

Goodhand, J, B. Klem, G. Sørbo (2014) 'Battlefields of method: Evaluating Norwegian peace efforts in Sri Lanka,' in B. Bull, M. Kennedy-Chouane and O. Winckler (eds) *Evaluation Methodologies for Aid in Conflict*, pp. 61-84. London: Routledge.

Chapter 4

Battlefields of method: Evaluating Norwegian peace efforts in Sri Lanka:

Jonathan Goodhand, SOAS
Bart Klem, Zürich University
Gunnar M. Sørbo, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen

1. Introduction

From 1999 to 2009, Norway was involved as 'sole facilitator' of the Sri Lankan peace process. Negotiations ultimately broke down, leading to a return to full-scale war which ended with the military victory by the Sri Lankan army over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Tigers (LTTE) in May 2009. An evaluation was commissioned by the Evaluation Department of the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (Norad) in 2010 to tell the story of Norway's engagement, assess the effects and identify broader implications and lessons. This was the first Norwegian evaluation to be commissioned in the area of peace diplomacy which has become one of the most distinctive aspects of Norwegian foreign policy.

Somewhat provocatively, our evaluation report, published in November 2011, was entitled 'Pawns of Peace' (Goodhand et al. 2011a). We borrowed and adapted the title of Harriet Martin's book on peacemaking, 'Kings of Peace, Pawns of War' (2006) in order to make the point that peace mediators are often minor players in a much larger game.

Analysts who evaluate peace efforts, it might be added, are also part of 'the game'; just as mediators enter into intensely politicized and contested environments, so do evaluators. Evaluating attempts to resolve conflict involves grappling with competing and partial interpretations of complex processes. As with all forms of historical assessments that call for explicit evaluation of events and policies, there is clearly a need for a systematic and robust

methodology, but peace evaluation can never be reduced to a technical exercise. Evaluators inevitably get sucked into the politics surrounding conflict and intervention, and run the risk of becoming ‘pawns’, just like peace mediators. In this chapter we aim to explore both the methodological and political challenges associated with the evaluation of peace efforts in Sri Lanka, and we will argue that the two sets of challenges are inseparable.

Unlike most other chapters in this book, the primary focus does not lie with development co-operation in support of peace building. Rather, our evaluation encompassed a wider range of international interventions, including diplomacy, ceasefire monitoring as well as aid. Although aid provision – which included high profile donor pledging conferences and efforts to bring about collaboration through joint aid mechanisms – was an important part of the international strategy to support the peace process, development co-operation was not at the centre of our evaluation. The peace process and the Norwegian role within it, was largely determined by politics and not by the provision or withholding of aid. This explains the analytical focus of the evaluation and also of this chapter.¹

The chapter starts with a discussion of the research literature on peace processes and its relevance to the design and practice of evaluating such efforts. We then provide a brief overview of Norway’s peace efforts in Sri Lanka, followed by an exploration of the methodological challenges and how we attempted to deal with them. We then tell the story of how our evaluation evolved in practice, dividing its implementation into three chronological phases. The concluding section draws on our experience in Sri Lanka to suggest some broader implications.

2. The challenge of evaluating peace efforts

2.1 Social science challenges: structure, agency and uncertainty

The quantitative literature on mediation provides a rather mixed picture on the efficacy of external mediation (Sarkees 2000; Dixon 2009; Licklider, 2009). Historically, most wars ended through military victory rather than through a mediated settlement, and one body of research has found that conflicts terminated through a negotiated settlement had a higher level of recidivism (cf: Stedman 1997; Licklider 2009). Another, growing body of quantitative research finds that peace settlements are becoming more ‘sticky’, identifying a positive correlation between external intervention and sustainable peace (Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Human Security Centre 2005; Fortna 2008; Human Security Centre 2010). This literature does not

¹ International aid to Sri Lanka, and the politics around it, is a relatively well-studied area (Goodhand and Klem 2005; Bastian 2007; Goodhand and Walton 2009; Orjuela 2011; Rainford and Satkunathan 2011).

provide a clear explanatory account about what works or does not work in relation to peace processes, but it does have value in pointing to some of the key structural variables that shape civil war termination, whilst also giving the evaluator (and peace mediator) a useful reminder that peace processes frequently fail.

One has to turn to the more qualitative literature, including on case studies, in order to gain insights about peace mediation in practice and capture the specificity and contingency of individual contexts and interventions. This literature explores the ‘how to’ of mediation. Much of this work is concerned with extracting lessons from analyses of particular peace processes. The analytical focus tends to be on the design of peace negotiations, the question of timing and ‘ripe’ moments, the necessary inclusion and sequencing of key conflict issues, dealing with information asymmetries and security dilemmas, the role of incentives and disincentives, and spoiler management strategies (Stedman 1997; Regan 2002; Zartman 2000, 2009). Much of this literature is informed by rational choice models which assume that individual agents make rational calculations and choices and that the decision-making of elite actors is a key determinant of ‘success’ or ‘failure’. Mediation, in this sense, is about negotiating a complex ‘prisoners’ dilemma’. Protagonists can ‘choose’ peace over war, if mediators deploy the right combination of (dis)incentives. Therefore a significant role is ascribed to individual agents, including peace mediators.

One of the implications of this perspective is that the failure of peace negotiations can be traced back to flawed decision-making processes, the incorrect deployment of carrots and sticks, the failure to grasp opportunities and so forth. Also this approach is based upon a teleological understanding of war to peace transitions – events, processes and actors are judged in relation to the desired outcome (a negotiated settlement), leading to assessments about whether they are for or against peace and more broadly whether the peace process is moving ‘forwards’ or ‘backwards’ (Klem 2012). Whilst like the quantitative research, this literature yields some important insights, it has some major weaknesses. First the rational-actor model is largely blind to non-material, symbolic and collective factors that influence and shape individual decision-making in peace processes. Second, by ascribing such an important role to agency, the significance of wider structural factors is downplayed. This leads to unrealistic expectations about what mediators can be expected to achieve and held accountable for. Just because a peace process fails, for instance, does not mean that mediators necessarily made the ‘wrong’ decisions or failed to deploy their resources optimally.

The rational-actor perspective is particularly questionable in the case of non-coercive mediators like Norway, with only limited means to persuade protagonists to change their course of action. The stakes and interests vested in protracted warfare often outweigh the instruments of international actors, who of course have their own sets of interests. Therefore, though one should not deny the role of agency, particularly during peace processes when

institutions may be in a state of flux, the wider structures place considerable constraints on both mediators and protagonists. Many after-the-event accounts of peace processes tend to 'write agency back in'. Yet unless done in a balanced and critical way, this may obscure the complex, messy reality of peace processes in which actors are always partially sighted; they are responding to events rather than shaping them, in other words making it up as they go along; and they are often severely constrained by wider power structures.

Therefore, whilst the research literature on peace processes and peace settlements provides useful insights to the evaluator, there are also limitations that need to be born in mind. There is no definitive theory in this field to guide action. Existing theory at best provides general guidance, rather than clear prescriptions, for both practitioners and evaluators (Stern and Druckman 2000:62). The most obvious yet important point, therefore, is to take contextual diversity seriously. Peace processes take place in particular contexts at particular moments in history and universal prescriptions and approaches have limited value. For the evaluator, this means that the foundation for any credible assessment must start with a robust political economy analysis of the context.

2.2 Political challenges: contested narratives, expressions of power

Like any other policy-oriented research, research on peace efforts is not detached from the field it claims to study. Whilst it may be conventional wisdom that sound policies must be 'evidence based', it is also true that the relationship between research and policy may run in the opposite direction, in the sense that policy priorities can shape the kinds of evidence and findings generated by research. Evidence may be drawn upon selectively or manipulated to support a particular policy narrative, a phenomenon that Cramer and Goodhand (2011) call 'policy based evidence'. Policy priorities shape the kind of research that is done and determine what questions are considered relevant. Policy makers may also be under pressure to make selective use of scholarly literature to legitimise or de-politicise certain policies. This phenomenon is reinforced when research findings are heterogeneous or contradictory, as is often the case.

