tens of thousands more casualties and Syria has become the world’s most severe humanitarian crisis, with more than 8 million displaced inside and outside of the country. Here they argue that a welcome change in tone from the West, together with an acknowledgement within the Syrian opposition that extremist groups are harming their cause, present a window of opportunity for the West to support locally-rooted, non-extreme solutions.

The situation on the ground in Syria has become the world’s most severe humanitarian crisis. Its economy lies in ruins, with over 45% unemployment and a 40% fall in GDP during 2011–2013. Furthermore, the modest gains in human development over the past 12 to 15 years have been wiped out and the country has recorded the largest fall in the Global Peace Index.

Despite the deteriorating situation various recent developments have opened up a window for national dialogue and compromise. A number of factors have prompted the realisation amongst the opposition that they have to talk to the Assad regime. Firstly, the vast majority of the opposition inside Syria well appreciate that the thriving Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) and other similar imported extreme groups have done much to harm their cause. Secondly, fighting on the ground has reached a stalemate and the opposition has woken up to the fact that they are one small part of a greater regional game linked to Iran, Israel’s security and neighbouring countries’ stability. Thirdly, having originally taken to the streets in the name of liberty and dignity, and to change the way Syria was governed and its wealth distributed (not necessarily to overthrow Assad), those entrusted with the difficult task of day-to-day governance in the large swathes of ‘liberated areas’ have found as much in common with the regime as with foreign extremist groups. In fact the opposition is having to negotiate and cooperate on a daily basis with the Assad regime in order to provide basic services to a increasingly demanding population.

What has also become clear over the past year is that the opposition in Syria does not trust its representatives outside the country, and that any trust they may have had in the international community was shattered by the ebbing of its resolve to intervene directly. After interventions in Iraq, Libya, and Mali many on the streets of Syria now ask, “Why is Syrian blood cheaper?”

As can be seen from the changed rhetoric of leaders such as Barack Obama and David Cameron, the world has moved on from initially wanting to intervene directly in order to forcibly remove the Assad regime, to seeking a negotiated political settlement.

For these reasons much more thinking needs to be done as to how to exploit this window of opportunity. The onus is now on the international community to capitalise on this moment of ripeness by transcending elite settlements and supporting locally-rooted solutions.

This requires that the international community deploy greater resources in the form of soft power, diplomacy and, in particular, direct engagement with the Syrian opposition inside the country. No doubt this venture entails a high degree of risk, but there must be a means
Leadership in post-crisis

On 8 July 2013, the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) hosted the launch of a new Centre for Post-crisis Leadership and Development (CPLD). The purpose of the Centre, which will deliver activities through the Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit (PRDU) at the University of York, and the Australia New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) Institute for Governance, is to nurture, at all levels, the leadership required to engage communities around tackling difficult underlying problems in a constantly changing and uncertain environment.

The launch event was chaired by Baroness Haleh Afshar OBE, Professor in Politics and Women’s Studies at the University of York. Speakers included: Sultan Barakat, Professor of Politics and Director of the PRDU at the University of York; Benedict Dempsey, Senior Humanitarian Affairs Adviser for Save the Children; Claire Messina, Senior Coordinator of the Humanitarian Leadership Strengthening Unit at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); John Mitchell, Director of the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP); Dr Sara Pantuliano, Head of the Humanitarian Policy Group at the ODI; and Paul Porteous, Director of Leadership Development and International Programs at the ANZSOG Institute for Governance.

At the launch, speakers stressed that leadership is tested in times of crisis, when it is most needed, but that few formal systems are in place to build effective leadership in humanitarian emergencies, either among international staff or among local practitioners. In the midst of mounting and invariably complex humanitarian crises, a lack of leadership can result in uncoordinated, unstrategic and even ineffectual responses that undermine local authorities, economies, and social structures – and, moreover, fail to respond adequately to those in need of assistance.

The new Centre for Post-crisis Leadership and Development will play an essential role in developing frameworks for leadership-building in a humanitarian context, evaluating whether existing organisational structures in governmental and non-governmental organisations adequately encourage effective leadership.

Sultan Barakat stressed that, “while we put an emphasis internationally on quality leadership, what doesn’t exist is an equivalent on the ground to take on that role and to build skills in leadership. We don’t induce a culture where people are trusted to take on leadership”. In fact, a distinct trend is evident in post-crisis settings whereby long-term international engagement often results in a de-skilling of qualified local personnel, who are unable to find qualification-appropriate roles or to take the lead in recovery.

Sara Pantuliano stated that all leaders should have a knowledge of International Humanitarian Law, without which they would be disempowered. She went on to outline six qualities that an ideal leader should possess: (1) political acumen – the ability to identify the stakeholders and navigate around the power struggles; (2) diplomatic skills; (3) consensus-building skills – the ability to generate a shared vision; (4) team-building skills; (5) networking at different levels; and (6) the willingness to take risks.

Speakers concluded that local leadership is not currently prioritised in post-crisis transition, and that there has also been little interest in building cultural sensitivity to non-standardised traditional leadership systems into collaborative governance, as defined by the international community. Paul Porteous summarised that: “Leadership is a verb, it’s something you do. Too often we see it conflated with the concept of authority”, but often authorities are concerned with “maintaining the status quo”. Leadership is the ability to generate innovative and adaptive solutions to diverse challenges. To build upon leadership skills, the CPLD will examine in detail what works and what doesn’t in trying to build towards unified visions of post-crisis transition.
New staff

A warm welcome to Dr Kenneth Bush, our new Al-Tajir Lecturer in Post-war Recovery Studies who was appointed in September. Dr Bush was a founding professor of the Conflict Studies Programme of St. Paul University in Ottawa, Canada, and has held teaching positions at the University of Ulster, Queen’s University and Carleton University (Canada), and Bilkent University (Turkey).

His PhD in International Relations and Comparative Politics was from Cornell University, and he also holds Masters degrees in Government (Cornell) and International Affairs (Carleton).

