THE ENDLESS PURSUIT OF THE *ESSENCE* OF PEACE: RETHINKING DEFINITIONS OF PEACE

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Abstract

The term *peace* has come to be a buzzword in political, scientific and everyday discourse. But do we always refer to the same thing? Do we even know exactly what we refer to? Attempts at defining peace are numerous and debates over the real or essential meaning of peace are abundant – yet are they really conducive to the problem we face when we state an absence of peace? In this paper we argue that they are not, and they are not because of a specific reason: Debates center mostly around what is called in philosophy "real definition", notwithstanding the little importance empirical social scientists attribute to this type of definitions. We therefor give an overview over the differences in definitions found in scientific inquiry and analyze already established theoretical notions of peace. Then we give empirical resonance to these concepts and conclude with the underlining of the necessity of a dynamic operational approach defining peace.

1 INTRODUCTION

For young individuals who desire an established career in the broad field of conflict resolution, there is no other word heard and discussed more than "peace". For many audiences from youth to scientific communities, there is a certain vagueness that accompanies the use of the term. This vagueness is partly due to the amount of different conceptions that exist in multiple peace theories. On the other hand, there is debate among these circles as to what the *real definition* of peace is. However, following the argument of this paper, the focus on this *particular type* of definition – that centers around the finding of a common meaning to what peace essentially is – is due to a lack of understanding of the philosophical basis and methodology of definitions. This is especially pronounced in the inquiry into peace, because the debate over what peace *is* or *should be* is wielded by politicians, scholars, interested audiences and practitioners of conflict resolution alike – and with long-lasting consequences. In situations of conflict – whether it is personal or socio-political – can concrete and sustainable resolution be obtained unless both parties agree on

the peace they are seeking? In order for conflicts to become successfully resolved, there must be a lasting and cohesive understanding of what peace is and what changes are brought forth from it. As such, this paper presents our attempt to give a short overview about the philosophical basis of the act of defining and with this background, to examine some various definitions of peace and conflict from the theoretical. Lastly an empirical look into the Irael-Palestine conflict will confront these concepts with the world of practitioners of conflict resolution. Ultimately, it is not our attempt to define peace in a *real*, or *essential*, manner. Rather, the necessity of a pragmatic stance, allowing different definitions to address different research, policy or resolution goals is underlined.

2 Defining *Definitions*

2.1 The Challenge Of Knowing What We Are Talking About

Common sense has it, that when we communicate with people using the same *language,* the information we share is mostly understood by speaker and recipient alike. However, in countless situations of social interaction – think situations when you argue with your partner or friend or family members – the mutual understanding of verbal expressions[1] is not so unmistakable. Miscommunication is experienced by us every day, but usually it is solved as fast as it arises, since native speakers of the same language usually develop some kind of intuition about what is meant by expressions even though they are not fully understood (Gupta, 2015: 3). If not, they at least have a mutual interest in sustaining the conversation so that miscommunication is addressed and speakers might reframe ambiguous sentences. However, there might also be long-lasting misunderstanding that could even lead to adversarial behavior. This may be especially true for political discourse between opposed interest groups. To come closer to our topic of inquiry, consider the difference in the understanding of the term *peace,* a government representative of Uganda and a gay Ugandan activist, who receives constant death threats because of official anti-gay policies, would exhibit. Most likely a call for peace from the latter would be considered provocative by the former, whereas a pledge to peace by the official representative will sound like bare cynicism to the gay activist. More theoretically speaking, it is might be the case that an expression *E* is used by person *A* in a different understanding then it is used by person *B*, hence when these two people communicate they might use the same language and words but not agree on the

[1] For the sake of simplicity we shall focus here on language as a form of *verbal* expression. In real life communications this is, of course, just *one* part of communication.

underlying *meaning*. Let M_{EA} be the meaning of the expression in question as understood by person *A* and M_{EB} the respective understanding of person *B*. Now the entire argument or discourse brought forward by *A* has a specific meaning contingent on M_{EA} – especially if we consider that *E* might be a crucial term like *peace*[2]. This in turn means that the original intention of *A* is not to be understood by *B* in the way it was uttered because this person will *reconstruct* a version of the discourse contingent on M_{EB}. The consequence is confusion and miscommunication.

Examples like this show the importance of common understanding of terms for conflict resolution. While we can easily relate to problems of miscommunication based on our experiences of everyday communication, we might be tempted to believe that scientific discourse should have somehow overcome this. Since science is expected to produce knowledge that should be of mutual benefit for society, the tacit core assumption is that this knowledge is *mutually understood* in scientific circles and also by the society at large (Häder, 2015: 26f). Usually concerns about the latter are waived by praising the idea of a common scientific parlance that in itself is so specific that general audience will not easily understand it without engaging in profound studies, hence taking for granted the mutual understanding in scientific circles (Opp, 2014: 120f). However, it can be seriously doubted that scientists (for the nature of the inquiry we focus on social science, including sociology, psychology, political science, economy among others) *really* share a mutual understanding of meaning of specific terms (Opp, 2014: 122f). So what is done to address a possible difference in understanding? Words are defined. Now, what is a definition? According to German sociologist and philosopher of science and method Karl-Dieter Opp (2014: 117ff), in the simplest of forms, we speak of characters (German: *Zeichen*) and designata (German: *Bezeichnetes*) that are put into relation using semantic rules. Characters are taken to be letters or groups of letters – words – and designata are "certain phenomena of reality" (Opp, 2014: 117) that are considered to be widely known. Hence, the (until then unknown) characters can be identified as a representation of the (know) designata and mutual understanding of terms is ensured. Nevertheless, there are very different approaches to *defining* and many types of definitions only serve certain purposes. This opens up the gate for large-scale confusion since not all scholars use definitions the same way. Neither do they share the mutual understanding of the *meaning of different approaches to defining*. Drawing upon philosophy of science,

[2] In this example we consider just one *stimulus* word open to ambiguous understanding. While in most situations this might be optimistic, the basic mechanisms considered here are the same whether there is just one difference in understanding of meaning or many.