This is particularly true for evaluations, whether of peace efforts or other activities, which are commissioned by intervening institutions. Of course, the formal rationale for evaluations is to provide a critical, independent view. Evaluators are expected to serve a watchdog role, assessing policy outcomes, and questioning policy dogmas. However, evaluations are shaped by the mandate set by the commissioning agency. In order to be relevant, evaluators need to adapt themselves to the policy logics and institutional practices they are studying. Evaluations are to some extent political instruments that serve to legitimize policies and their impacts by packaging and presenting them in particular ways. They capture messy realities in a 'scientifically' endorsed narrative. They make sense of institutions and interventions, even if

they criticise them. Evaluations are thus not simply instruments of empirical verification, they ‘do political work’, and as such are expressions of power.

This point is elaborated and developed in a much wider (broadly Foucauldian) literature on development, state rule and neo-liberal assemblages (cf: Duffield 2007). For example, James Ferguson’s seminal work on the ‘anti-politics machine’ (Ferguson 1990) argues that development interventions tend to obfuscate the deeply political interests that they promote, by breaking things down into bureaucratic units, projects, and categories. They render technical what is in fact very political (Li 2007). Evaluations – be it on peace or development interventions – may be seen in a similar light. They provide coherent narratives of policy and practice, thus reducing messy realities to manageable proportions, and lend themselves to political usage; to legitimise or de-legitimise particular courses of action. This does not mean that evaluations necessarily become ‘scientific’ smokescreens for political actions – after all, technical narratives often invoke counter-narratives – but it recognizes that evaluations operate in political force fields that affect their methodological approaches and outcomes. This applies to all varieties of policy-research², yet peace evaluations are likely to be particularly vulnerable to such pressures because it may be more difficult (though not impossible) to ‘render peace technical’, given the fact that it so obviously touches upon critical political issues related to security and sovereignty.

Evaluators of peace interventions thus unavoidably have to navigate a political arena throughout their assignment: from the discussion of terms of reference to the tug of war over contentious findings and minute rephrasing of the executive summary. Arguments about methodology and evidence base are usually at the heart of these struggles, but the underlying reasons these issues are contentious often have more to do with vested political interests, public perceptions, and bureaucratic fears of possible political fall-out. When the stakes are high, pressures are likely to increase. In this context, evaluators use similar arguments to protect their product (and the voices and convictions manifest in it) as well as their reputation, while also preserving their relations with possible future clients. Evaluation politics permeate the entire evaluation process.

Interventions in war-torn areas generate their own information economies. Information is a valuable resource which is hoarded, manipulated and disseminated, and can literally make the difference between life and death. And the brokers operating in these information economies have to navigate numerous issue to do with the nexus of power and knowledge: Who gets to say what? Which voices are heard or suppressed? What data count as valid? What findings are

² The controversies around the fourth assessment of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change in February 2010 reminds us that the supposedly less politicised natural sciences may fall prey to such dynamics as well.

considered policy-relevant? Whose truth prevails in the echelons of power? If we are to study peacebuilding evaluations as an empirical phenomenon, an acknowledgement of these forces and interests is warranted.

3. Our object of study

According to the Terms of Reference, the main purpose of our evaluation was to “learn from the unique Norwegian experience as a facilitator in the peace process in Sri Lanka”. More specifically, evaluation questions required us to: (a) map the Norwegian peace engagement in Sri Lanka from 1997 until 2009; (b) assess the role as facilitator between the parties on the one hand, and the relationship to the international community on the other; (c) assess the Norwegian facilitator role and the relationship to local parties and stakeholders; (d) assess the ceasefire agreement and how the parties observed it; (e) assess Norway’s efforts in the last phase of the war (January-May 2009); (f) assess results achieved through the Norwegian facilitation of the peace process; and (g) draw lessons from the Norwegian engagement in the Sri Lankan peace process.

These questions did not explicitly engage with the history, roots and dynamics of armed conflict in Sri Lanka. However, given the importance of context, noted above, and to avoid an overly teleological approach that places interventions at the heart of the analysis, we decided the evaluation should not treat the rise and fall of Sri Lanka’s peace process as simply a derivative of Norwegian intervention. Rather, the ambition was to review the turbulent fifteen years of Sri Lankan history, and then place Norway’s efforts in that historical process, to identify results and draw lessons.

Conceptually and methodologically, this is difficult. Incorporating a much wider set of issues and factors into the makes it very difficult to demarcate the scope of the study. If an understanding of Norwegian peace efforts in Sri Lanka requires a fine-grained analysis of the evolution of the island’s ‘conflict system’ over fifteen years, including the involvement of the Norwegian mediators and other international actors, there is clearly a risk that it all becomes too much to handle, particularly within the time constraints of an evaluation. In our case this was indeed a major challenge, even if the team could draw upon prior knowledge and research.

For readers who are unfamiliar with Sri Lanka, we provide below a nutshell summary of the conflict’s historical background and the last fifteen years of the war in particular.

Sri Lanka’s minority question has long historical roots, but became particularly pronounced in the post-colonial era (from 1948 onwards). In our understanding, the clash between Sinhala

nationalism and Tamil separatism is rooted in the nature of the Sri Lankan state and the way its democratic politics played out in a multi-ethnic environment. The contention between the Sinhala (73%)³ majority and the Tamil minority (18%, of which at least one fourth are so-called “Indian Tamils”) has always been most salient, but other groups – such as the Muslims (9%) – have not escaped these dynamics (Moore 1985; Coomaraswamy 2003; De Silva 2005; Spencer 2008; Uyangoda 2011). After several agreements on minority rights and regional autonomy were not implemented, anti-state armed violence began in the early 1980s. The LTTE subsequently emerged as the dominant Tamil faction fighting for an independent Tamil homeland in the northeast of the island. India’s diplomatic and military intervention in the late 1980s resulted in renewed warfare and a further entrenchment of positions (Bullion 1995; Loganathan 1996).

It was in the wake of Indian withdrawal, in 1991, that the possibilities of a Norwegian role were first explored. But Norway was only formally invited as a “facilitator” in 1999, from among several other candidates who had offered to play this role. Initial backchannel negotiations proved unsuccessful and it was only with the election of a new Sri Lankan government in late 2001 that a first major break-through was reached: the February 2002 ceasefire agreement between the government and the LTTE. The agreement was subsequently monitored by an unarmed Nordic mission. Direct talks, backed by Sri Lanka’s aid donors (most prominently Japan, the European Union and the United States), soon entered an impasse. The subsequent “no-war-no-peace” phase was characterized by a fragmented political landscape, continued violence and eroding popular support for the peace process, despite an apparent window of opportunity after the December 2004 tsunami. Finally, full-scale military offensives resumed in 2006. Sri Lanka’s replenished armed forces gradually pushed back the LTTE and defeated the insurgents in May 2009, killing its entire leadership. This military victory came at the cost of an estimated 30 to 40,000 civilian deaths and bolstered a reform resistant government with little inclination to address the underlying ethno-political issues of the war.

