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Watch Out for Peace: The Polemic Nature of a Horizon Desired

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a critical perspective to look at one of the most basic concepts in life: peace. By reflecting on a wide range of literature on peace, the aim is to make sense of the way in which the longing for peace is part of the violence it hopes to overcome. Understanding peace requires understanding its polemic functions in world politics (both internationally and domestically). Due to its symbiotic relationship with its counterpart (all forms of violence and their accompanying norms) peace is polemic. This implies that peace is experienced only when the echo of violence is absent, and the polemics are absent. In such absence, however, peace loses its meaning. In this context, the article reflects on various notions of peace and the inescapable logic of war norms they entail. This is illustrated by reflections on post-Cold War European, American and UN war & peace practices.

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Everyone wants peace, and that's when the fighting starts.

Introduction

Peace is understudied. This is a returning observation. In the presidential addresses of respectively the American Peace Science Society and the International Studies Association, both Patrick Regan (2014) and Paul Diehl (2016) argued that peace should be studied in its own right, not in its negative connection to war. In my view that is a mission impossible. “Positive peace” concepts, “gendered peace”, studies of “peace systems” and the wide literature of peace making & peacebuilding cannot escape the automatic connotations of “absence of war”, “absence of violence”. This makes violence (including awareness of its absence) part of peace. In terms of contents, moreover, peace concepts emphasise qualities that can and are already studied in their own right, such as human rights, human security, justice, emancipation, development, democracy, conflict

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management, compassion, friendship and more. Peace Research and Peace & Conflict Studies merely emphasise the normative concerns present in all these approaches.

I take a different approach. This article is based on three observations. The first observation is rather trivial, but generally lacking reference to discursive functions of peace. The second observation interprets this, which, in sequence with the first, leads to a third observation. This Introduction presents the basic logic of the three observations, which then is elaborated in the subsequent sections.

Observation 1—peace is polemic

Peace presupposes war and war presupposes peace. Both are concepts of temporality and spatiality, not able to exist without each other. War always carries a forecast of peace—even if the next war presents itself immediately (like in George Orwell's *1984* (1948) or in Realist readings of great power politics). Those who start a war generally aim to achieve a better situation afterwards—peace for themselves, their group or for the world. Also those who desire to fight (in search of honour, fame, sensation, desperation, material gain) need some peace to prepare, harvest and celebrate. There is no need for an explicit desire for peace. It is embedded in the alternation between fight and rest. Peace, as a word or as a symbol, always remembers violence.

Observation 2—peace is a horizon

In this treatise I posit that the nature of peace (its ontology) is akin to the nature of a horizon: you can travel towards it without ever getting there, but it allows you to judge life normatively and navigate accordingly. To be clear: peace is not a point on the horizon, but the horizon itself. In this image, war represents another horizon. An image we are more familiar with thanks to Book 1, Chapter 1 of Carl von Clausewitz' magnum opus *On War* (1873). Here he treats war in the abstract, detached from the societies in which it rages, detached from politics—a cognitive experiment. The interdependence of enemies creates a dynamic of mutual assured destruction (which during the Cold War was cynically perceived as a guarantee for peace). This abstract logic of war cannot exist, according to Von Clausewitz, because in practice (time and space) it is part of politics. Here it meets the logic of peace.

War and peace represent two different sets of norms. These are absolute on the horizon: eternal annihilation, eternal peace. We know that annihilation cannot be eternal (save in imaginations of hell), since it requires life (bodies or cells to mutilate, torture or destruct). It ends with and in death. Eternal peace on earth would require life as well. Given the temporal nature of life, peace cannot be eternal (save in imaginations of heaven). Both imaginations can merge as in a vanishing point, but in the here and now, they are polemic, both are political. Politics, I will argue, is based on the logic of peace and war with feared and desired horizons guiding it.

Observation 3—peace exists out of sight

As a consequence, temporal/spatial peace may exist as a condition, but only when it goes unnoticed, outside of politics. Peace as a manifestation exists in being beyond its

horizon, which is only possible by imagination. Imagination can cross horizons easily, unhindered by space and time. We can create heavens and hells or transcendental notions of enlightenment, and imagine what life would be like in these imaginary realms. But in trying to get there in real time, peace is part of polemics legitimating violence, including self-sacrifice, suffering, repression and destruction. Peace as an ideal is caught in time and space and is always related to the unpeaceful grounds we stand on now. It is these unpeaceful grounds that call the horizon into being; peace as a means to escape. In the absence of unpeaceful grounds peace can exist, but unnoticeably.

By analogy: While reading this, most readers will not be aware of the ease with which they are breathing. But as soon as the attention is drawn to this, connotations of both (presence of) health and (absence of) sickness appear. Readers with structural or temporal long diseases are much more aware that breathing is a precious blessing, with an existential dimension. For others breathing is so normal that it goes unnoticed. Similarly, peaceful norms and conditions go unnoticed and are fairly banal. But as soon as the term peace is used to describe them, it is upset: negative reference points automatically enter into the picture. The observation disturbs the practice. Talking about it causes concern or even alarm: how to preserve this; what is threatening it? I am not arguing that this is bad. I am arguing that this is what the word peace does.

Navigating peace

War and peace: the symbiotic core of politics

Those who undergo war, put hope from the expectation of peace. Eventually the violence will end. It can last for generations, such as the civil war in Mozambique (from roughly 1976 to 1992, and re-emerging in some parts of the vast country in the 2020s) or as the partly mythical Eighty Years' War between Spain and the Dutch United Provinces (1568–1648). For many, hope gets lost in time, but the expectation of peace is part of war. The fighting will stop. Sooner or later. The more intense the war, the shorter. The war resources wear out. Peace remains. For those who survive.

The American Strategic Studies specialist Edward N. Luttwak (b.1942) notes that particularly civil wars can last so long because they use relatively few resources. While in the north of Sri Lanka the civil war raged from 1983-2009, tourists were sunbathing on the beaches in the south. The same happened in Uganda, where only the north suffered directly from the civil war against Josef Kony's Lord's Resistance Army from 1987 until about 2006. According to Luttwak (2001, 57), war is always temporary: "By consuming and destroying the material and moral resources needed to keep fighting, war prevents its own continuation". In contrast, he sees peace as a "negative abstraction that cannot contain any self-destructive phenomenon" (Luttwak 2001, 67). Peace has "no substance of its own [and] cannot disturb anything", he says, but can lead to war by drifting away from the equilibrium of the forces out of which it came into being (Luttwak 2001, 67).