Dr Bush has worked with a broad spectrum of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding organisations in South and South East Asia, and has undertaken fieldwork in a number of other countries, including Turkey, Uganda, Mozambique, South Africa, and Bosnia Herzegovina.

Danny Singh started as a Teaching Fellow in October 2013, having recently submitted his PhD thesis at the PRDU. Danny has extensive teaching experience at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, and is currently a Module Tutor and supervisor of students for the MIHA programme (see pages 8–9), and also contributes to teaching on the MA in Post-war Recovery Studies.

His PhD focused on the issues of corruption and anti-corruption strategy in the lower levels of the Afghan National Police that negatively impacts on both security and the rule of law, and included extensive field research in Afghanistan. Previously, Danny studied an MA in Global Politics and International Law at the University of Sheffield’s Department of Politics.

Sansom Milton is a newly appointed Research Intern. His research interests include the role of higher education in post-conflict recovery (see page 4), post-war reconstruction in Iraq and Libya, the politics of the Middle East, and theories of reconstruction and development. Sansom recently submitted his PRDU-funded PhD in Post-war Recovery Studies. Prior to joining the PRDU he was a researcher at the Regional Human Security Centre in Amman, Jordan.

Nobel co-laureate Rae McGrath honoured by York

Every year the University of York bestows Honorary Degrees on people who have made a significant contribution to society. Previous recipients nominated by the PRDU include HH Prince El Hassan bin Talal (2002), Lyle Douset (2011) and Yohei Sasakawa (2013).

Rae McGrath, co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize, will receive an Honorary Doctorate in 2014.

When I left the military in 1985 I planned to become a journalist. In fact I was getting regular magazine work as a freelance when, quite late one night, I received a phone call from Save the Children Fund asking if I would be interested to work in Darfur with their famine response team. The pay was rubbish and the conditions sounded worse; how could I refuse?

And so began my career as a humanitarian fieldworker – in Darfur I ended up running the distribution of 150,000 tonnes of sorghum to communities spread over an area roughly the size of France with, in those days, very little in the way of roads beyond desert tracks. Over the years that followed I gravitated to the work I found most challenging; responding to the needs of vulnerable communities in conflict and natural disaster. I worked in many parts of Africa and Asia but eventually, as did so many aid workers in those distant days, I found myself in Afghanistan. It was there that my rather basic military landmine knowledge became useful – working on the heels of the retreating Soviet and regime forces I was managing an agricultural rehabilitation programme but began to recognise the huge impact of landmines on land-use. We incorporated a mine clearance element in the programme but soon recognised we were literally only scraping the surface. Those stumbling steps grew, via a somewhat winding route, to become the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) and the eradication of unexploded ordnance took over my life for some years, as did advocacy to ban landmines and cluster munitions.

Fifteen years ago, when I first became a visiting lecturer at the PRDU, I used to lay minefields in the university grounds – my association has remained strong because I recognise the value of melding practical techniques with academic knowledge. Some years ago my career went full circle and I became engaged again in humanitarian response to conflict, the core of my current work with Mercy Corp’s Syria response.

What do I feel about being awarded an Honorary Doctorate at York? It feels natural, we’re old friends. ■
UNICEF Somalia CPSA

As revealed in Revival 29, the PRDU has been commissioned to conduct a two-part study on behalf of UNICEF Somalia as part of UNICEF’s Peace-building, Advocacy and Education in Conflict-Affected Contexts programme. The four-year programme (2012–15) aims to bolster social cohesion and human security through strengthened education policy and practices in 10 conflict-affected countries. Education has a vast potential influence in post-conflict societies through crucial linkages to their social, economic and political spheres. It can help build tools to sustain relationships and linkages vital to peace-building, while providing crucial space for integration.

In-depth country contextualisation is regarded as crucial when implementing peace-building programmes, and the first stage of the project has consisted of a conflict, peace, situation analysis (CPSA) of Somaliland, Puntland, and South-Central Somalia. The largely field-based analysis has focused on the community-level education system, using a bespoke participatory research methodology, the cornerstone of which is the collaboration between the University of York Team and its Somali partner organisation, Daryeel. The University of York/Daryeel Team employed a multi-level data gathering and analysis process in order to fully capture the complexities of the relationships between conflict, education, and peace-building at the local, district, regional, and national levels. A mixture of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and consultations with key stakeholders at international, national, and regional levels have been conducted. Community-level data collection activities have been carried out by 16 local teams who were trained in Hargesia and Mogadishu by the joint University of York/Daryeel Team.

The CPSA will be education-focused and policy-oriented in its analysis, building towards the second stage of the consultancy, the development of the Peace-building Education Programme design. The research team, led by Sultan Barakat, includes Frank Hardman from the University of York’s Institute for Effective Education, Professor Ken Menkhaus of Davidson College (North Carolina, USA), Dr David Connolly, Dr Alexandra Lewis, Kathryn Rzeszut, Kelsey Shanks and local partners.

Post-conflict higher education: the need for greater knowledge sharing

Higher education is often neglected in terms of post-conflict investment, yet the sector offers arguably a major resource that can contribute to post-conflict reconstruction, statebuilding, peacebuilding, and related fields – referred to here as post-conflict recovery. In post-conflict contexts, higher education sectors can connect to a wide range of post-conflict recovery tasks, including re-pooling human capital depleted by war and displacement, research on local social and developmental challenges, and a long-term sustainable approach to capacity building. However, while basic education in emergencies, conflict and reconstruction has recently emerged as a major research area, the issue of higher education in post-conflict recovery remains largely under-studied in academic literature. Existing studies tend to be conducted at the country or project level, with few previous attempts at global theorisation of the field.

While the issue remains under-studied and under-theorised, over the past decade there has been increasingly greater global recognition at the level of practice of the importance of higher education in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts, as evidenced by the expansion of various scholar rescue schemes. Furthermore, over the past decade there has been a growth in projects and programmes designed to build domestic higher education and research capacity in post-conflict countries, for instance university partnership and scholarship programmes. This increase in activity has not been followed by a corresponding increase in the number of publicly-available evaluations, reports, and assessments. As a result, the knowledge base on the effectiveness of higher education interventions and policies in post-conflict settings is very weak. There is therefore a need for greater sharing of knowledge on higher education in post-conflict contexts.