A basic starting point for our analysis was to define the war in Sri Lanka as a manifestation of a deeper state crisis. This led us to analyse the changing nature of the Sri Lankan state within its global, regional and domestic settings, and to examine shifts in state-society relations over time and the role of inter- and intra-elite competition in shaping political bargains, coalitions and settlements. The rivalry between the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) – both of which are predominantly Sinhala – concerns issues and interests that are different from the country’s ethno-political crisis, but have often complicated

³ Ethnic statistics are clearly sensitive in Sri Lanka and there has not been a country-wide census since 1981 because of the war. The figures mentioned are a composite of the national census (2001), which did not cover the war-torn north-east, and district-level data (2007) and thus provide a general indication only.

the conflict and impeded the search for its peaceful resolution (Venugopal 2009; Uyangoda 2011). Such dynamics help explain both the continuities and shifts in Sri Lanka's political economy during the course of peace negotiations. And they help place international intervention, and specifically the role of Norway, in perspective. A political economy analysis of the Sri Lankan peace process shows the relative autonomy of domestic political elite decision-making, which limited the options for international actors. This was particularly the case where international backers are divided and when the legitimacy of, and domestic constituency for, such changes are limited (Goodhand et al., 2011b).

It is important to note that a conflict analysis also involves looking at the changing external environment before and during the course of Norway's engagement. Sri Lanka's political elite have had to balance and mediate different, sometimes competing external pressures. Other domestic actors, including the LTTE, have likewise adapted to changes in the international arena to generate political capital, gain access to resources and to build their legitimacy. It is important to avoid a narrowly internal understanding of the civil war and to recognize the inter-connectedness of domestic and external dimensions.

This was the analytical starting point for the evaluation. Our analysis placed Norway's peace efforts in Sri Lanka in a broad historical perspective and showed the magnitude of the challenges the mediators faced. Drawing on this conflict analysis, we posited that a durable peace settlement would require the following elements: 1) constitutional reform, 2) some level of support for these reforms from the three largest ethnic communities (Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims), 3) a fundamental transformation of the LTTE into an organisation able to operate in a context of democratic power-sharing, 4) addressing the rivalry between the two largest Sinhala-dominated political parties (UNP and SLFP), and 5) ensuring that the settlement would be acceptable to India. In parallel to these core political issues, there was an imperative to address immediate humanitarian issues and preserve a level of respect for human rights, both for moral reasons and to ensure the legitimacy of the settlement.

4. Methodological challenges and approach

Having provided an overview of our evaluative approach, we now turn to the core topic of this book: the methodological challenges associated with evaluating peace building efforts in conflict settings. As discussed in this volume, and elsewhere, these challenges are numerous (cf: Stern and Druckman 2000; OECD/DAC 2012).

Firstly, there is the very basic question of what is the measure of ‘success’ or ‘failure’? Because the Sri Lankan peace process broke down, does this mean that Norwegian efforts were a failure, or should other accomplishments still be valued?

Secondly, there is the challenge of dealing with uncertainty. Uncertainty plays a bigger role in questions of armed conflict (and peace) than is typically acknowledged by policy makers and researchers. Particularly attempts at constructing measurable, predictive models tend to inadequately approach conflict and peace processes as ‘closed systems’. Conversely if one understands peace processes, like other domains of social relations, as an ‘open system’ this means that the same causes can have different outcomes and similar outcomes can have different causes. Furthermore, mediators are at a disadvantage compared to evaluators in the sense that they cannot ‘postdict’ (Stern and Druckman, 2000:53) i.e. evaluators are able to make ‘after the fact’ assessments based upon a knowledge of outcomes. Mediators are operating with incomplete knowledge – and often information is deliberately withheld or massaged by the conflicting parties – which makes planning and prediction extremely difficult. In such a situation of uncertainty, a strategy that seemed logical at the start of a process may prove to be erroneous or lead to fatal mistakes further down the line. And yet, the fact that a particular decision had undesirable effects, does not mean that this was inevitable. While evaluations usually have the benefit of hindsight⁴, they still have to grapple with the challenge of open systems and uncertainty – for example they often take place too early to judge the long-term effects of the intervention studied. With regard to Sri Lanka, the historical significance of the collapsed peace process and the subsequent military victory depends to a large extent on political developments in the years to come.

Thirdly, and related to the problem of uncertainty, is the problem of attribution: the challenge of trying to separate out the effects of Norwegian interventions from the impacts of wider international and domestic interventions. Impact on larger scale processes can normally just be inferred rather than confirmed. Related to the attribution problem is the conceptual problem of counterfactual history. Whether a different Norwegian strategy would have resulted in different outcomes is impossible to prove. Whether the final war and military defeat of the LTTE would have occurred without the peace process is similarly difficult to judge.

Fourthly, there are questions of access and secrecy. Peace efforts often require confidentiality and actors may have information which they cannot or will not reveal. Key informants may be dead, imprisoned or otherwise hard to reach.

⁴ One exception to this is ‘real time’ evaluation, which is carried out while an intervention is ongoing. Likewise ex-ante or mid-term evaluations may not have the same benefits of hindsight.

Finally, as in all reconstruction of historical events, there is the challenge of dealing with conflicting or unreliable accounts and discourses. The narratives of key protagonists are in a sense “scripted” and aimed at particular audiences. Actors may inflate their own roles, present a greater level of coherence and logic to decision making than was actually the case, and smooth over the frequent gaps between declared intentions and actual behaviour. Furthermore these narratives often clash with one another, reflecting the highly contested nature of war to peace transitions.

We identified these difficulties at the very start of the evaluation and tried to develop strategies for addressing them, while also being conscious of the fact that some of them are intractable. Perhaps the most important strategy for dealing with several of these challenges is that of triangulation – drawing upon different qualitative data sources (archival study, historical analysis, individual interviews, and focus group discussions), and different levels of analysis (macro, meso and micro) – to reduce possible biases and provide as a firm an empirical foundation as possible.

In order to place Norwegian intervention in perspective, we combined an ‘inside-out’ approach (a detailed account of Norway’s involvement in the peace process) and an ‘outside-in’ approach (analysis of the broader structural context, conflict and peace making dynamics) and then sought to link the two. A careful ‘inside-out’ analysis of Norwegian involvement provides an actor-oriented perspective that recognizes the spaces and opportunities for individual agents to influence conflict dynamics and outcomes. This is not restricted to Norwegian actors, but also explicitly recognizes the political agency of domestic elites. The background to the Sri Lankan conflict provides an ‘outside-in’ perspective, giving an analytical baseline of key trends and conflict dynamics, placing Norwegian interventions within a wider structural context. This combination of approaches aims to capture the complex dynamics and chains of causality that link individuals, institutions and structures in peace processes.

In order to connect the outside-in and inside-out perspective in a larger historical plot, we identified key turning points (‘critical junctures’) in the period studied. It is at these moments of change, we posited, that the outlook or composition of the LTTE and the government changes or shifts take place in the political space and military options available to them. Therefore, these events also had a profound – restraining or enabling – impact on Norway’s room for manoeuvre as peace facilitator. Some of these turning points resulted from political-military calculation – for example the LTTE withdrawing from the peace talks in 2003. Others may be seen as manifestations of structural political trends (the election of Rajapaksa as president in 2005) and others yet were entirely contingent (the tsunami in 2004). We used these turning points to scrutinize Norwegian responses in relation to the knowledge and opportunities that were available at the time. This close analysis of turning points seemed to be the best way of dealing with problems of causation and attribution, structure and agency. It

enabled us to reconstruct critical events and engage in careful ‘process tracing’ to explore causal mechanisms and the linkages between individual decision making and wider institutions and structures.

In sum, we adopted a historical, political economy approach, where inside-out and outside-in perspectives were linked through the use of key turning points. This approach aspires to balance and connect structure and agency. It recognises long histories, the centrality of the state and the structural constraints in which key actors operate, thus acknowledging a level of path dependency. Mediators like all other actors in a conflict never have complete context freedom – they inherit a particular situation, which places constraints on their choices and actions. But on the other hand, our approach acknowledges that key actors have some room for manoeuvre, and it does not dispense with contingency and uncertainty. We thus explicitly attempted to ‘write key individuals back into the story’ without adopting a radically contingent, actor-centred perspective. After all, the world does not follow Newtonian rules and principles – it is more chaotic, random and uncertain, and individuals make a difference, even though they do not act in contexts of their own choosing.⁵

5. Evaluation methodology and politics in practice

The sections below review the evaluation process in chronological order, including the methodological challenges and strategies that came up at different points in time.