This logic of temporary balances of power dictates that in each peace you must be arming yourself against uneven progress: *si vis pacem, para bellum* (if you want peace, prepare for war) according to the old Latin adage. But if the expectation of a fight is a

constant, so is the exception of peace—in practice both are temporarily alternating in dominance, without ever being absent. For the living, both horizons are always there.

In Luttwak's view peace is empty, as if a horizon gives no direction. The so-called "negative peace" definitions seem to support him: they are empty by their semantic nature (peace is the "absence of" whatever type of violence). That vision, however, is too limited because peace and war have different normative structures. These different norm-sets imply choice, and hence politics. Although Luttwak, surprisingly, doesn't know what peace is, he rightly observes that war and peace are contiguous and co-constitutive—albeit not in a symmetrical way.

This co-constitutive nature is implied in Von Clausewitz's dictum that war is the continuation of politics with the use of other means'. A dictum that has informed all contemporary Eurocentrically trained strategic thinkers. It is tempting but too easy to conclude from this dictum that peace is achieved when these "other means" are not or no longer used. The "negative peace" definitions imply this simplicity: peace is the absence of war or, in a wider sense, the absence of (organised) violence.

There is a wide criticism of this, perhaps most strongly formulated by philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), who was one of the first to challenge the Western distinction between the internal and external dimensions of politics (Owens 2007, 26–31). Organised violence and manifestations like warfare are not limited to the realm of international politics, but at the heart of all politics. It feeds into a reversal of the Clausewitzian dictum, Owens (b.1975) notices: "politics as the continuation of war with the use of other means". Phrased in her poststructuralist terms: "political power operates through a continuum of violence rather than through a war/peace or war/politics dichotomy" (Owens 2007, 28).

Arendt (1970, 9) herself goes a step further: "peace is the continuation of war by other means". Support for this view comes from understanding the nature of the institutions that dominate world politics. The sociologist Charles Tilly (1929–2008) famously compared state formation processes in European history with the logic of organised crime (Tilly 1990, 1994). Tilly, in good Marxist tradition, focused on monopolising coercion and capital, accumulated in territorial settings, as the main drivers of state formation. He missed out on a third crucial driver: monopolising identity—convincingly put forward by Benedict Anderson (1936–2015) in *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 1991). Collective norm sets based on identity myths are crucial in organising coercion and capital.

In a similar vein Achille Mbembe (b.1957) proposes the term necropolitics to capture that "control over mortality" is the essence of sovereignty (Mbembe 2003). Violence is a dominant force in politics, which easily shatters the illusion of peaceful politics. We are either waiting till war returns (Von Clausewitz, Luttwak, and Strategic Studies more generally) or we observe that it actually never stops (Arendt, Mbembe, and Poststructuralists more generally). Both readings are correct in pointing out that politics is the essence of understanding peace. Both readings, however, ignore or downplay the logic of peace, in particular the polemic power of the norms it represents.

The emphasis is on the control over mortality, but by default this implies control over life as well. The dark definitions of politics are correct in emphasising the continuity of war norms in peace times, but play down the power of peace norms. Politics is navigating between both sets of norms, and influences who is profiting or suffering from their

temporary asymmetrical balances. Obviously, the balance in weak states (where authority is contested) is different than the balance in strong states—which is close to but not the same as comparing autocracies and democracies. Weak states need to rely on the use of violence more strongly, but the logic of violence is not absent in strong states.

Striking the balance between war and peace norms is an art, and to make peace norms dominant a fine art. Consider how Quincy Wright (1890–1970) approaches politics:

Politics is usually conceded to be an art, but is it the art of operating the *state*, the *government*, or the *party*; of organising group *power*, group *will*, or group *unity*; of achieving group ends against the *opposition* of other groups; or simply of making group *decisions*? (Wright 1955, 33)

In spite of Wright's reluctance to accept this, it is all of this, and more: collective interests, social identities, moral positions and the instruments to serve them are constructed by political processes.¹ They may result in what David Easton (1917–2014) has famously called the “authoritative allocation of values for a society” (Easton 1965, 50); temporary and spatial “outcomes” of politics.

Liberal thinkers like Wright and Easton may obscure the insights of critical thinkers like Ahrendt and Mbembe, and vice versa. Taken together, politics involves the constant navigation between norms of violence and norms of peace, guided by unreachable horizons of eternal annihilation and eternal peace. They always coexist in a polemic way, legitimising and questioning temporal and spatial equilibriums between them. In this context, the discussion about “hybrid” peace and “hybrid” war should be seen as an awakening of liberal scholars to this notion of politics: in practice, violence and peace are a continuum based on dichotomous norms.

The simple logic that peace and war are alternating is also found in the assumption, made by IR-scholars in the both Realist and Liberal traditions, that hierarchies (domestic orders) are more peaceful than anarchies (international orders). They differ on the subsequent discussion on “positive peace” (acceptance and appreciation of the hierarchy by both rulers and subjects), but not on the axiomatic assumption that hierarchies, assuring negative peace, are a prerequisite for achieving positive peace. This logic is trapped in a what poststructuralists have called a heroic practice (Ashley 1988). It is suggested that before we can have positive peace, we need to cherish a negative peace, guaranteed by the sword. The co-constitutive nature of war and peace, however, implies that both sets of norms are always part of politics. Politics, whether domestic or international, is continuously caught in a logic of both peace and war. What alternates is the way in which one dominates the other, as well as the question who profits from their polemic interaction (in general the ruling elites).

From horizon to compass

How to push the balance in favour of peace norms? Can the horizon be operationalised? One of the founders of Peace History Studies, Charles Chatfield (1934–2015), elaborates a basic Western operationalisation of peace by distinguishing *pax*, *eirené* and *shalom*: peace

¹In this line I agree with Christian Reus-Smit (b.1961), who takes issue with colleagues like Andrew Moravcsik (b.1957), who argue that “Socially differentiated individuals define their material and ideational interests independently of politics ...” (Moravcsik 1997, 517; as quoted by Reus-Smit 2012, 535).

as order, peace as social justice, and peace as state of mind (Chatfield 1986, 11). The immediate question is, of course, whose order, which justice, what state of mind? In settling this, these three forms of peace move away from their conceptual horizon into concrete battles—politics.