While carrying out fieldwork on higher education in post-war Libya it was found that many university and Ministry officials faced the myriad challenges of the post-conflict environment with very low knowledge of how similar problems were addressed in other settings. Libyan officials should be commended for adapting – often in innovative ways – to these challenges, but lessons learned from other cases, including Iraq, Afghanistan, or Lebanon, could have improved policy and practice. In order that such lesson learning can occur in a way that could enable the higher education sector to be harnessed as a positive resource capable of driving future cases of reconstruction and development, it is vital that knowledge of higher education in a wide range of post-conflict contexts is shared and reflected upon in a much more systematic manner.

Beyond international agencies and universities producing and sharing information and knowledge on post-conflict higher education, it is also vital to seek the voices of universities and academic communities in post-conflict settings. As others have argued, ‘Southern’ voices are often excluded from debates over fragility, peacebuilding, and recovery. An inclusive dialogue involving diverse voices and perspectives from across the globe can establish the importance of learning, knowledge, and higher education to the long-term task of recovery and development in post-conflict societies.
How do we know whether a development or humanitarian programme is ‘working’ in a conflict zone? Indeed, how do we know whether it is having its intended impact, and not exacerbating tensions or conflict? How does conflict context affect the methodology, logistics, politics, and ethics of the conduct of evaluations or research projects? How should we evaluate the impact of research in violently divided societies, be it positive or negative?

These questions are explored in a recently concluded project entitled Evaluating Research on and in Violently Divided Societies. The three-year study, funded by IDRC, seeks to build bridges between post-war recovery studies and evaluation research and practice. While much work continues to be done on the theories, methodologies and praxis of peacebuilding, we suggest that the international aid community, researchers and practitioners need to think more deeply and systematically about the role of evaluation in increasing the efficacy of projects and programmes in violently divided societies.

What have we learned from this research?

1. The evaluation of our interventions in conflict zones is the Rosetta Stone for understanding and systematically strengthening those social, political and economic substructures needed to support locally-determined paths to peaceful, prosperous, and just futures. In the absence of ‘good’ evaluation, we are left to make decisions based on impressionistic or anecdotal assessments, or worse: opaque political, economic, or particularistic interests.

2. Context matters: The extreme nature of the conflict environment shapes and amplifies the challenges of conducting evaluations and, importantly, the consequences of each decision made in the process. Evaluators and commissioners must be able to tease out the inevitable peace, conflict, or mixed impacts of any and all interventions in conflict zones – this includes the evaluation itself, as well as the initiative being evaluated.

3. Evaluation is fundamentally a political exercise: The conduct of evaluation in conflict zones is embedded in the political dynamics of the environment. Evaluators are faced with multiple pressures emanating from multiple, intersecting, conflicts, as well as power imbalances, competing donor interests, and their own value-systems. In this context, evaluators should be prepared for political complications throughout the evaluation process.

4. A broader skill-set is required of evaluators in conflict zones: Evaluation in conflict zones requires a skill set that goes beyond the usual social science approaches and tools at the disposal of evaluators – from cultural humility and conflict resolution skills to ethnographic and security training and context-specific ethical sensibilities.

5. Methodology: Conventional, linear, approaches to evaluation are often insufficient in conflict zones. The introduction and growing practice of creative, flexible, and adaptive evaluation approaches rooted in systems and complexity thinking would help to generate robust, useful findings. In this process, meta-evaluation (that is, the evaluation of evaluations) would be helpful in rebuilding and reshaping evaluation standards and practice in conflict zones by fusing theory, methodology and practice.

6. Extreme Ethics: Extreme context is infused with extreme ethical implications – more risks, greater risks, and greater consequences of all decisions and actions. Each stage of the evaluation process should be monitored very closely through a “politico-ethical lens”. Much work remains to be done in examining ethical challenges in conflict zones, and in finding strategies to anticipate or address them.

The fruits of the project include an edited volume entitled Evaluation in Extremis – The Politics and Impact of Research in Violently Divided Societies (under review); a special issue of the Journal of Peacebuilding and Development (2013, Vol 8, No. 2); as well as a series of academic articles. The dissemination of this research has also included paper presentations, book panels, and specialised skill-based workshops at conferences in the USA, Europe, South Asia, and Africa.
A fond farewell

Following 13 fruitful years at the PRDU, Dr David Connolly will be leaving us in January 2014 to join the Hague Institute for Global Justice.

David came to the PRDU in 2000 as a PhD student under the supervision of Sultan Barakat. Since then he has contributed widely to the growing success of the Unit, conducting research and professional training programmes in a range of countries, and undertaking numerous studies for UNICEF, UNDP, World Bank, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the government of Afghanistan, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, and international and local NGOs.

In 2011, David co-founded the Education in Conflict & Emergencies programme at York, and he has recently been the Programme Director for the MSc in International Humanitarian Affairs – a role which Professor Barakat will take over until a suitable replacement is found.

We would like to thank David for the hard work he has put into the Unit, and wish him all the very best in his future adventures.

How mass atrocities end

Dr Claire Smith (Lecturer in Post-war Recovery Studies) has been invited to join the US-based World Peace Foundation’s two-year research programme on ‘Ending Mass Atrocities’. Six scholars from Tufts, St. Andrews and, with Claire on board, York, are collaborating on a multi-country study on the relationship between mass atrocities and various forms of solution and intervention. The results of the research will be published in a major new series of articles and books through 2014 and 2015. The project, which was launched in June 2013 at the International Genocide Scholars Annual Conference in Siena, compares endings to mass atrocities across seven country case studies: Iraq, Sudan, Bosnia, Guatemala, Burundi, Timor-Leste and Indonesia.