5.1 Overtures: contracting and designing the evaluation

The word overture has a double meaning: on the one hand it can mean a (musical) introduction; on the other it can mean a performance of subtle self-promotion in order to establish rapport (making overtures). The second meaning of this term resonates with the process through which evaluators secure a contract. Prospective evaluators need to submit a proposal that fulfills two basic requirements: it needs to be good (in order for the assignment to be carried out successfully) and it needs to look good to the commissioning agent (in order to get the contract). Often, of course, the two align, but they are not the same thing. For example, reputed senior researchers may add gravity to a bid, even when their actual involvement in the research may be minimal; tight time frames may look efficient, but may be hard to enforce once a bidder gets into the assignment; limiting staff time may help make the budget competitive, but will create the risk of massive unpaid overtime.

⁵ This approach bears some semblance to what Paul Richards has called causal process tracing in a stimulating recent article (2011). For earlier discussion on process tracing, see for example George and McKeown (1985).

Team selection is one of the most crucial parts of the evaluation exercise. This particularly applies to highly sensitive evaluations in the field of peace and conflict. To what extent are the evaluators known and trusted in terms of the quality of their analysis? Do they have a track record in this field? Is there a good combination of established and emerging talent in the team? Do they have the necessary thematic, methodological and area-based expertise? Is there any conflict of interest? To what extent is there a balance between ‘international’ and ‘local’ researchers? Is there an adequate gender balance? These were all important considerations for us when putting together our evaluation team, which was composed of a core team of international and Sri Lankan researchers, in addition to an advisory group of senior academics and analysts.

Even after having won the Norad Evaluation Department bid (22 July 2010), the question of team composition remained a contentious issue and raised a number of ethical challenges. The timing of the evaluation coincided with a number of developments in relation to Sri Lanka, which heightened its sensitivity and politicization. After a brutal military victory in the north-east in 2009, the Sri Lankan government had come under growing international pressure to account for alleged war crimes. Therefore the regime, already suspicious of anything that had to do with Norway and what it regarded as a flawed peace process, was especially sensitive to any initiatives that attempted to look at the past. In parts of the Sri Lankan media, the evaluation was lumped together with wider international efforts pushing for accountability in relation to war crimes. As a result of tense political climate and the increasing visibility of the evaluation, some of the Sri Lankan members of the team felt that they had to withdraw the endeavour. Because selective withdrawal would have upset the balanced ethnic background of the team, it was eventually decided that none of the Sri Lankan researchers would be included on the team. This suggests that the principles of independence and transparency, considered to be essential pillars of ‘good practice’ in evaluation, may be very difficult to abide by in highly politicized and conflictual environments.

The initial phase of the research focused on interviews with key Norwegian actors and the perusal of the archives of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in Oslo. Archival research led to the production of several lengthy annotated summaries, detailing Norwegian efforts, perceptions and internal discussions throughout the study period. However, we were aware that the archives did not provide us with a comprehensive database of historical facts. One of the key Norwegian actors explained to us that the whole process had been relatively informal. While the key decisions and statements were well-documented, many of the preceding discussions, disagreements and considerations had only been discussed through SMS communication or in private conversations. For example, it remained unclear how exactly the 2002 ceasefire agreement had been negotiated. This made it very difficult to judge Norway’s mediator role, especially whether or not some of the alleged flaws in the truce

(exclusion of the president, weak monitoring mission, unclear arrangements at sea) could have been avoided.

Archival research yielded further deliberation about the identification and significance of various turning points. We tried to deal with these key moments in their historical context. In other words, rather than assessing decisions and actions with the benefit of hindsight, we tried to construct a historical plot that faithfully captured the uncertainty that characterised Norwegian involvement in Sri Lanka. It was also clear, however, that our selection of turning points was nonetheless informed by knowledge of outcomes, something that the Norwegian mediators did not have at the time. To evaluate the effectiveness of the Norwegian efforts, the team needed to distinguish between processes and consequences that were clear at the time, and might have been anticipated (and for which people could thus be held accountable), and dynamics that could not have been anticipated (for example, the tsunami), and only became clear afterwards.

Alongside the archival research and the initiation of our interviews with key actors, we commissioned a number of sub-studies and data-gathering efforts to inform our analysis. This included: 1) a review of the literature on mediation and peace building; 2) a study of prevalent perspectives among Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora on the peace process; and 3) a (tri-lingual) review of Sri Lankan media coverage of the peace process, and of our turning points in particular.

5.2 “Fieldwork”: navigating an arena of conflicting and missing narratives

Partly overlapping with the previous phase, the main part of the evaluation comprised ‘fieldwork’, that is interviews with key informants, along with the review of written sources. The crucial part of ‘the field’ however proved off-limits to us when Sri Lankan government officials made it known to the Norwegian embassy in Colombo that it would be better not to pursue our visa applications. Losing access to the country was a major setback. However, this problem was partly mitigated by interviewing key people on Skype or telephone. The impossibility of visiting Sri Lanka forced the team to focus our resources on accessing key informants internationally: interviews in Norway (and Sweden), other European countries (including Brussels, Geneva), the US (Washington DC, New York), India (Delhi, Chennai) and – somewhat coincidentally – Singapore (where a significant Sri Lankan government official happened to reside). Arguably this enhanced the complementary value of the evaluation in relation to the existing scholarship on the Sri Lankan peace process, which is often not as thorough when it comes to empirical research on Norway and other international actors. Nevertheless, the team was concerned that its inability to visit Sri Lanka would undercut the legitimacy of the exercise, particularly because our visa application had not

officially been rejected. Fortunately, this did not prove to be a problem when the evaluation was published.

Among the key conflict protagonists, the main group missing from our list of interviewees was the LTTE. The insurgents were clearly a vital player through the rise and fall of the peace process and the dramatic end of the war, but the movement is much less well understood than the political elite in the capital Colombo. Rather opaque and speculative interpretations about the leadership and factions within the movement in the press or elsewhere tend to obfuscate as much as they elucidate. Both written and verbal accounts of the LTTE tend to reinforce rather than debunk the movement's somewhat mythical self-image.⁶ We had met with some of the key LTTE figures in the past, including S.P. Tamilselvan (former leader of the political wing) and Pulidevan (former head of the LTTE peace secretariat). We had access to people who could provide credible accounts for other key cadres like Karuna (the break-away eastern commander) and Anton Balasingham (the former LTTE negotiator). The latter moreover wrote rather extensive memoirs (Balasingham 2004). But we never had access to the key military figures (i.e. Pottu Amman, Soosai and the LTTE leader Prabhakaran), who were dead when our evaluation started, and there was little reliable information that gave an insight into their thinking and decision-making.

Crucial aspects of the evaluation were thus difficult to substantiate: What were the objectives of the LTTE when they signed a ceasefire and started talks in 2002? Were the stated reasons the real grounds for walking away in 2003 and what was their longer-term plan B? What was the cause of the Karuna split? Why did they provoke the government into resuming hostilities in late 2005 and mid-2006? Why did they not resort to guerrilla style warfare when they could not sustain a state-like posture in late 2008 and 2009? We have tried to address all these questions by working our way through the various theories and speculations by perusing the LTTE's own statements, accounts in public media and interviews with people who are well-positioned to reflect on the LTTE. We discarded accounts that were clearly conspiratorial or lacked any evidence. Beyond that, the evaluation report could only spell out plausible interpretations but had no means to verify these conclusions.