There is a wide literature that links peace to settling disputes—which I prefer to call conflict transformation and conflict management rather than peace making or peace enforcement. There is also a large body of literature that links peace to social justice—which I prefer to call development, empowerment and emancipation, rather than peace-building. Both types of literature are about change, preferably peaceful (unnoticed?) change, and preferably by so-called non-violent means. Additionally, there is a lot of literature on “peace systems”: blueprints of idealised democratic social structures, observing human rights in all respects. The essence of arriving at such systems I prefer to call democratisation; the result is called security, rather than peace.

Most of the literature on conflict management, empowerment, emancipation and democratisation is Western, even if it embraces post-colonial insights (paradoxically, mainly developed within Western academia). Here, the word “peace” points at the horizon, which explains why we don’t experience tautologies in phrases like “peace and security”, “peace and conflict studies” or “democratic peace theory”. Rather than operationalising peace, the horizon is linked to navigation strategies: we need “security” to get there, we need “conflict management” to get there, we need “democracy” to get there.

Still, more can be said about peace itself. Thanks to the American peace researcher Kenneth Boulding (1910–1993) we learned to distinguish between stable and unstable peace (Boulding 1978). In both cases war (as active fighting) is absent, but in unstable peace fights are expected to break out sooner or later. There is a preparation for war, and there are crises or enemy images that call for and legitimise these preparations. In stable peace, the expectation of war and the preparation for it are no longer there. Also, crises and enemy images no longer invite armed struggles or the preparation for it. Crises occur constantly, because power-political struggles and politicised inequalities continue to exist among people. However, the battles have been demilitarised. Peace as demilitarised politics. Here, peace still has no contents, but it reaches observable qualities in terms of the instruments used or not used in politics. Empirically, in the here and now, we observe the absence of hostilities, the lack of preparations for them, and the absence of war expectations.² But *being* in that situation should not be confused with trying to get there.

Calibrating the compass

The attempts at formulating more substantive definitions of peace do not escape its antagonistic character. Since the Hague Peace Conferences of 1898 and 1907, and the historically neglected International Congress of Women in 1915 (Tickner and True 2018), peace research has focused strongly on the question of whether peace can be defined in a positive sense. Paul Diehl (2016, 2), who argues that peace should and can be defined without reference to violence, points at a recent attempt by the Advanced Consortium

²In line with this, there is a wide literature on the concept of “security community”, first developed by Deutsch et al. (1957), updated by Adler and Barnett (1998) and linked to the “democratic peace” debate by, i.e., Williams (2001).

on Cooperation, Conflict and Complexity (AC4) to define peace in terms of sustainability:

... “sustainable peace” identified five thematic categories of key elements beyond the one dealing with violence: (i) wellbeing; (ii) quality of relations, cooperation, and interdependence; (iii) conflict management and resolution; (iv) access to resources, equality, and human security; and (v) institutional capacity and governance.

But we know these categories already from the sustainability discourse. What is gained by adding the word peace?

In such attempts, positive is not meant as the opposite of negative but as being more than negative. “As such”, social anthropologist Donald Tuzin (1945–2007) argues, “peace is quite different from its semantic opposite, war, which is all too real” (Tuzin 1996, 9). He compares it with co-constituted terms like health and disease; and, referring to Karl Popper, truth and falsity. Disease is easier to define than health, he claims, and “truth is approached only through the elimination of error—*approached*, but never definitely attained, for we can never be sure that the next test will not falsify our present wisdom” (Tuzin 1996, 9). The parallels make sense in showing that health, truth and peace are different types of horizon than disease, error and war. Discussing their manifestations in positive terms is much harder than discussing their opposites. Still, there is a crucial difference. Disease & health, falsity & truth can be and are politicised and securitised, but don’t have to, whereas war & peace *are* political.

In 1964, Johan Galtung (b.1930), in the first issue of the *Journal of Peace Research*, briefly defined positive peace as “the integration of human society” (Galtung 1964), which he tried to operationalise during the rest of his impressive career.³ A search for non-violent conflict management and for peace systems. Anthropologist Leslie Sponsel (1996, 96) defines positive peace in line with Kenneth Boulding’s approach:

Following the positive concept, peace may be defined ideally as the dynamic *processes* that lead to the relative *conditions* of the absence of direct and indirect violence, plus the *presence* of freedom, equality, economic and social justice, cooperation, and harmony. (Boulding 1978, 3)

Other attempts at defining peace are variants on the same theme.⁴ All of them evade the benchmark question: how to define these positive qualities? Justice, freedom and equality are articulated differently in time and place. Who or what decides if positive peace exists? Politics decides.

In the end, the “positive peace”-literature mainly focuses on non-violence and compassion in social behaviour. Still, this is often done in a tautological way. Sponsel (1996), e.g. uses the phrase “nonviolence and peace”, “nonviolent and peaceful behaviour”. The website of AC4 focuses likewise on “peace and security” (for women and youth) and “peace and sustainability” (for complexity and environment), which leaves peace itself undefined—but still a horizon. In the analysis it boils down to tracing non-violence, and “attacking” (with non-violent means of course) those who disagree. Unwillingly, Verbeek and Peters (2018a, 2018b, 4) provide an example of another type of

³Later in his career he developed this into the TRANSCEND method, aiming at conflict transformation by peaceful means. See: <https://www.transcend.org/galtung/>.

⁴See Verbeek and Peters (2018a, 2018b) for a comprehensive treatment.

frequently occurring tautology: peace is defined by itself. Building on others, they define peace systems as: “institutions or arrangements that pattern their members’ interactions toward peace. ... Peace systems, thus defined, are patterns of social behaviour that promote or sustain peace”.

Peace polemics at the local level

An unaddressed puzzle so far is how peace at one level relates to violence at another level. Can large parts of Europe be called at peace, while domestic and criminal violence is structural and omnipresent? In a briefing to the European Parliament, Rosamund Shreeves and Martina Prpic (2020) report that “there are approximately 3,500 domestic violence-related deaths in the EU every year”. In line with the 2011 Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention), femicide has to be reported by its member states.⁵ In 2022 this was done by researchers of the Dutch Institute on Gender Equality and Women’s History ATRIA. They concluded that in the Netherlands (with a population of 17.8 million inhabitants) every year 44 women are killed because of domestic violence—that is one every eight days. Small Arms Survey (2012, 1) reported in 2012 that “[a]bout 66,000 women and girls are violently killed every year, accounting for approximately 17 per cent of all victims of intentional homicides”. So much for peace.

Especially in gender studies on peace the linkage of levels is addressed (Björkdahl and Selimovic 2016). If wartime sexual violence is internationally recognised and condemned as a war crime, negative peace (let alone positive peace) can never be achieved if rape persists as a structural practice in the private sphere. The same goes for the neglect of criminal violence. If homicide figures would be treated in the same way as terrorist attacks and war-related deaths, we would get a more comprehensive picture of the role of violence in world society.