As part of her research into how mass atrocities ended in Indonesia and Timor-Leste, Claire is exploring the role of governments and international organisations in building peace. To this end, in April 2013 Claire was invited to work as the Senior Research Fellow on a study of local governance in fragile states in Timor-Leste, hosted by The Asia Foundation and the Justice and Security Research Programme (JSRP) at the London School of Economics (LSE). Nicholas Rowland (MA in Post-war Recovery Studies graduate 2012–13) joined Claire as a Junior Research Fellow, also sponsored by the Asia Foundation and the JSRP. Their co-authored paper, ‘Negotiating the Governance Gap in a Post-War State: Assessing Local Governance Reform in Timor-Leste’, is forthcoming in 2014 as part of the Theory in Practice Working Paper series with the JSRP at the LSE.

Conference shorts


PRDU Research Fellow, Kathryn Rzeszut, participated in the PSS-ISA Joint Conference 2013 as discussant in the panel ‘Securing the Fragile State: the Challenges of Security Sector Reform in Conflict-Affected States’.

Santander bursary award

Congratulations to Alexandra Kiss, PRDU PhD student, who has won a Santander International Connections Award for her fieldtrip to Colombia in early 2014. The bursary will significantly contribute to travel expenses, subsistence, accommodation fees and other costs for the visit, which forms a crucial part of her research project focusing on the reintegration of former child combatants.

As well as showing ambition and creativity, applicants must demonstrate how their project will benefit the development of themselves, the wider University of York community, and the Santander Universities network (comprising over 1,000 universities in 17 countries), through which Santander has been supporting higher education for the past 16 years.

Professor Barakat starts Visiting Fellowship in Qatar

On 1 September 2013 Professor Sultan Barakat started a nine-month fellowship at the Brookings Institution, Doha Center based in Qatar. During this period he will conduct research into the role that Qatar plays as a third-party mediator in various conflicts in the Middle East including Sudan, Lebanon and Palestine. This will build upon earlier research conducted into the role of Qatari peacemaking and conflict mediation before and after the Arab Spring, which can be found in his paper ‘The Qatari Spring: Qatar’s Emerging Role in Peacemaking’ published by the London School of Economics as part of the Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States.

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New actors and local responses

Findings from the Advanced Course on Crisis, Recovery & Transitions in Beijing, October 2013

These findings emerged from the week-long Advanced Course on Crisis, Recovery and Transitions organised by the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in partnership with Tsinghua University’s School of Public Policy and Management (SPPM).

The course, which was held in Beijing in mid-October 2013, also involved collaboration with the Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit (PRDU) at the University of York and the Australia and New Zealand School of Government’s Institute for Governance (ANZIG). Speakers were drawn from a wide range of institutions, including universities, think tanks and organisations such as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the China International Search and Rescue (CISAR) Team and the National Disaster Reduction Centre of China (NDRCC).

Business as usual: international engagement with crises

The Advanced Course involved a review and critique – to which both speakers and participants contributed – of existing humanitarian institutions, as well as aid financing and coordination mechanisms. Participants were particularly critical of subcontracting arrangements which, while seen as beneficial for accountability, have often unnecessarily wasted vital humanitarian resources. Several participants called for mechanisms to ensure that less aid is lost due to subcontracting arrangements as funds make their way from donors to those directly supporting crisis-affected communities. Doing so will require not only new mechanisms but, equally importantly, capacity-building initiatives designed to genuinely strengthen local entities and enable them to work with foreign donors and major humanitarian institutions without excessive supervisory arrangements. Participants and speakers highlighted shortcomings in existing models of capacity-building, noting that they often rely on costly external experts, ineffective short-term training or on-the-job approaches that often fall by the wayside amidst the demands of programme implementation.

New actors: regional organisations and the private sector

The course highlighted opportunities and pockets of innovation, particularly around the growing roles of so-called ‘new’ or ‘emerging’ actors, such as regional organisations and private firms. The private sector is playing an increasing role in humanitarian action and post-crisis recovery. However, participants felt that it was important to move beyond a primary concern with the role of the private sector as a supplier, service provider or donor via corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Instead, they noted ways in which the private sector could bring to bear new technologies to assist crisis-affected communities, whether in the form of geospatial imagery from Google or the IKEA Foundation’s efforts to develop improved shelters, in partnership with UNHCR. There is a continued need to develop creative ways in which firms could contribute to emergency response and preparedness within the scope of their ‘core business models’.

Learning from emerging powers: the Chinese experience

The Chinese government, often referred to as a ‘new’ actor in humanitarian work, in fact has long experience in responding to disasters, both domestically and abroad. The country is vulnerable, not only to earthquakes but also to floods, droughts, fires, typhoons, blizzards and epidemics such as SARS. The 2003 SARS epidemic was particularly influential in shaping China’s approach to crises. Following the epidemic, the Chinese authorities concluded that their approach to disaster preparedness and response was overly centralised and that its emergency management services were outdated. Since that point the Chinese authorities have, like much of the international community, followed a familiar pattern: first introducing highly structured approaches such as complex contingency plans at multiple levels, before concluding that a more flexible approach which accounts for civil society and community contributions was crucial.

China’s crisis response tools have both developed domestically and internationally, and the country has applied technology to disasters in creative ways.

Conclusion: the changing humanitarian landscape

Course speakers and participants broadly noted that the humanitarian landscape is changing, bringing new opportunities and new challenges. Promising ideas are rapidly emerging, propelled by new actors such as the private sector, regional organisations and countries such as China, but institutional procedures and political considerations too often continue to take precedence. The notion of leadership – and, specifically, adaptive leadership – emerged several times during the course.

Some felt that a new generation of humanitarian leaders is needed to overcome organisational hurdles and refocus aid work more fully on vulnerable and crisis-affected populations.

Future Advanced Courses in Beijing will specifically take up this question of crisis leadership in a continuing partnership with Tsinghua University’s School of Public Policy and Management.