Among the Colombo elite, the challenge was different. Most of the key people were still accessible (either abroad or on the phone), most of them were quite willing to share their perspectives and many of their actions and statements are well documented. However, many

⁶ There are a number of publications that claim authority in this regard, including journalistic accounts such as 'Tigers of Lanka' (Swamy 1995) and 'Inside an Elusive Mind' (Swamy 2006) the latter referring to LTTE leader Prabhakaran. These provide interesting insights, but provide only a somewhat speculative basis for making rigorous assessments with regard to some of the key considerations and decisions within the insurgent movement. See also the rather hard-nosed scholarly confrontation between Sarvananthan (2007) and Stokke (2006).

of them were politicians, with a strong vested interest in presenting their actions in a positive light. The same, it might be noted, can be said about interviews with international policy makers and (mainly Norwegian) politicians – many interviewees were prone to a level of revisionism, and reframing of events with the benefit of hindsight. Many of them had strong views on counterfactuals – if only the others had let them do things this way ... – but these could not be verified. Former President Chandrika Kumaratunga for example was very angry about the fact that she had been left out of the ceasefire negotiations, because the newly elected Prime Minister Wickremesinghe saw her as his primary rival. This, she correctly argued, was unconstitutional, because the President is the commander-in-chief, but it was impossible to say what would have happened if she had actually been consulted. Would she not have blocked or delayed the process so much that it would have scuttled the deal altogether? Would the LTTE have accepted her involvement in the process after her ‘war for peace’ a few years earlier? It was hard to get a credible account of whether Kumaratunga’s involvement would have strengthened or disabled the ceasefire agreement, which was probably Norway’s most significant accomplishment in Sri Lanka. In our analysis, we acknowledged that these were indeed difficult judgments, but also underlined that it was ‘problematic’ to exclude an actor with ‘a legitimate stake in the conflict’, and ‘sufficient political power and support to destabilise the peace process’ (Goodhand et al. 2011a: 88).

On the Norwegian side, the evaluation had excellent access. The Norwegian government provided full support to the evaluation, allowed unrestricted access to the archives and we were able to do interviews with the key actors, such as government minister and former peace envoy Erik Solheim, his successor as envoy Jon Hanssen-Bauer, former state secretary Vidar Helgesen, ambassadors (to Colombo) Jon Westborg, Hans Brattskar and Tore Hattrem, successive heads of mission of the ceasefire monitoring mission,⁷ as well as current and former Norwegian ministers. As was the case with the Colombo elite, however, some of these respondents had staked significant political and professional capital on the Sri Lankan peace process. Although they supported the evaluative exercise and were open to critical reflection, it did of course matter to them which version of the story would prevail in our report; or – to be more precise – in the public perception of the report. We return to this below.

With regard to contextual knowledge, there was a widespread conviction among many of our Indian and Sri Lankan respondents that the Norwegians were insufficiently savvy when it came to the Sri Lankan polity, its layered rivalries and competing dynasties, the symbolic meaning of its actions, its use of the vernacular media, and its relation to Buddhist leaders and other prominent figures in society. We found some of this criticism credible, particularly because the architects of Norway’s involvement had eschewed the creation of larger institutional structures (often called ‘track 2 and 3’) and the involvement of specialised

⁷ Except the first one, who was no longer alive.

academics in support of peace efforts in Sri Lanka. However, it is rather difficult to provide evidence for the lack of contextual awareness, though there were a few quotes indicating that this was the case. It is hard to provide specific examples of how some people had misunderstood something that happened several years ago.

Interviews with key Norwegian respondents were particularly important to construct what we have called an inside-out perspective. The more structural outside-in perspective also drew on interviews, but was largely based on the existing literature on Sri Lanka's recent history and available statistics (including opinion polls, electoral results, and economic growth figures). This approach shifted the focus away from the minutia of day to day Sri Lankan politics, to the longer-term structural changes that took place in our study period. This included shifts in the international context, most saliently the changing attitudes towards insurgent movements after 9/11 and the rising power of Asian states, including India and China. Other examples were the increasing importance of diaspora networks, and the significance of globalised circulation of politically vocal streams, which assumed significance within Sri Lankan Buddhism. Some of these structural changes were themselves influenced by the peace process. The split in the LTTE in 2004, for example, may have been influenced by several contingent events, but it also reflected the difficulties for a rebel movement to preserve unity and discipline under ceasefire conditions. On the Sinhala side of the political spectrum, the peace process opened up major political space for ethno-nationalist, anti-elitist forces.

The way our evaluation dealt with these unintended side effects of the peace process caused some debate, both among our Norwegian interlocutors and more widely. Paradoxically, we found that the political dynamics around Norway's involvement in the peace process became centrally important in Sri Lanka, while Norway's ability to influence these dynamics was in fact very limited. The outside-in perspective brought into focus the powerful forces that constrained Norwegian peace efforts. The inside-out perspective revealed that although some of these structural forces were not immune to the effects of the internationalised peace process, Norway did not have the power to steer these forces in intended directions.

5.3 Coda: contested conclusions

If we understand evaluations as attempts to understand and justify policy choices to particular audiences, the last phase of writing, re-writing, deleting and rephrasing is clearly an interesting one. Frequently the submission of a draft report provokes a 'tug of war' between evaluators and the commissioners that ordered the evaluation. Though this is sometimes driven by concerns over reputation or political fall-out, the legitimate way of criticising draft reports is to take issue with methodological rigour and reliable evidence. Given that peace evaluations are not a 'hard science', it can be quite challenging to reach consensus on these matters. Moreover, the actors concerned know that once the report is made public, it is not just the

nuanced treatment of evidence that wins out: most readers will only read the title and the executive summary. Different users may interpret (or frame) the main findings of the report quite differently, irrespective of the evidence and analysis in the report.

In brief, our report argued that Norwegian peace efforts were heavily constrained by the structural forces of Sri Lanka's political economy. The demise of the peace process eventually culminating in the government's military victory was as much a story of the government winning and the LTTE losing, as it was a story of Norway failing. In addition to this general conclusion, we highlighted seven broader implications about international peace mediation in a changing global context. Some of these points met with agreement; others were (sometimes quite fiercely) contested. Our draft report underwent two cycles of elaborate feedback. Apart from a long list of minor comments and corrections, the main issues of debate can be summarized under three points.

First, some of the people involved felt that we had subjected Norwegian efforts to a "negative framing". The criticism was that we "downplayed" the positive results of Norwegian intervention (such as the signing of the ceasefire), while painting a negative gloss to the overall narrative. Also, some commentators felt we were providing a platform for politicians (such as former President Chandrika Kumaratunga) who had an interest in disqualifying key parts of Norway's efforts while downplaying their own responsibility. Particular phrases were considered to be problematic, specifically the title of the report ('Pawns of Peace') and parts of the executive summary. The draft summary stated that the 'Norwegian involvement in Sri Lanka is a story of failure', that Norway's accomplishments were ephemeral, and that the 'structural dimensions of the conflict' had not been addressed.

These conclusions were considered too strong in view of the more nuanced narrative in the report. In the view of our strongest critic: 'The executive summary should be completely revised'. We did rephrase parts of the summary, but the gist of it remained unchanged. Rhetorical softening would undercut the strength of the report and the legitimacy of the whole exercise particularly among non-Norwegian audiences, who might interpret our efforts as part of a Norwegian whitewash campaign if we adopted overly diplomatic phrasing.