Peace & war norms are coexisting in all societies, and need to be addressed in their polemic qualities. Möller & Shim’s notion of “everyday peace” is helpful here: “By everyday peace, we mean the continuation of mundane everyday actions on the quotidian level in spaces dominated by physical violence” (Möller and Shim 2018, 248). In the everyday, also in conditions of long-lasting civil wars or structural inner city-wars, “victims are never *only* victims; violence is never *only* violence” (Möller and Shim 2018, 254, emphasis in the original). Both violence and peace call the everyday into being, forming the “normal” order. In contrast to the violence however, everyday peace travels largely unnoticed. John Paul Lederach (b.1955) correctly observes that in deep-seated conflicts “violence is known; peace is the mystery” (Lederach 2005, 39). At the same time, the violence within societies is only taken up as a national security issue when it is perceived to threaten the overall “law and order” structures or leading public figures.

The best practice of unnoticed, everyday peace is recorded by sociologist Norbert Elias (1897–1990). In *The Civilising Process* (2000 [1939]) he notes that urbanisation was only possible by what peace researchers would call “dissociative peace”: mutual neglect. In cities and in masses, people show great trust in spite of the violence they may inflict on each other. By ignoring each other they can share the same space. From a rationalised

⁵See: www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention.

point of view, one can argue the mutual self-interest of this practice, but it is not the outcome of a deliberate peace policy. Nor do people use the word peace to explain or motivate their behaviour. It is a functional necessity and apparently fairly successful in spite of street violence still occurring. This is quite a break from peace in smaller (rural) communities, where everyone needs to know everyone else in order to limit threat perceptions and perceived needs to be armed. That perceived need still exists in urbanised populations, where dissociation doesn't work: most violence within mass societies occurs between people who have close relationships and know each other well. Hence, positive peace as the "integration of human society" largely rests on unnoticed dissociative peace.

Dissonance or dissidence?

More long-standing attempts at giving substance to the idea of the "integration of human society" have been most successful in religious discourses—as far as in-group dynamics are concerned. In blessings such as "Go in peace" or greetings such as "Shalom" and "Salam" the connotation of violence is far away; the intention is mainly to be spared disaster and other devilish things. In the Christian tradition, this goes back to the Algerian church-father Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and to the Italian Dominican friar Thomas Aquinas (125–1274), both working on Just War Theory. Both defined peace as a state of tranquillity, *tranquillitas ordinis*, attainable by people taking their proper place in the universal order created by God. Secular or other religious variants are many.⁶

Verbeek and Peters (2018a, 2018b, 3), e.g. opt for a process-based concept of peace, which

transcends peace as a response to direct or structural violence (direct peace and structural peace) to include peace concerned with the preservation of harmony in relations, for example through the pursuit, establishment, or deepening of mutual or reciprocal interests, tolerance, helping and sharing, and the active avoidance of aggressive confrontations.

In line with Gregor (1996) they call this *sociative peace*. Also Michael Fox (2014, Ch.5) emphasises the role of compassion in serving people's deep psychological "will to peace". This is the basis for building a "culture of peace" achieving a "universal peace-consciousness" (Fox 2014, Ch.6-7).

The same approach of "peace as a process" is present in literature on conflict transformation (see, e.g. Lederach 1995, 2005; Craig 2019). The main purpose of conflict transformation is to overcome deep-rooted origins of conflict, mainly by achieving a mutual understanding of fundamental difference, leading to acceptance of its insolvability by argument, and then at least "an agreement to disagree". To bring about "peaceful" change may take generations (intangible issues are hard to solve). In Lederach's approach, in line with that of many others, the root of (unsolvable) conflict is treated as cultural differences. He is fairly quiet on what he means by peace, but quite articulate about conflict transformation, which boils down to establishing the logic of harmony as the boundary condition for conflicts.

⁶See Nader (1991) on Harmony Ideology; a practice of keeping social unity, common in large parts of the world pre-dating colonization.

However, both striving for tranquillity and “peace as a process” implies an unrest that must be overcome. At what price? And when is the process completed? Peace as order or harmony embraces conflict defined as dissonance (in music: discords), which makes it dynamic. But harmony in music opposes false notes, playing out of key. It is an order of truth and falsity, fairly inflexible to change. The players of the false notes need to be attuned, i.e. educated, disciplined, imprisoned or even killed. Crusades are part of the Christian quest for peace. Islam likewise has its holy wars. More inward-looking religions are about fights against (individual) shortcomings that need to be overcome; false notes that need to be attuned. Moreover, harmony includes inequalities, i.e. structural violence. The root of a chord defines the intervals. Moreover, religious discourses have been quite successful in moving the horizon of peace to afterlife—placing the rewards for self-sacrifice, suffering, compliance to abuse, self-denial, etcetera outside of politics on earth. The promise of eternal peace as reward for earthly sacrifice. Peace is political. Peace is polemical. Watch out for peace.

Verbeek and Peters tellingly quote Deutsch and Coleman (2012) who maintain that “Peace is never achieved, but rather is a process that is fostered by a variety of cognitive, affective, behavioural, structural, institutional, spiritual, and cultural components”. Even the pacifist mantra “There is no way to peace, peace is the way” is raised with the purpose to convince people that non-violence is possible and potentially successful in sailing towards the horizon of peace. Non-violence hopes to upset the harmonic system by enforcing modulations. It is conflict management attempting to achieve emancipation. In most cases, we can be sympathetic to that objective, but here too, peace is political and polemical.

Waging peace: the reversal of coexisting norms

Practicing peace is harder than waging war. This is contested by authors who claim that processes and systems of peace are just as omnipresent, but simply less studied. Verbeek and Peters (2018a, 2018b), in line with Gregor (1996), make a compelling case, but their impressive volumes are about demilitarising politics rather than about peace. If war is the continuation of politics with the use of other (violent) means, conflict management without these other (violent) means is demilitarised politics. To equate this with peace is to forget that politics is inherently violent (Arendt 1970; Mbembe 2003). “Politics without violent means” is omnipresent in all human societies throughout known history, but I would not call it peace, because war norms remain present.

Verbeek and Peters (2018a, 2018b, 3) define peace as

Behavioural processes and systems through which species, individuals, families, groups, and communities negate direct and structural violence (direct peace; structural peace), keep aggression in check or restore tolerance in its aftermath (sociative peace), maintain just institutions and equity (structural peace), and engage in reciprocally beneficial and harmonious interactions (sociative peace).