If you are interested in learning more about the Advanced Courses in York and Beijing, or registering for an upcoming course, please visit: www.odi.org.uk/programmes/humanitarian-policy-group/advancedcourse

This report was extracted from the Summary Note of the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the ODI.
MIHA – going from strength to strength

Professor Sultan Barakat, interim Director of the online MSc in International Humanitarian Affairs (MIHA), reports on the progress of the programme which has received glowing feedback from its first cohort of distance-learning students, and which welcomed its second cohort in September.

2012–13 intake

Since the launch of our online MIHA in January 2013 (see Revival Issue 29), the first cohort has completed three modules of the programme and are set to move into their second year. As the course allows participants to continue working full-time, students have already been able to apply the theory, academic debates and new policy-based knowledge to their professional roles and environments. Feedback so far (see below) shows they are enjoying the distance-learning experience:

“The opportunity to encapsulate the ideas from the reading in a discussion forum was great.”

“An excellent opportunity for adding more and different points of view.”

The weekly online discussions “serve as a means to clarify my own understanding of the week’s readings. I also appreciate reading the analysis of others.”

The discussions “give us new perspectives and contextualization for our understanding.”

“Real cases are very stimulating when we can discuss the context and the results of the initiatives while taking into account the academic perspective.”

The readings are “very exciting and informative.”

“Support from the administrator is outstanding.”

The programme is run in collaboration with the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute (HPG-ODI), one of the world’s leading teams of independent researchers and information professionals working on humanitarian issues. The online content continues to benefit from the contributions of senior practitioners and policy experts such as PRDU Associates Dr Simon Robins and Dr Shajra Nurang, Sean Healy (Médecins Sans Frontières [MSF])

I am a humanitarian aid worker with two years experience in Somalia, Egypt, and currently as a Programme Operations officer in a Turkey/Syria mission with an NGO called ‘The MENTOR Initiative’. Previously, I worked with Médecins Sans Frontières as part of their Belgium section, and with UNHCR. My background is in pharmaceutical sciences but having read many books, case studies, lifetime experiences, and research findings about humanitarian assistance, I decided to pursue a career in the humanitarian field once I had graduated.

I have been living abroad for the last 13 years. Since 2009, I’ve been working for Médecins Sans Frontières, developing experience in training and coaching national and international staff. Before that I held management positions in international accounting and finance organisations. I possess a postgraduate degree in Management Accounting and Management Control from Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona); a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from the University of Lisbon; and have taken a number of specific training courses in Humanitarian Aid and Development.

Humanitarian Advisor), Eva Svoboda (HPG-ODI Research Fellow) and Dr Emanuele Sommario (Assistant Professor of International Law, Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna). The bespoke learning materials are regularly supplemented and refined so that the MIHA continues to be informed by developments in theory and practice.

2013–14 intake

In September we were delighted to welcome a new cohort of 18 students to the MSc in International Humanitarian Affairs (MIHA) programme. This brings together a diverse range of professionals across the global humanitarian response, including the sectors of education, governance, health, law and security. They are working for key agencies such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, AusAID and MSF, in addition to a range of NGOs and the respective armed forces of Canada and the United States.

As well as the 13 students who are profiled here, the cohort also includes:

Malik Allaoua-Moreau France
Haroon Altaf United Kingdom
Samuel Beever Australia
Sachiko Kareki Japan
Julie Stalker Australia

For further information on the MIHA please contact the programme administrator,

Emma Piercy
emma.piercy@york.ac.uk
and visit our web pages:
www.york.ac.uk/politics/centres/prdu/training/msc/
I have been living abroad for the last 15 years, and have worked in Bosnia, Haiti, Morocco, Burundi, South Sudan and now Colombia. My current post entails coordination and planning, but also supervising protection intervention for the internally displaced population. My first degree is in Economics and I hold an MSc in Development Economics. I also have some experience in gender studies. This course is an opportunity to reflect on my field experience and to start thinking more strategically. I know it will not be easy, as I have not studied at this level for some years.

After completing a Baccalaureate in Nutrition at Laval University in 1997, I worked in a community health center in Canada. In 2011, I completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Information Operations at Cranfield University. I have twice been to Afghanistan with the Canadian Forces as an officer working with the Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) branch. I have also been to Sudan, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Haiti. During these deployments, I have helped to set up projects related to community improvement and RRR (Return, Reintegration and Recovery).

I have been working in Sweden since 2011, in the field of development cooperation. I have an MA in Economics, and my work experience lies in project and programme cycle management, with focus on the promotion of human rights, and gender equality. I joined the MIHA course to develop my formal education and to form a deeper understanding of humanitarian assistance and policies, that will contribute to both career and skills development (e.g. to be able to better support the NGO I work with in their assistance to Western Sahara and a refugee camp in Algeria).

I am a former military officer who recently joined the UN. A big change! I am now an international civil servant working for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As a new member of staff I felt the need to acquire additional tools to help me operate in the humanitarian world. This MIHA course addresses key issues with which I am dealing on a daily basis, particularly in the context of refugees. Previously, I served in the Senegalese Air Force as a helicopter pilot. I speak Arabic, French and English fluently.

I graduated from the Australian National University with a BA in Development Studies (Hons), with my honours thesis focussing on microfinance in Bangladesh. During my studies I completed political internships in both Washington DC and Canberra. I have done voluntary work in India, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Vietnam. Key humanitarian interests include protection, displacement and refugee issues, and education in emergency settings. Currently working for the Australian aid program, I joined the MIHA course to complement my work experience.

I have a BA in English Language and Literature from the University of Mosul, Iraq, and diplomas in Camp Management, Protection and Gender Studies. I have more than 10 years’ of international humanitarian experience with international non-governmental humanitarian organisations, private consultancy companies and United Nations a agencies. I’ve worked as a protection and coordination expert in Iraq, Somalia, Jordan, Kenya and Lebanon, and am currently deployed to the Syria response operations as a Sector Coordinator Expert on Mission.

I am the Center Manager for the Clean Combustion Research Center at the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), a graduate research university 90km north of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. The Center opened in 2009. Prior to this Middle Eastern adventure I have lived and worked in Nigeria, Namibia, Thailand and Australia.