The second point of discussion was analytically more fundamental. Some commentators argued that the report suffered from structural determinism; others took a more nuanced position and said it was inconsistent in its positioning on structure and agency. In short, both groups felt the analysis over-emphasized structural factors and longer-term trends, leaving little analytical space for the way Norwegian decisions and efforts impacted (or could have impacted) on these processes. While we firmly rejected the allegation of being determinists, the more moderate critique of mixing structural perspectives with agency was not altogether unfounded. As mentioned above, there was an apparent paradox in our analysis, which argued

on the one hand that Sri Lanka's plight was driven by an entrenched conflict system in which Norwegian peacemakers were only pawns, while on the other hand reviewing turning points, which were subject to contingency and political decisions. Moreover, how could we criticise Norwegian efforts if the conflict was path dependent anyway? One of the comments read: "You cannot at the same time argue that outcomes were predetermined in the way the conflict worked and at the same time attribute so much responsibility for failure (only) to Norway." We were convinced of the need to acknowledge structural factors as well as agency and contingency, but to do so in a coherent and robust way is difficult. There are ample examples of both: the significance of Sri Lanka's post-colonial state institutions and the entrenched rivalries in domestic politics are monumental; and yet there are clear moments of contingency (the tsunami) and political choice (signing the ceasefire; the LTTE walking away from the peace talks in 2003; the LTTE split in 2004; the government not signing the joint government-LTTE aid mechanism in 2005; the LTTE boycotting the 2005 elections resulting in the victory of the more hard-line candidate Rajapaksa). Our approach of inside-out and outside-in perspectives woven together on the basis of key turning points was designed to provide a measured (in our view) balance between structural and agency-based perspectives, but it does not provide a waterproof defence against this sort of criticism.

The third set of criticism took issue with the adverse effects of Norwegian involvement in Sri Lanka that we had identified. We argued that Norway's involvement was not only the victim of Sinhala ultra-nationalist forces gaining strength, but contributed to it as well. The internationalized peace process fuelled well-established Sinhala anxieties about foreign infringements on Sri Lankan sovereignty and left a lot of political space for the forces rallying against Norwegian peace efforts. We also argued that Norway's continued involvement after the resumption of large-scale territorial offensives in 2006 posed an ethical problem: there was no feasible space to work on peace talks of any sort, and the continued involvement of Norwegian diplomats and Nordic ceasefire monitors lent itself to abuse by the parties. Neither of the parties requested a Norwegian departure; the fiction of a ceasefire plausibly provided tactical military advantages and served to limit the diplomatic fall-out of resuming a war that resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties. We were critical of Norway's role during this phase of the conflict and argued for a consequentialist ethic (there comes a point where you must withdraw when your involvement lends itself to such abuse), rather than the duty-based ethic that some of our Norwegian respondents advocated (peace is a noble endeavour that must always be tried).

This line of argument was met with strong criticism from some of our Norwegian counterparts, who felt these were "unacceptable" and "unsubstantiated allegations". The continuation of Norwegian involvement after the resumption of war in 2006 had been intended to limit the humanitarian damage, but our report questioned this rationale. We argued that unintended and unforeseen consequences are not exceptional; they feature in

virtually every such intervention. War-making and peace-making are not neatly distinguishable categories; they influence each other and they may overlap. Norwegian-supported peace efforts were not a marginal political process in Sri Lanka; they were at the centre of the island's political dynamics. They were very controversial and played a dominant role in media debates and successive elections. Though Norway's room for manoeuvre and its ability to effect change was very limited, its involvement produced a number of unintended effects, in part because its efforts fuelled counter-forces or lent itself to strategic manipulation by domestic actors. Though it was clearly impossible to prove the counterfactual, the fragmentation of the LTTE (the split in 2004, which fundamentally shifted the military balance) would not likely have happened without the peace process. And the internationalised peace process opened up a large political space for more radical Sinhala nationalist politics to enter the political mainstream. Not only were the Norwegians attacked by these forces; the very notion of peace through political negotiations lost its legitimacy. We thus defended these observations about unintended negative effects, while also making clear that Norway was not solely responsible for these dynamics.

5.4 Public reception: divergent interpretations

Our argument was sustained with a detailed historical narrative, but this was not sufficient to pre-empt or deflect the political forces that came into play when the final report was publicly disseminated. Providing transparency and contributing to public debate were explicit objectives of the evaluation and for that reason Norad's Evaluation Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised a high profile dissemination event. During the event, Erik Solheim, who had been the most visible Norwegian player in the Sri Lankan peace process and was now Minister of Environment and International Development, reacted to the report and then it was discussed by a panel. His ministry had selected a small group of panellists who were considered close to the minister. Solheim highlighted some challenges they had faced on the way, reiterated some of the positive accomplishments, welcomed the criticism and lessons learnt (without discussing them in much detail), and argued that the report suffered from a structural determinist perspective and made criticisms that could only be made with the benefit of hindsight.⁸

In parallel to the launch in Oslo, the report was published online on some of Sri Lanka's primary political debate platforms (Groundviews; Transcurrents). It was important for us to make sure 'our version' of the story and the entire report were directly accessible, because we were concerned that some of Sri Lankan media reporting on the evaluation would be skewed and politicized. *The Island* in particular, had been a source of rather speculative, even

⁸ A full video of the launch is available at: http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/lyd_bilde/nett-tv-2/fred_srilanka.html?pid=662709

conspiratorial coverage of our evaluation efforts. At the beginning of the evaluation, the paper underlined that CMI (the lead agency) had long been “a major recipient of Norwegian funds” (The Island, 19 December 2011), while also suggesting we would investigate some of the assassinations and shed light on what happened at the end of the war (the allegations of war crimes). It explicitly connected the evaluation to other on-going international efforts: the inquiry by the UN into allegations of war crimes (the Secretary General’s Panel of Experts), the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee (LLRC, the domestic response to international pressure to investigate) and the rather inflammatory documentary of the UK TV station Channel 4 (“Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields”). Particularly the UN panel and the Channel 4 film became symbols of what was perceived as foreign infringement on Sri Lankan sovereignty driven by supposedly pro-Tamil and/or neo-colonial international actors. Our evaluation had neither the explicit mandate nor the means to investigate war crimes or gather forensic evidence on killings; its aim was to reflect on Norway’s role over a twelve-year period. But, *The Island* presented as part of a larger international effort to undermine the government’s victory over the LTTE and white wash Norway’s errors (if not malign intentions). For instance, when the release of our report was delayed, *the Island* wrote:

‘Norway seems to be reluctant to make public a costly evaluation of its unsuccessful peace efforts in Sri Lanka. Although Norway initially planned to unveil the final report in the first week of April 2011, ahead of UNSG Ban Ki-Moon’s unsubstantiated ‘war crimes’ report, an influential section in the Norwegian government is concerned about the outcome. Sources told *The Island* that in view of a spate of revelations made by Wikileaks with regard to the Norwegian-led peace process since February 2002 the interested parties would not be able to manipulate the Norwegian evaluation.’

(The Island 27 July 2011)

Coverage of the release of the report followed suit: “There is an unmistakable tendency to apologize on behalf of and whitewash the Norwegian effort – not surprising considering that this is a Norwegian government commissioned study and the evaluation team would not have got the job if they were not going to write something to absolve their paymasters of blame.” (The Island, 12 November 2011) Meanwhile the Ministry of Defence selectively highlighted a quote in the report to commend Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa (who is also the president’s brother) as the only person with the foresight to predict the LTTE could be defeated militarily.

An article in the internet newspaper *Asian Tribune*, by contrast, observed that through our report, Norway “finally admitted” that its peace efforts were a “political disaster, despite the carefully-calculated spin applied over the catalogue of significant failures.” The author acknowledged our point about unintended and unforeseen consequences of peace efforts, but underlined that “rubbishing the sentiments of the majority community as irrelevant, belongs

to neither” and closed with the argument that the report ought to have “apologized for using 20 million inhabitants of Sri Lanka as guinea pigs for the botched geo-political experiment.” (Asian Tribune, 12 November 2011).