If this is peace, how would they define politics? Moreover, this definition is about overcoming direct violence and trying to marginalise structural violence. That is not a peace system, but at best an anti-war system, still containing violence. As long as it is necessary to overcome and rule violence, peace is an horizon, not a practice. When it is no longer necessary, not only war, but also the logic of peace has disappeared.

War is a social practice well institutionalised in world society. The military, secret services and police, supported by ministries, law and tax money, are constantly on the alert to commit or answer violence when their political leaders deem it justified or otherwise necessary. Challengers of governmental power (revolutionaries) and challengers of legal societal order (organised crime) easily find arms to underline their arguments with violence too, if they so desire. Clausewitzian logic applies to all forms of politics. In situations of stable peace, war norms may no longer apply to former enemies (like the classic example of France and Germany after the Second World War), but we call it “stable peace” because echo of war is still heard. Moreover, in all types of domestic politics the authorities are always willing and able to use violence where disruptions of their normal order occur. Short of civil war, this is generally caught in a discourse on law & order; avoiding the words war and peace.

There is no such infrastructure for practicing peace. Non-violent emancipatory movements, free press, and political parties come closest, but as soon as they cross the lines of what a ruling elite finds acceptable, emergency measures will move the situation away from stable peace and societal harmony. At best, willing compliance or passive (enforced, disciplined) acceptance of societal structures by the majority of the people can be labelled a peace practice in terms of the *tranquillitas ordinis*. This comes very close to what various scholars have phrased as “peace systems”. However sophisticated these attempts at structuring peace are, they suffer from two fundamental problems.

First, societal inequalities are inherent to all political structures, and so are tensions about them. This implies structural violence, backed up by means to preserve monopolies of manifest violence. It also implies emancipatory protesting forces against this (often in silence if speaking out is suicidal). Elites, in whatever peace system, will always show and set limits to what they consider acceptable. Liberal political orders embedded in human rights and democracy discourses may have longer escalation ladders, but they are finite. In line with Carl Schmitt’s (1888–1985) understanding of sovereignty, Giorgio Agamben (b.1942) used the international and domestic repressive responses of the US-Administration after nine-eleven to analyse the “state of exception” as a practice of how easily democracies can slip into autocratic, unrestrained violent practices (Schmitt 1934; Agamben 2005). This is moving beyond the classic “paradox of tolerance” (as elaborated by Karl Popper [1945] 2012): limitless tolerance would not just pave the way for those are intolerant, but protecting tolerance requires intolerance, making the Self intolerant. Due to the structural tensions between hierarchy and change, peace stays on the horizon. Luttwak’s (2001, 67) observation about the temporality of equilibriums of forces applies domestically just as much as internationally.

Second, waging peace cannot be a unilateral action; whereas waging war can be. You cannot shake hands on your own, in contrast to using a fist. In its contrast to war, peace is about faith in mutually applied virtues like trust, honesty, loyalty, understanding, and willing compliance. But they have to be mutual in order to work. In contrast to peace, warfare can make use of fear.⁷ In *The Prince* (1532) Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) advises that the strongest position for rulers is to be feared. When her power depends

⁷Note that Gregor (1996, xvi) on the basis of chapters on “Community-Level Cases Studies of Peace” observes that also in so-called peaceful societies non-violence and conflict avoidance are partly based on fear. The same analyses show that these societies turn out not to be one-sidedly peaceful at all. Especially homicide rates appear to be high. The analyses, moreover, are silent about what we now call “domestic violence”.

on love and compassion, the Prince can't be sure it will be sustained over time. When it depends on hatred, she can't turn her back to her subordinates. But when it is based on fear, subordinates always have to be cautious; never knowing if their behaviour will be rewarded or punished. Better stay low. Obviously, the advice is cartoonish; well-exploited in popular political drama, like the American fantasy series *Game of Thrones*.

But also note the limits of unilateral action. Ruling elites are groups rather than individuals, which makes the reliance on fear much more complex than Machiavelli's individualised image. Every in-group needs cohesion beyond fear only. Peace norms play a role, even in warfare and repression.⁸ However, the unilateral advantage of those who are willing to (threaten to) start a fight is clear over those who principally refuse to do so. The closest pacifists can come to unilateral persuasion, beyond superiority of argument, is by mobilising masses, mobilising massive non-participation or other strategies for non-violent protest (feared by the rulers), and by endlessly and patiently repeating the moral superiority of their arguments, pressing for emancipation.

One could argue that the United Nations do their best to create peace-making capacities, but time and again this requires the mobilisation of superior military force. (More on this below) Trying to make peace is not a peace practice but a policy aiming to result in such a practice. Although the term peace is used, "conflict management" is a better term. A wide literature on peace boils down to being literature on conflict management. The purpose is peace, the method isn't.

In principle, concluding peace is a moment: a kiss, a handshake, a seal, a treaty.⁹ By concluding peace, the warring sides move into a different normative equilibrium. It is more than a ceasefire. The moment of peace aims at a reversal of a normative relationship between two or more parties. Parties go overboard from the dominance of one set of norms towards another set of norms. In wartime, the logic of virtue and vice reverses, at least between enemies. "Thou shalt not kill" transforms into "Thou shalt kill". Lies and deceit become the highest virtues against the enemy. Likewise, nuance gets lost from the political landscape: you are for or against us; friend or foe. Peace settlements reverse these norms back.

Poststructuralists of all feathers warn against the tendency to argue that after the war the norms reverse "back to normal". "Back to normal" would imply that peaceful relations are the standard condition of humankind. At best this is a romantic view. But, as noticed earlier, there is no reason either to surrender to the other, more fatalistic view that aggression and violence are the standard condition of humankind. The either/or-logic does no justice to their combined, and mutually constitutive presence in what is called politics, as discussed above. Moral awareness of right and wrong, love and hate, good and bad are present in all human cultural records. Western thought has separated and isolated them from each other (e.g. in Eros and Thanatos), whereas in Asian traditions their co-constitutive nature has been acknowledged from ancient times till the present. But this reciprocity does not make them harmonious. For emancipatory orientations, the pacifying nature of "harmony ideologies" that allow for discords but not for dissidents will be experienced as repression.

⁸E.g., Vuori et al. (2020) show the importance of peace symbols like the white flag, the red cross, or the blue helmet in regulating war.

⁹See, e.g., Kustermans 2013, 48ff on medieval "irenical practice", which "centres on the kiss of peace (*osculum pacis*)".