I have been working for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in the Middle East (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania) and Africa (Senegal, Gambia, Mozambique and South Africa) for 15 years, and have worked in Bosnia, Haiti and Colombia. My current post entails coordination and planning, but also supervising protection intervention for the internally displaced population. My first degree is in Economics and I hold an MSc in Development Economics. I also have some experience in gender studies. This course is an opportunity to reflect on my field experience and to start thinking more strategically. I know it will not be easy, as I have not studied at this level for some years.
of distinguishing between extremist groups such as ISIS and those whose positions and agendas can shift with changing circumstances.

In moving forward with direct engagement in support of a settlement capable of achieving lasting peace there is much foundational work to be done. First and foremost there is a need to create the space and opportunities for the myriad opposition groups to start dialogue amongst themselves in Syria, and between them and the internationally-recognised opposition outside of the country. For the opposition to be able to articulate a common stand in future negotiations with the Assad regime, the agenda for dialogue should be structured around substantive issues such as the plurality of rule, political participation and redistribution of wealth. In other words, the issues that drove people onto the streets in early 2011, rather than the ultimate colour of the future Syrian state, be it liberal or Islamist. If we are to avoid the bitter experience of Egypt then whether or not Sharia is the basis of law is not a priority at this stage.

In the immediate term, rather than remain preoccupied with the moral and international response of elite bargaining and rushed elections as a means of establishing a post-conflict settlement, the international community should encourage the emergence of a more collaborative and locally-rooted format of leadership. There is an acute need for leaders with moral authority who can articulate the plural agenda of the opposition to the rest of the world while gaining the respect of laypersons on the streets of Syria. Conscious of the shift in the West’s public perception towards the conflict, Syrian opposition leaders both inside and outside the country must work together more collaboratively if they are not to miss this window of opportunity.

In short, the international community can help by engaging directly with the Syrian opposition beyond supplying them with weapons, through building their capacity to enter dialogue and negotiations. This is the minimal requirement to prepare for talks with the Assad regime and its shrewd foreign policy operatives. Meanwhile, the responsibility lies with the opposition to agree over a slim, pluralistic and high value agenda that would challenge what Assad stood for and offer a fruitful basis for a cohesive platform upon which to negotiate.
Before coming to York I worked for a congresswoman from the Department of San Andres in the design of development plans for that island. Why am I studying for this MA? My generation, my mother’s and my grandmother’s don’t know what it is like to live in a country without fear, and we want a better future for the generations to come. The Colombian conflict isn’t just a matter for Colombians. Our biodiversity, water resources, coffee, mining, and even the oxygen our jungles produce are shared with the world. At this important time we need more people with experience in post-war recovery.

I have a Bachelor’s degree in Social Science and a certificate in Law from the American University of Afghanistan. During the past few years I’ve worked as a communications officer, data analyst, and lead analyst and operations officer with local and international NGOs. I also have lots of experience as a volunteer – currently with the World Economic Forum – and a strong background in research methodology and conflict analysis. I am excited to explore new approaches, theories and modules that are applicable in post-war societies like Afghanistan.

Having graduated from the University of Reading in 2007 with a degree in law, I spent several years in the field of corporate sales before choosing to pursue a more rewarding career within the development sector. Last year I worked for six months in the occupied West Bank as an intern for a Palestinian NGO which focused on the protection of refugee rights. I chose this MA in Post-war Recovery Studies due its strong emphasis on both theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

Growing up in a society as unequal as South Africa sparked my interest in social justice and post-conflict studies. After my undergraduate degree in Political Studies and History, I went on to study Justice and Transformation Honours at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. I would like to gain a deeper understanding of the practical dimensions of working at a grassroots level, as well as in a policy-making level, and chose to enrol on this MA as the programme offers a unique opportunity to work with a diverse group of people in a very hands-on manner.

I graduated from Newcastle University with a BA in Politics with Spanish (2013). I was drawn to subjects that focused on political conflict. My dissertation was about the politics of memory, and how states that have experienced conflict choose to remember and represent an uncomfortable past through the use of cultural forms. I am interested in the importance of cultural heritage, and the power of art as a tool of expression and communication in post-conflict societies, and hope to be able to develop this line of research, as well as expanding my knowledge on a variety of other issues.

I have recently completed my undergraduate degree in Geography at Sheffield Hallam University, focusing my attention on the field of development geography. My interest in conflict and peacebuilding developed while researching the underlying causes of unrest, and how this has shaped and influenced contemporary peacekeeping efforts, particularly within Africa, Latin America and Cyprus. The topical trend within humanitarian efforts could not be of more interest in a time of current civil and political unrest in many corners of the world.

After studying History at the University of York in 2011, I spent two years working in the Media and Arts industries. This gave me the opportunity to reflect on what had particularly interested me during my degree. I was always drawn towards conflict and development, and I see the PRDU as the perfect chance to transition from a passive observer to an active protagonist. In preparation for the course I worked with the United Nations Association in Palestine for three months, and I hope to focus on the Middle East, and the role of collective memory, as the year progresses.

My interest in conflict and peacebuilding began with a year-long exchange to the Philippines, witnessing the effects of conflict, poverty and inequality, post-revolution. As a high school teacher, I have focused on educational experience in active global citizenship, through curriculum development, and projects in rural Kenya and Ghana. My personal interests are in genocide studies, especially Rwanda and the Holocaust. At the PRDU, I hope to be able to analyse the effects of humanitarian intervention, particularly by contrasting international actions with grassroots developments.
The refugee situation in Malawi is one of the ‘forgotten’ humanitarian challenges in the world: even though the small, southern African country hosts more than 16,000 refugees in its only camp, Dzaleka, it rarely features in the world news and the local UNHCR office has the second smallest budget in the region. The UN Refugee Agency’s work in Malawi concentrates on delivering basic services using participatory and community-based approaches and on achieving durable solutions, including resettlement and repatriation of refugees – who arrive to Malawi mostly from the Great Lakes region, particularly from Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

My work placement with the Protection Unit focused on three assignments. For the first five weeks I assisted in the implementation of a joint Government of Malawi/World Food Programme/UNHCR housing survey. During this time, my tasks included finishing the project proposal, organising the logistics, participating in the coordination meetings, developing the survey tools, coordinating the survey teams and preparing the final report. After that, I had to establish the 2013 procurement plan for the office, which required close coordination with the Programme and the Administration Unit. Finally, I took part in the Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping of Dzaleka in my last week, where I had the chance to work together with the refugees, and two specialists – from the Ministry of Land and the World Food Programme – in order to produce more than 10 different types of maps.