A more astute, pro-Sri Lankan government response came from political scientist and journalist Dayan Jayatileka, who was the ambassador representing Sri Lanka in the UN Human Rights Council at the end of the war. He complimented the report as “useful and good”, but “empty at its very core”, because it failed to confront the question: “how does one make peace with a non-state (therefore unconstrained) actor that is fanatical, politico-ideologically fundamentalist and totalitarian?” In other words, we should have accepted that the insurgents were not amenable to a negotiated settlement. From a realist perspective, he argued, the LTTE’s track record of violence and recalcitrant positions made a “final war” the only feasible option. The Norwegian effort “was foredoomed” and “the war had to be fought to win”.

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, the criticism was quite different, but no less fierce. *Tamilnet* – an established Eelamist website, associated with what used to be the LTTE – underlined that our report “subconsciously sees ‘victory’ in the war”, while failing to acknowledge that international peace efforts had “abetted genocide”. In sum: “Norway washes its hand of its responsibilities to victims” (*Tamilnet*, 11 November 2011).

We discuss these reviews at some length because they illustrate the political arena into which the evaluation entered. The political work of the evaluation was not simply the drawing of lessons on the basis of scientific findings. Instead, the evaluation had to create as firm a methodological ground as possible to navigate divergent political pressures and withstand critical attacks from various quarters. We produced a text that explicated underlying assumptions, conceptual foundations, contradictory interpretations and their varied evidence bases and sought a reasonable middle ground between competing versions of the story, attempting to preserve nuances and tensions in a productive way. But this nuanced openness made the report more vulnerable to knowledge brokers from across the political landscape drawing out simplistic – and diametrically opposed – punch lines to serve their own agendas.

This section has highlighted the range of opinionated responses to our report. This provides insights into the polarised political landscape in which our efforts were set, but it may wrongly create the impression that the evaluation created an enormous reaction. That was not the case. Some media – including much of the Norwegian media – in fact had rather minimal coverage of the report. And the heated debate that did take place on some platforms died away within a matter of days or weeks. The launch of our report provided an occasion to contest and confirm established positions; it did not necessarily influence those positions. This sobering fact also became clear from the follow-up to our report in Oslo. Norad’s Evaluation

Department received written comments from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which repeated some of Solheim's main points, but also recognised that the report "largely reflects main challenges and, partly, constraints that Norway faced in Sri Lanka", including the difficulties of trying to combine different roles (facilitator, monitor and aid donor), and the importance for mediators to have a strategy towards media (Norad 2012). There was, however, no willingness to discuss whether the Norwegian decision to continue as mediator rather than pull out in 2006 might have been morally questionable, and most of the general lessons that we tried to draw from Norway's engagement in Sri Lanka were ignored in the official response to the evaluation.

6. Conclusions and broader implications

The methodological, analytical and political insights from this evaluation cannot simply be carried over to other contexts. Norwegian peace efforts in Sri Lanka involved a lot of 'high politics'. Our evaluation assessed the performance of relatively powerful and politically savvy actors, and there was a significant amount of media attention to both the Norwegian involvement and our evaluation. Given that this was the first comprehensive evaluation of Norwegian peace efforts and that a government minister (Erik Solheim) had played a major role, it meant that the stakes were high on the Norwegian side. That is not always the case for such evaluations. The experience of other evaluators, particularly in terms of the political reactions to the release, is likely to be somewhat different. And yet the argument of this chapter has purchase beyond Sri Lanka. Other high profile evaluations have clearly been subject to similar dynamics (cf Waage, 2008) and we believe lessons from our evaluation can be useful to others.

First, such evaluations are an ineluctably political exercise. Whilst there are strong pressures to present them as technical, scientific and dispassionate analyses, this is never an accurate representation of reality. As we have highlighted here, good evaluation is partly about improved methodology, but also (and perhaps more so) about the ability to navigate and engage with politics. To some extent this is the case with all forms of evaluation. However, evaluation in conflict-affected environments tends to bring out in much sharper relief the political stakes of the evaluated interventions. We can understand peace processes as charismatic moments in politics when the stakes are extremely high and the protagonists have a strong interest in selling particular narratives and versions of events and limiting what can and cannot be said and what is considered legitimate and illegitimate. Much in line with Ferguson's (1990) and Li's (2007) work on development, peace interventions and evaluations may be prone to 'rendering' technical. People's careers and even their lives may in fact depend upon which version of events prevails.

Some very practical and concrete implications for evaluators and those who commission evaluations flow from this analysis. For example, it is clear that evaluation teams should be composed primarily of individuals who have had a long engagement with the context(s) in question and who can navigate the politics and interpret and decode the information economy. This suggests that those funding conflict related evaluations should think very carefully about the balance between such context knowledge and general “technical” knowledge on conflict/peacebuilding or evaluation methods. There has been a trend in recent years for knowledge on conflict issues to be commoditized and universalized – with the growth of Conflict Advisors and Strategic Conflict Assessment experts who have general knowledge of the field outside of particular conflict settings [?]. We feel that there should be a stronger commitment to context-based expertise and robust political economy analysis.

Another implication of acknowledging the politics of evaluation is to recognise that evaluators do not simply look down objectively from the commanding heights and pass neutral judgments on the messy reality below them. They are part of the ‘mess’ they are evaluating, and this needs to be explicitly acknowledged to avoid doing harm, i.e. not making the ‘mess’ even worse for those who have to live with it on a daily basis. Therefore, just as there has been some significant work done in recent years on the ethical and methodological challenges of doing research in areas of conflict (Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Finnström 2001; Smith and Robinson 2001; Gould 2010), there is a need to develop ethical guidelines for evaluators operating in conflict settings, which set out clearly how they should endeavour to ‘do no harm’.

Second, the chapter has discussed the methodological challenges and our way of dealing with them in the evaluation of Norwegian peace efforts in Sri Lanka. Our approach involved ‘systematic eclecticism’, using mixed methods in a systematic way. We were transparent about underlying assumptions, causal inferences and associated methods, to enable readers to make their own judgments about the accuracy and validity of our findings and conclusions. Whilst conflict and peacebuilding can never be reduced to universal laws and dictums, comparative and quantitative research on peace processes can certainly add insight. Evaluators should aim for more systematic and innovative mixes of quantitative and qualitative methods. Our contribution to that end has been on the qualitative end of the spectrum with an exploration of a historical political economy approach combining an inside-out perspective with an outside-in perspective and using turning points, to deal with the perennial problems of uncertainty, attribution, conflicting accounts and the balance between structure and agency.

The overarching argument of this chapter has been that the political arena of peace evaluations and the methodological challenges they face are related. It is clearly important to improve the rigour and transparency of the methodologies used in evaluating peace efforts,

but these scholarly advances will never provide a water-tight, “neutral” scientific vantage point for evaluating deeply political interventions. In fact, evaluations that claim to have neutralised or circumvented the political content of the interventions they study may in fact be missing critical aspects of these interventions. Our chapter has sought to ask some uncomfortable questions about the links between the worlds of research and policy. The evaluator often sits in a twilight zone bridging these two worlds, acting as a broker and translator between them. In the development world, critical evaluation is presented as a learning tool, leading to smarter and more effective policies. Yet, it is also clear that evaluation, often the result of crises of legitimacy or political attacks on development policies or projects, has the effect of re-legitimizing the world of development (e.g. Ferguson 1990; Duffield 2007). In this context, commissioning evaluations shows openness to learning, without forcing significant structural changes. The findings of research projects are used selectively by policy makers to provide ammunition for existing policies or new policy departures that have already been decided. While there has been a remarkable professionalization of evaluative practice over recent years, there remains a significant rift between the elevated aspirations of scrutinizing and improving policy-practice and the political work that evaluations actually do.

Bibliography

Balasingham, A. (2004) *War and Peace: Armed Struggle and Peace Efforts of the Liberation Tigers*. Mitcham: Fairmax Publishing.