In line with Asian traditions, concluding peace is not a “back to normal”. Instead, there is a reversal of a temporary, spatial dominance of one set of norms vis-à-vis another set. Peace settlements and war declarations demarcate a normative change of mind, legitimating the corresponding courses of action. “Waging peace” focuses on these shifts. But these switches do not demarcate a change away back to the “true” nature of humankind.

War norms are not only present during war. Repressive regimes are based on the same normative foundation: everyone is a potential enemy. It is easy to see that autocracies are based on an institutionalised logic of war, both in their interior and exterior. But it applies to all forms of repression in general. Even the most tolerant state is characterised by suspicion towards its inhabitants. For all regimes, the exercise of their repressive sides, also in peacetime, involves a reversal of norms associated with peace. Secret services, as the term suggests, work in secret. Deceit is their core business. They infiltrate, eavesdrop and, based on the collected data, intimidate, arrest, marginalise or even liquidate.

The reversal of norms invites mirroring behaviour: when fighting the enemy, you may, no, you even have to use the same means as s/he is using or is expected to use. If anarchists, communists, resistance groups or terrorists secretly plan attacks, secret infiltration of those groups and fighting them with their own means is justified. If potential enemies arm themselves, we have no choice to do the same. The logic of arms races and security dilemmas. The same applies if criminals threaten to disrupt society. “It takes a thief to catch a thief”. Domestic oppression and war use comparable norms, irrespective if the relations are asymmetrical. “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”. Just War Theory and Humanitarian Law try to preserve a mutually binding normative setting of peace norms, both before and during the animosities (*jus ad bellum*, and *jus in bello*), but even in Just War Theory *proportional violence* is a norm.¹⁰ For proportional violence, the violence committed by the enemy is the measure of proportion. Hollywood movies use this principle flawlessly: the hero can smash, blow up and sabotage everything to catch the bad guy who has already done that. Not only the end justifies the means, but also the means justify the means. In such an escalation, the other’s lack of norms justifies our own lack of norms. Containing intolerance requires intolerance. Moreover, in the identification with the “good guys” many people experience a good time, culturally at least.

Attempts to break the mirror imaging by using a peace policy have rarely been successful. More than half a century of peace research has yielded many studies of social defence, satyagrahi, peaceful protest, non-offensive defence, and so on, but they remain attempts to forge a sword of peace.¹¹ If peace is the means to an end, it turns out in practice to imply marching after leaders with military mindsets, even if they are called Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) or Martin Luther King (1929–1968). Martin Luther King deliberately chose Birmingham (USA) for his movement’s non-violent anti-discrimination demonstrations in 1963. Why? It was the most likely place for violent repression, and subsequent media coverage to his advantage (Johnson 2007). It turned out to be an excellent choice. Non-violence as a Clausewitzian way to underline one’s argument may support its moral right, but fits the logic of war.

¹⁰See for an authoritative overview and still topical account of Just War Theory: Walzer (1977). See for a critique: Fox (2014).

¹¹See for some excellent examples on social defence, i.e., Sharp 1985; Niezing 1987. More recent attempts have turned to the concept of Human Security to achieve the same. See, i.e., Glasius and Kaldor (2006), Kaldor (2008).

Stable peace is a by-product of a normative turnaround, not its origin. After the peace treaty and the exchange of other symbols, a transition is made to another social situation, just as a “yes” at a wedding ends single life. As with marriage, it is not known in advance what you are confirming to, nor how long it will last. The normative relationship changes and with it the conditions within which ideals and interests can take shape, but even then, in politics, suspicion remains. The war norms are put on a simmer plate. In traditional diplomacy it is even a vice to assume the good intentions of the other. Distrust is an international norm, with all due respect of course, while in domestic politics there is a constant watch out for dissidents. The discursive setting is different (international anarchy versus domestic hierarchy), but caution, fear and suspicion keep the logic of war alive in peacetime. Preserving the peace sanctions the continuation of the norms of war.

Peace in practice

Spontaneous peace?

Fry et al. (2021, 1) are investigating peace systems in a comparative anthropological analysis. They demonstrate that “creating peaceful intergroup relationships is possible whether the social units are tribal societies, nations, or actors within a regional system”. Their research identifies “common identity; positive social interconnectedness; interdependence; non-warring values and norms; non-warring myths, rituals, and symbols; and peace leadership” as crucial factors. In other work Douglas Fry (b.1953) also focuses on ingroup dynamics of what he calls “peaceful societies”. He defines this largely in terms of negative peace: “A society with an extremely low level of physical aggression among its members as well as shared beliefs that devalue aggression and/or positively value harmonious interpersonal relationships” (Fry 1999, 719). The main factors here are

that the belief systems of peaceful cultures do not accept the inevitability of violence, but to the contrary, devalue physical aggression and violence. Additionally, egalitarianism seems especially conducive to keeping the peace. Other general peacekeeping approaches seem to include (1) avoidance of antagonists, (2) enculturation processes that facilitate the development of each person’s self-restraint and internalisation of nonviolent values, beliefs, and behavioural patterns, and (3) a variety of psychocultural social controls, many of which are informal. (Fry 1999, 732)

Unanswered in studies like these is whether “peace” is the ticket on which these achievements are built, or that observers use this term because of their own perspective and research question: can we live in peace?

Enduring peace-like situations do exist, but I expect that the more this becomes the normal order the less the term peace is used to characterise or govern it. In a similar search for peaceful societies as Fry, the American anthropologists Thomas Gregor and Clayton A. Robarchek (1996) studied the Semai of Malaysia and the Mehinaku in Brazil, who share with each other what they have.¹² As a consequence, the Mehinaku have no words for “generosity”, while neither of them know a phrase for “thank you”—sharing is too self-evident. Peace as a structural condition would likewise disappear from our vocabulary.¹³

¹²Fry (1999) builds on the Semai analysis and adds his own of the La Paz Zapotec of Mexico.

Anthropologists more generally have been searching hard to find peaceful societies. Anthropologist Colin Irwin (2020) mentions a “culture without war” among the Inuit in the Canadian Arctic. He doesn’t define peace, but it implies a nonviolent method for conflict management (peace as a process) towards a peace agreement (peace as a moment) eventually building a culture without war (peace as a structure). The analyses tend to focus on the specific problem of organised violence in the form of war—in my view merely a subset of what the horizon of peace promises to overcome, be it an important subset, also to be found in IR and Political Science.