The most rewarding aspect of the work placement was the fieldwork that required close cooperation with the local authorities, international organisations and the refugees themselves. This not only gave me an insight into the everyday work of the UNHCR, but also allowed me to work with people from various cultures, and made it possible to utilise the knowledge I have acquired during my studies. Additionally, I had the chance to witness the challenges of working in an older refugee camp, which was an interesting experience after our December 2012 MA Field Visit to the Za’atari camp in Jordan, which was only five months old at that time.

Mátyás Juhász
Hungary
Investigating local governance project in Timor-Leste

In 2012 Timor-Leste celebrated a decade of independence. Formerly referred to as East Timor, much of the world knows the territory for its lengthy resistance against Indonesian occupation. It was a chapter of Timorese history only to end amidst regional financial turmoil some 25 years after the invasion which was supported by the USA and Australia. Timor-Leste may be a country which possesses the will and the financial capability – through oil reserves – to confidently look to the future, yet it still suffers from substantial historical legacies.

My placement was with the American INGO, The Asia Foundation (TAF). The Foundation works across a large number of countries in the region, focusing primarily on governance, security and justice. I had been tasked through a TAF-LSE (London School of Economics) collaborative project with investigating the use of a ‘theory of change’ approach to TAF’s current local governance project. The main output of this programme has been to create a forum for village chiefs to meet regularly together at the District level, in order to act coherently under the one umbrella. Unsurprisingly, only a decade after establishing new state institutions akin to that of a well-established, modern, democratic state, Timor-Leste still has the monumental task of closing a significant gap between the central state and a village-level society still using customary means for decision-making.

Having conducted research in three separate districts, the qualitative data allowed for an assessment on the particular theory of change used for the programme design. Previous work by the local governance team in Timor-Leste meant a high degree of understanding of the context of village-level governance in the country. It was hugely beneficial for me to have an in-depth look at the evidence-based discussion around a limited but successful project in this particular post-conflict setting.

Nicholas Rowland  United Kingdom

Altering my perceptions in Palestine

Despite the challenges (which themselves helped make the overall experience worthwhile), the placement radically altered my perceptions of the conflict in general, in Jerusalem in particular, and it led to the beginnings of my dissertation (‘Making Live and Letting Die: Power-Knowledge, Biorationality and Jerusalem’s Planning and Building Regime’).

I was fortunate enough to be given a tour of Habitat programmes in Ramallah, Hebron and Bethlehem as well as a field visit to a string of threatened Bedouin settlements on the border of the Green Line and on the edge of the Negev Desert. Work included meeting with project staff and other associated partners in Jerusalem and Ramallah, while outputs included the planning brief to the proposed ‘State of the Palestinian Cities Report’, as well as a completed grant application for a proposed one million dollar, EU-funded project in the West Bank (‘Planning Support Programme for Threatened Communities in Area C’).

In all, the challenges of living in the context (for instance, the commute across the Separation Barrier was something to behold), the technical knowledge and experience of operating alongside a UN Agency, the personal relationships developed, and an intimate introduction to a complex context, together made this a challenging and highly worthwhile experience.

Bradley Lineker  United Kingdom

Qualitative data collected by the research was used to assess the project.
Pondering the curious case of the watered-down LogFrame: participatory methods in South Sudan

Those familiar with the work of the PRDU will know it has a rich pedigree in designing and evaluating participatory and community-driven approaches to recovery and development programmes. This was not something which interested me in any way whilst I was a student there; it all seemed rather ‘fluffy’ at the time. But less than a year from graduating I found myself working with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) as a Project Manager of the World Bank’s new Community Driven Development (CDD) Programme, eloquently titled the ‘Local Governance and Service Delivery Programme’. The central idea of the Programme was to strengthen the link between the local government and communities by providing cash to the former to fund projects identified, designed and overseen by a community-elected Community Development Committee (CDC).

Whilst not pure CDD, the participatory credential of having a CDC design and oversee projects they have selected was certainly sound. Yet this being South Sudan, the CDCs in question had some problems with literacy, and when the World Bank required us to provide a full LogFrame within a community-written proposal, it was without doubt a major problem. All alumni of the PRDU will remember the ‘LogFrame Week’ with a certain degree of trepidation, and I was quite happy that I’d avoided having to go near one in my first year with DRC. But now I was expected to find a way of teaching 19 CDC members how to do the very same, all the while my HQ insisting that whatever I do “don’t upset the Bank”!

Over the next month we managed to achieve what originally seemed impossible. Through a careful blend of ‘streamlining’ and copying and pasting, we got our proposals approved. There have been many times in the last two years where I have been grateful for the skills the PRDU course gave me, but by far this was the most grateful I’d been ... to date.

Tom Dawes  United Kingdom
Helping to improve education and livelihoods in Somalia

Based in Nairobi, the initial months after finishing my MA were spent coordinating an emergency primary education programme in 53 schools in the IDP camps of Mogadishu for the British-based NGO ‘Human Relief Foundation’. Running this project opened the doors, not only to travel to Somalia – an opportunity which cannot be over-rated in a context characterised by insecurity and uncertainty – but ultimately to a full-time consultancy contract with the UN Human Settlements Programme. For the past 10 months I have been assisting with the programme management and coordination of a UN-Habitat-led programme aimed at improving basic urban services and generating employment opportunities for vulnerable urban communities in Mogadishu. Project activities range from establishing a sustainable solid waste management system, to creating interim laws for the protection of employment rights, to building a technical centre and laboratory for the quality testing of drinking water and construction materials. The project is run through a close partnership with the local administration of the Benadir region – a relationship which has been an incredible eye-opener both to the internal politics of the country but also to the lives of its people.