Bastian, S. (2007) *The Politics of Foreign Aid in Sri Lanka: Promoting and Supporting Peace*. Colombo: ICES.

Bullion, A. (1995) *India, Sri Lanka and the Tamil crisis, 1976-1994: An international perspective*. London/New York: Pinter.

Coomaraswamy, R. (2003) ‘The Politics of Institutional Design: An Overview of the Case of Sri Lanka,’ in S. Bastian, and R. Luckham (eds.) *Can democracy be designed? The politics of institutional choice in conflict-torn societies*: pp. 145-169. London: Zed Books.

Cramer, C & Goodhand, J (2011) ‘Hard science or waffly crap? Evidence-based policy versus policy-based evidence in the field of violent conflict’ in Baylss, K, Fine, B & Waeyenberge, E (2011) *The Political Economy of Development. The World Bank, Neo-Liberalism and Development Research* Pluto Press, London, UK, pp. 215 – 238.

De Silva, K. (2005) *A History of Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications.

- Dixon, J. (2009) 'Emerging consensus: Results from the second wave of statistical studies on civil war termination', *Civil Wars*, 11(2): 121-136.
- Doyle, M. and N. Sambanis (2006) *Making War and Building Peace*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Duffield, M. (2007) *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.
- Ferguson, J. (1990) *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Finnström, S. (2001) 'In and out of culture: Fieldwork in war-torn Uganda', *Critique of Anthropology*, 21(3): 247-258.
- Fortna, P. (2004) 'Does Peacekeeping Keep Peace? International Intervention and the Duration of Peace After Civil War', *International Studies Quarterly*, 48 (2): 269-292.
- George, A. and McKeown, T. (1985) 'Case Studies and Theories of Organizational Decision Making', *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations*, 2: 21-58.
- Goodhand, J. and B. Klem, with D. Fonseka, S.I. Keethaponcalan, D. and S. Sardesai (2005) *Conflict, Aid and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka, 2000 – 2005*. Washington DC: the Asia Foundation.
- Goodhand, J., B. Klem and G. Sørbo (2011a) Pawns of Peace: Evaluation of Norwegian Peace Efforts in Sri Lanka, 1997-2009. Norad evaluation 5/2011.
- Goodhand, J., D. Rampton, R. Venugopal and N. de Mel (2011b) *Strategic Policy Assessment*. Study commissioned by DFID.
- Goodhand, J. and O. Walton (2009) 'The limits of liberal peacebuilding: international engagement in the Sri Lankan peace process,' *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 3 (3): 303-323.
- Gould, K. (2010) 'Anxiety, epistemology, and policy research 'behind enemy lines'', *Geoforum*, 41: 15-18.

- Human Security Centre (2005) *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia.
- Human Security Project Report (2010) *Human Security report 2009/2010: The Causes of Peace and the Shrinking Costs of War*. Vancouver: Simon Fraser University.
- Klem, B. (2012) *In the Wake of War: The Political Geography of Transition in Eastern Sri Lanka*. PhD Dissertation at the University of Zurich, Switzerland.
- Li, T. (2007) *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Licklider, R. (2009) 'Civil War Outcomes,' *Saltzman Working Paper*, No. 11, November 2009 <<http://www.siwps.com/programs/SWP.attachment/no-11--/No%2011%20-%20Licklider.pdf>> Accessed 10 January, 2011.
- Loganathan, K. (1996) *Sri Lanka, Lost Opportunities: Past Attempts at Resolving Ethnic Conflict*. Colombo: University of Colombo.
- Martin, H. (2006) *Kings of Peace, Pawns of War: The untold story of peace-making*. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Continuum, London.
- Moore, M. (1985) *The state and peasant politics in Sri Lanka*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Norad (2012) 'Evaluering av norsk fredsinnsetts på Sri Lanka, 1997-2009'. Oslo: Norad.
- Nordstrom, C. and A. Robben (1995) (eds) *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- OECD/DAC (2012) 'Guidance on evaluating peacebuilding activities in settings of conflict and fragility – Improving learning for results' DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, DCD/DAC(2012)40/FINAL.
- Orjuela, C. (2011) 'Buying Peace? Politics of Reconstruction and the Peace Dividend Argument,' in K. Stokke and J. Uyangoda (eds.): *Liberal Peace in Question: Politics of State and Market Reform in Sri Lanka*; pp. 121-140. London: Anthem Press.

- Rainford, C. and A. Satkunanathan (2011) 'From SIHRN to Post-War North and East: The Limits of the "Peace through Development" Paradigm in Sri Lanka', in K. Stokke and J. Uyangoda (eds.) *Liberal Peace in Question – politics of state and market reform in Sri Lanka*. pp. 121-141. London: Anthem Press.
- Regan, P (2002) 'Third Party Interventions and the Duration of Intra-State Conflicts', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 46(1): 55-73
- Richards, P. (2011) 'A systematic approach to cultural explanations of war: Tracing causal processes in two West African insurgencies', *World Development*, 39(2): 212-220.
- Sarkees, M. (2000) 'The correlates of war data on war: An update to 1997', *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 18(1): 123-144.
- Sarvananthan, M. (2007) 'In Pursuit of a Mythical State of Tamil Eelam: A Rejoinder to Kristian Stokke,' *Third World Quarterly*, 28(6): 1185-1195.
- Smith, M. and G. Robinson (2001) (eds) *Researching Violently Divided Societies: Ethical and Methodological Issues*. London: Pluto.
- Spencer, J. (2008) 'A Nationalism without Politics? The Illiberal Consequences of Liberal Institutions in Sri Lanka,' *Third World Quarterly*, 29(3): 611-629.
- Stedman, S. (1997) 'Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes,' *International Security*, 22(2): 5-53.
- Stern, P. and D. Druckman (2000) 'Evaluating Interventions in History: The Case of International Conflict Resolution', *International Studies Review*, 2(1): 33-63.
- Stokke, K. (2006) 'Building the Tamil Eelam State: Emerging State Institutions and Forms of Governance in LTTE-Controlled Areas in Sri Lanka,' *Third World Quarterly*, 27(6): 1021-1040.
- Swamy, N. (1995) *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa.
- Swamy, N. (2006) *Inside an Elusive Mind*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa.
- Uyangoda, J. (2011) 'Travails of State reform in the Context of Protracted Civil War in Sri Lanka,' in K. Stokke and J. Uyangoda (eds.) *Liberal Peace in Question: Politics of State and Market Reform in Sri Lanka*. pp. 46-75. London: Anthem Press.

Venugopal, R. (2009) *Cosmopolitan Capitalism and Sectarian Socialism: Conflict, Development, and the Liberal Peace in Sri Lanka*. PhD dissertation, Oxford University, Oxford.

Waage, H. H (2008) 'Postscript to Oslo: the Mystery of Norway's Missing Files' *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Autumn 2008), pp. 54-65

Zartman, W. (2000) 'Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond,' in P. Stern and D. Druckman (eds.) *International Conflict Resolution after the Cold War*. pp. 225-250. Washington DC: National Academy Press.

Zartman, W. (2009) 'Interest, Leverage and Public Opinion in Mediation,' *International Negotiation* 14: 1-5.



Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:

Goodhand, J; Klem, B; Sørnbø, GM

Title:

Battlefields of method: Evaluating Norwegian peace efforts in Sri Lanka

Date:

2014-01-01

Citation:

Goodhand, J., Klem, B. & Sørnbø, G. M. (2014). Battlefields of method: Evaluating Norwegian peace efforts in Sri Lanka. Andersen, OW (Ed.). Bull, B (Ed.). Kennedy-Chouane, M (Ed.). Evaluation Methodologies for Aid in Conflict, (1), pp.61-84. Routledge.

Persistent Link:

<http://hdl.handle.net/11343/128244>

File Description:

Accepted version