It is impressive how anthropologists are able to trace the peace norms that seem to be active. But the studies don’t convince me that “peace” is the motivation for adhering to them. It may well be that we, mainly Westerners, read it into our observations. Why have a logic of peace when the logic of violence is absent? From a peace research perspective it is more interesting to look at cases where the logic of violence gradually evaporated, giving way to peace without the need to reify it constantly.

At the end of the nineteenth century, diplomatic relations between the United States and Canada were demilitarised. IR-scholars Robert Keohane (b.1941) and Joseph Nye (b.1937) argue that Canadian “fear of military threat was probably over by 1871, and certainly by 1895” (Keohane and Nye 1977, 167).¹⁴ The war plans for a battle for the Great Lakes disappeared in the closet. Peace had broken out, without a previous war. There was no common enemy to bring them to this, and the hegemonic position of the United States was not yet such that pacification could be imposed. It was not celebrated. There was no treaty, no balance of power. And let’s not overdo it, the professional distrust of the military was still there. Canada and the USA kept official war scenarios against each other up to World War II: during the Interbellum period, the US War Plan Red, in case of a war against the British Empire, and the Canadian answer to this, Defence Scheme No.1, sketching out a pre-emptive attack against the USA. But diplomacy as such was demilitarised. The war plans were collecting dust in bureaucratic drawers.

A stronger pacifying development occurred in Northern Europe, where stable peace appeared at the end of the nineteenth century as well, unrelated to settling wars (Wiberg 2000). Did they call it peace? No, it was a new normative condition; not concluded, simply achieved—unnamed, unnoticed. Only in a historical context, the contrast with its war-prone past becomes visible, and with it the stable peace it stands for.

The other intriguing historical example is the demilitarisation of diplomatic relations in, first, Western Europe, and then almost all of Europe—at least from the late 1980s until the 2010s, when Russia re-emerged in “the West” as a perceived enemy, and with a major footnote on former Yugoslavia (see below). During the Cold War it was still possible to argue that peace between Europe’s core powers, France and West Germany, was only unstable: enforced by the combination of Europe’s utter devastation in the Thirty Years’ War of the twentieth century (1914–1945), the hegemonic exercise of power by the United States (via Marshall Aid and NATO) and Cold War overlay (including the nuclear stalemate between the United States and the Soviet Union). This altogether

¹³Although the authors present the Mehinaku as a shining example of a “relatively peaceful society” (Gregor and Robarchek 1996, 159), I’m not convinced: “The only regular form of violence among adult men is witch killings and ritualized gang rape” (179).

¹⁴They fail to mention why, but imply it was due to economic and societal interdependence.

had removed the sting of war from regional power politics. In the meantime, however, the normative change has become structural for most of Europe—even in spite of the violent breakdown of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, or Brexit in 2020; or actually, one may say: as illustrated by Brexit, be it at the price of revived warring sentiments (and peace longing) in Northern Ireland (see below).

The Russian “military operation” in Ukraine, manifest since 2014 with the occupation of Crimea, and neglected by Western media and politicians until 24 February 2022, has ignited a war rhetoric in EU-diplomacy. For the US-dominated NATO and its new Central and East European members, the Russian Federation was the major military threat all the time. The EU is now joining NATO’s self-fulfilling prophecy: enlargement cornering Russia may be in US interests, but had to backfire at some point (De Wilde 2003, 2004, 2015, 2017). Luttwak (2001) qualifies NATO as a “warlike organisation”. Its success as a “peace-like organisation”, however, is at maintaining cohesion (stable peace) between its member states—although relations between Greece and Turkey have never reached that level. Initially the Russian Federation was far from being pushed back. In the 1990s, Russia became a “partner in peace” and obtained its own diplomatic status in the NATO-Russia Council. It didn’t last. But why give periods of failure more credits in our historical records than periods of success?

Moreover, characteristic of Western/Nordic/Southern Europe is that *military* power political discourses have been replaced by *integration* power political discourses, centred on international organisations (IOs).¹⁵ Diplomatic relations have been demilitarised. It is still about power, but the normative embedding of that struggle is only marginally based on war norms or their domestic repressive surrogates. At the interstate level there is stable peace: absence of war, no expectation of war, no preparation for war and no military crises. This is not true for all bilateral relations: Turkey/Greece, divided Cyprus, Northern Ireland/Ireland/UK, Russia/Ukraine, Russia/Baltics, Serbia/Kosovo/Montenegro, EU/Russia. Nor is it true for Transatlantic relations (NATO/Russia), for the relations with the MENA-societies or for a wide range of domestic settings. But the overarching setting of Europe in international relations is one of stable peace. Its strength is tested—not just by the Russia-Ukraine war—it is tested all the time, but its resilience is impressive, also if it ultimately or temporarily would fail.

Even the wars in the former Yugoslavia, from 1991 to 2001, underline this: although divided as ever, there was no temptation for France or Germany to take sides in a nineteenth-century’s fashion. The two countries were initially sharply opposed in their positions in the Yugoslav civil wars. France wanted to keep Yugoslavia, while Germany championed independence for Slovenia and Croatia (at the cost of the civil war in Bosnia–Herzegovina, major unrest around Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania and the ongoing dynamic stalemate around Kosovo). Germany won, but France did not budge. The context in which Germany won was that of IOs. It was the litmus test that proved American political scientist John Mearsheimer (b.1947) wrong. His thesis was that after the Cold War, Europe would revert to traditional, and thus

¹⁵The logic of diversifying regional security discourses is based on Regional Security Complex Theory, as developed by Barry Buzan (b.1946) (See: Buzan 1991; Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998; Buzan and Wæver 2003).

militarised, power politics (Mearsheimer 1990). France and Germany refused to fall into that trap.

Brexit as invisible peace

If the demilitarisation of politics is successful and lasting, the horizons of peace and war disappear from view, and with them the awareness of the achievement. Where the conditions of stable peace become self-evident, the echo of war disappears.¹⁶ At best it survives in commemorations, history books and other cultural expressions. Beyond those, no one will look at the horizon. Life will continue to be dominated by struggles for power, political conflict and strife, institutionalised inequalities, etcetera—involving war and peace norms—but in demilitarised fashions. The Clausewitzian logic to underline your arguments with threats or use of violence no longer applies.

In Europe, we have to thank the British for showing how this works. Brexit in 2020 nor the road towards it led to the mobilisation of armies across Europe. Yes, border guards are mobilised in the Canal and around Northern Ireland. But this is far removed from the logic of Europe's warrior states that dominated politics from the tenth to twentieth Century.¹⁷ The idea that an alliance of France and Germany would correct Britain's behaviour with military means is beyond the horizon. The historic achievement of demilitarised diplomacy went unnoticed. Can such conditions be enforced?