Although security restrictions and bureaucratic rabbit-holes can be incredibly frustrating at times, the range of experiences I have managed to gain, both at the government and grass-roots level, over my short time working in Somalia have been undeniably life-changing. The knowledge and expertise gained on my Masters course have been a massive asset to my work and I find myself referring back to lectures and discussions from my time in PRDU on an almost daily basis.

Clare Sadd United Kingdom

One of 53 schools in the IDP camps of Mogadishu which benefitted from the emergency primary education programme.

Fighting zoonosis in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen

I’ve been working for Relief International (RI) as a Program Associate with their Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP). The Technical Director and I are based in RI’s London office, with significant travel to our programme countries. Fitting under RI’s ‘One Health’ umbrella, this programme combines the disciplines of human, veterinary and environmental health to reduce the spread of diseases passed between animals and humans. Since two thirds of emerging diseases affecting humans originate with animals, we work with community animal health workers, schools and civil society organisations, research institutions, and within governments, to integrate our systems with existing federal efforts.

Our countries of impact combine fragile and conflict-affected states, where the poorest and most vulnerable have a high reliance on livestock. In the next year we will be expanding our efforts to include Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan and Libya.

Every day I use the conflict analysis, programme management and evaluation training which we learned during the MA in Post-war Recovery Studies. I work across three regions, so I have to have a good understanding of the context within each country. Direct attacks on Western aid workers, especially kidnappings, is a high risk in all my programme countries, bringing frustration when it comes to travelling to field sites. I always request hotel rooms on the second floor, so the security training stuck!

Laura Simpson United Kingdom

IN MEMORIAM

Barbara De Anna
1975–2013

On 24 May 2013, the Shar-e-Naw district of Kabul was rocked by a wave of explosions and gunfire. This Taliban attack lasted for several hours until Afghan security forces managed to restore order. It was concentrated on an area of the capital populated with hospitals, Afghan police units, hotels serving the non-Afghan community, and the headquarters of international organisations.

Tragically, Barbara De Anna, a former PRDU MA student (2007/08) lost her life due to injuries sustained during the attack, which also claimed the lives of an Afghan police officer and three Afghan civilians, including a six-year old child (as well as the six attackers). Fourteen others were injured. Barbara, who was in the IOM (International Organization for Migration) compound at the time, suffered serious burns, and although initially treated in a local hospital, she was evacuated to a specialist hospital in Germany. She remained in a coma and died there some weeks later, on 20 June.

Barbara had been working with IOM Afghanistan since April 2010. At the time of the attack, she was a project officer responsible for training some 600 staff working for the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MORR) in offices throughout Afghanistan. The training was designed to build the capacity of the MORR in order to help thousands of vulnerable internally-displaced people and recent returnees from neighbouring countries – mainly Iran and Pakistan.

As well as her work in Afghanistan, Barbara was widely respected for her extensive field experience with UNDP in Honduras, UNMIL in Liberia, UNMIT in East Timor and UNHCR in Jordan. She spent her life trying to improve the lives of the poorest and most marginalised people, doing a job that she loved. Her friends and colleagues will always remember her love of life, humanity and ever-present smile.
Winning the Peace or Playing at Development? Interrogating the Utility of Sport in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding
John Skelton

PRDU Working Paper Series – No.6 – October 2013
(PRDU/The University of York, 28pp, ISSN 2049-5064 [Online])

Recently there has been an upsurge of interest among agents of liberal peacebuilding in the role of sport in peacebuilding processes. However, the wide-ranging claims concerning sport’s peacebuilding utility as articulated by proponents of the so-called ‘sport for development and peace’ (SDP) sector have escaped rigorous empirical research. Focusing on Lebanon, this piece draws on social capital and civil society peacebuilding theory to critically examine key suppositions of sport-based peacebuilding.

The paper can be downloaded from the PRDU website at the following address: www.york.ac.uk/prdu/publications/working paper

Conflict, Security and Development
(Vol 13, No 3, July 2013)
“Conflict analysis for the twenty-first century” (pp.259–283)
Sultan Barakat and Tom Waldman

Approaches to conflict assessment remain stuck in the late 1990s. Methodological tools are overwhelmingly geared toward development actors. Significant policy evolution over the last decade, along with progress in research on conflict and instability, powerfully suggests the need for analytical tools that are both truly joint and capable of embracing all major aspects of conflict causation and drivers of state fragility. Based on a review conducted for DFID, and taking the UK as a case in point, this article outlines the key issues, challenges and requirements involved in operationalising genuinely joint analysis.

The Journal of Peacebuilding and Development
(Vol 8, No 2, 2013)
Special Issue on “Evaluation in Violently Divided Societies – Politics, Ethics & Methods”
Guest Editors: Kenneth Bush and Colleen Duggan
Includes their chapter “Evaluation In Conflict Zones: Methodological and Ethical Challenges”.

Evaluation and research in the service of peacebuilding and development is a complex enterprise. Theories of change and assumptions about how peace and development work are often unarticulated or untested. We suggest that the international aid community, researchers and practitioners need to think more deeply and systematically about the role of evaluation in increasing the efficacy of projects and programmes in violently divided societies. This belief underpins and motivates the articles contained in this special issue.

Contemporary Politics
(192, 2013)
Kenneth Bush

Why is there so little graffiti in Northern Ireland (NI) compared to cities in North America and Europe? The question is perplexing given the highly developed political mural tradition on both sides of the sectarian divide in NI. This paper explores the connections between the absence of graffiti and the street-level structures and processes of reconciliation or conflict. The paper highlights the importance of graffiti as a lens for assessing the degree to which the expected benefits of a peace agreement are experienced at the street level; addresses the methodological challenge of how to examine something that is not there; and questions the well-marketed representation of NI as a case of successful post-agreement peace.