The hell of good intentions

“Peace” as a speech act (also in images by the way) is strongly institutionalised in the United Nations. Reference to peace mobilises the promise of or the longing to life beyond the horizon. As such it can fulfil various functions, be it in a polemic way: “if we don't do this, peace will be at risk/not achieved/destroyed” or “if we continue to do this, peace will be at risk/not achieved/destroyed”.

Peace is the order of the day in UN circles and war is constantly involved: peace enforcement, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, responsibility to protect, human security. The United Nations has a Peace Palace. It has a Peace University. Its Charter refers throughout to peace and “the peace”. The UNGA declared 2001–2010 as a “decade for a culture of peace and non-violence for the children of the World”.¹⁸ The preamble of UNESCO's Constitution (1945) states that “it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”. The UN has conducted 71 peace keeping missions (12 are ongoing) and are champions in achieving the Noble Peace Prize.¹⁹

Oliver Richmond (2004), an International Relations expert at the University of Manchester, aptly speaks of a “peacebuilding consensus”, leading to “peace as government”, including the repression of norms dominant in war. At the same time Richmond (2018) argues that this entire practice is caught in a global project that seeks to discipline states and their subjects in a neoliberal order. Peace is not a politically neutral condition. Peace-

¹⁶The same occurs in the opposite direction: in long lasting severe violence (stable war?) the echo of peace disappears.

¹⁷Compare Tilly (1990, 1994).

¹⁸UN Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly, 53/25. *International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001–2010)* https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/53/25.

¹⁹<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/data>; <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/nobel-peace-prize>.

making and peace-building “out of the blue” are not a blessing by definition, but often suffocate people in a hell of good intentions.

The United Nations is the current centre in the discourse on when, and against whom violence is appropriate—the IO-variant of necropolitics. It is all about cohesion between the 193 sovereign member states. In the UN Charter, Article 1, Chapter VI, Chapter VII and, in particular, Article 51 mark the conditions of peace and thus of war. The Resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly refine the net of rules and thus the wealth of loopholes. Of great symbolic importance is *An Agenda for Peace*, published in 1992 by then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1922–2016; in office from 1992 to 1996) (Boutros-Ghali 1992). The deadlock of the Cold War was broken and war and peace came together at the global level in an activist manner: the non-intervention principle had to give way to the promotion of human rights, democracy and the market economy. If necessary, by military means.

However, consistent intervention for the sake of human security, human rights or world peace would unleash a world war; a snake biting its own tail. Since 1945, the world has had yearly about 15–25 so-called high-intensity conflicts, just under a hundred low-intensity conflicts and then hundreds of armed incidents under the heading of political violence.²⁰ Yet the call for peace operations is great; first in the media, then in public opinion. Hugo Slim (2001) of the Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict, has argued that humanitarian interventions are actually modern crusades. This speaks to both the ruling elites and the modern peace movements. Ministries of War that turned into Ministries of Defence could well become Ministries of Peace—just a mile away from Orwell’s deadly Ministry of Love in *1984* (1948).²¹ Less polemically, the international jurist Stephen Neff (2005) has said the same thing: we are back to medieval thinking about just war. Peace must be defended and spread by fire and sword. From an even more conservative quarter, Henry Kissinger (2002) also concludes that the principle of non-intervention is losing out against the desire to allow more and more people to share in, what he calls, Western peace. The Belgian IR scholar Jorg Kustermans (2013) shows in his dissertation how democratic peace is likewise tied to war norms. The horizon is clear, but so are the violent struggles to get there.

In the UN, the interdependence of war and peace norms is most evident. Its strength is negative peace: peace-making, if need be backed up by military means, serves to end violence. By brokering a “handshake”, a treaty, the balance of war and peace norms switches in favour of the latter; a form of conflict transformation. The UN hopes to do more, but peacebuilding requires consensus on positive peace. Positive peace works as a horizon, but immediately invokes conflict when its nature and the road towards it are discussed.

In conclusion

The first conclusion of this analysis is that peace cannot be studied in its own right. Peace presupposes war and war presupposes peace. The connection is inescapable, because

²⁰See publications by SIPRI, PRIO and the interactive website of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP): <https://ucdp.uu.se/>. Note that violence by organized crime is not included in these statistics.

²¹A tendency which I observed earlier in relation to the post-Cold War conflict prevention discourse; De Wilde (2006).

both are standing for different co-existing and co-constitutive norm sets, legitimising each other.

Secondly, as co-constitutive horizons, peace and war at the core of politics, merging repressive and liberative practices; merging conservation and empowerment. In overseeing their massive study, Oliver Richmond, Sandra Pogodda & Jasmin Ramović (2016, 13) conclude: “Organising peace is clearly messy and unpredictable. Indeed, the very essence of the concept of peace varies too much between different contexts to allow uniform principles for its organisation”. The variation, however, is not the problem; the idea that peace has a meaning independent of its counterpart is the problem. All these contexts have in common that they are violent. In the struggle for peace, war standards remain present, at all levels of analysis. Apparently there is a need to fight for the demilitarisation of power politics, both internationally and nationally, including households. But the opening motto of this article, “everyone wants peace, and that’s when the fighting starts”, is too easy an observation. It is harder to tell why this is the case.

My third argument is that experiencing peace goes largely unnoticed, but that longing for, talking about or even thinking of peace has a polemic nature. When drawn to the horizon of peace—whether conceptualised as world peace or internal mental rest—navigation automatically takes issue with the logic of war, and its accompanying norms about the use of violence. Navigating towards the horizon of peace does not exclude the logic of war.

The reverse is likewise true: navigating towards war uses the logic of peace, for it requires solidarity, trust, loyalty, willing compliance, love and friendship among everyone defined as the essential in-group. In that sense Luttwak is right that war and peace alternate in time and place, while being universally present. This is not, as he claims, because peace is an empty condition. The alternation in mixtures of the conflicting sets of norms is related to the horizons of eternal peace and eternal annihilation; images of heaven and hell. These conflicting sets construct parallel lines, with people beating against the wind in between them, reaching out for one horizon, fearing the other. Yet, waging peace or violence are not on par, because peace lacks the unilateral qualities of violence. Because of this asymmetry, discourses on peace can easily become counterproductive. Parallel lines appear to meet in the horizon, but they don’t. In the end, peace stays on the horizon, unless we stop thinking about it.

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