Gupta argues that some “debates can be settled by making requisite distinctions, for definitions are not all of one kind: definitions serve a variety of functions, and their general character varies with function. Some other debates, however, are not so easily settled, as they involve contentious philosophical ideas such as essence, concept, and meaning” (Gupta, 2015: 1). So to get a common understanding of peace, we consider it worthwhile to dive into the philosophical basics and understand the practice of defining itself.

2.2 Nominal Definitions

A nominal definition is a very basic definition that (in its strict form) usually belongs to the realms of abstract science. When we use Opp’s terminology, in a nominal definition the relation between the characters and the designata is that of mathematical equality. We can understand it as something similar to the renaming of a term. These definitions follow the logic of clarifying meaning in a specific context instead of finding an *essence* to an object of inquiry. When there are expressions already well-founded and understood (the *definiens*), a nominal definition helps to equate those to a new expression that didn’t have this connotation before (the *definiendum*), thus establishing a common understanding for the new term. Carl Gustav Hempel – one of the founding fathers of modern-day philosophy of science– gave very simple examples for this kind of definitions: “Let the word 'tiglon' be short for (i.e., synonymous with) the phrase 'offspring of a male tiger and a female lion'” (Hempel, 1952: 2), or: “Let the term 'Americium' be synonymous with the phrase 'the element having 95 nuclear protons'” (Hempel, 1952: 3). In social science this kind of definitions are often used when clarifying use of words: “In the following the expressions *war* and *conflict* are used interchangeably”. Since we just assign one expression to another, without making statements of *how* empirical phenomena *should* be, it follows that this kind of definitions cannot be logically wrong or right. They just set the ground for the use of certain terms, hence helping to understand possible multi-faceted concepts and unclear terms (Stein, 2014: 137). It is therefore irrelevant to ask if a nominal definition is true (“is *war* really the same as conflict?”), as long as for a given purpose the equality of the terms in question seems convenient.

2.3 Real Definitions

A very similar form to the aforementioned one has the real definition[3]. The usual understanding is that of searching an *essence* to a term that should be defined. When we attempt to find a real definition of *X*, the essence of *X* should be a concept based on empirical evidence that states the sufficient condition something has to meet to be called *X*. Considering Hempel once more, we have the example of the real definition of life under any set of conditions *C*: "*x* is a living organism if and only if *X* satisfies condition *C*" (Hempel, 1952: 7). So what we do is not only to arbitrarily assign known expressions to unknown ones, rather we are looking for the *essential* conditions something has to meet, before it can be endowed with the expression in question. There are scholars who believe that real definitions are pertinent to the realm of natural science, whereas humanities mostly stick to nominal definitions (Gupta, 2015: 2). This being said, the difficult point is always the possibility of singling out a *real essence* to whatever concept in question. Hempel adverts us to the fact that even though a real definition of life would follow the given formula, the sufficient conditions to finalize the definition (even in biology) are far from found (Hempel, 1952: 7). Due to the vagueness of the term "essence" (German: *Wesen*), Opp argues that we shouldn't even include it in scientific reasoning (Opp, 2014: 125). Given the impact constructivism has had on contemporary social science, it can hardly be argued that all – or indeed even two – people would concur in the appraisal of exactly what the constitutive essence of whatever concept *should* be. The last phrase indirectly reveals that whatever real definition is made in social science, outcome is a normative one: By allowing only phenomena that suffice the condition expressed, it is stated how a certain concept *should* be understood in empirical terms.

The closest we can get to address the issue of *essence* would then be what is commonly called "meaning analysis" (Hempel, 1952: 6). During this process, the scientist tries to reconstruct the *intersubjective meaning* a concept has to the people using it in speech acts, thus mapping out an approach to how this word can be understood in a specific community/time/situation.

2.4 Operational Definitions

Operational definitions consist of the operationalization of a theoretical concept in terms of observable empirical phenomena (Häder, 2015: 32). In the original version of this conception

[3] There is some level of disagreement on the very definition of real definitions. See differences in approaches: Bortz and Döring (2006: 61) and Hempel (1952: 6).

it is assumed, that the term that is to be defined is nothing more or less than the outcome of certain measurement operations. A popular and seemingly circular statement follows this exact logic: "Intelligence *is* what is measured by intelligence tests" (Bortz and Döring, 2006: 62). However, if conceived of in more adequate way for social science, the first step of operational definitions would be a meaning analysis as a pretest for intersubjective understanding, which is required for operationalized concepts to be valid measurement instruments for the latent terms. In this way, we can argue that these definitions entail certain aspects of real and nominal definitions alike. The nominal ascription of a certain term would then be based on an intersubjective meaning analysis and an operationalization as to what extend the concept can really be measured in the empirical world.

3 Defining Peace In Theory

3.1 Discussing Peace In Conflict Resolution

Though not institutionalized until 1945, Conflict Resolution as an academic discipline began with the failure of preventing the First World War (Ramsbotham et al., 2009: 34). K. Holsti studied various peace treaties over a 300-year time span; from the Thirty Years War to World War II. In his studies he surmised eight prerequisites for peace: Governance, Legitimacy, Assimilation, Deterrence, Conflict Resolution, War as a problem, Peaceful change, and Anticipation of future issues. According to Holsti, governance occurs when there is a system in place that regulates responsible behavior. That system must be viewed as rightfully established, making it legitimate. If this system is legitimate, all parties must see that working within that system as the better option than working against it, and will assimilate into that system. If there is a party that wishes to work against this system, then there must be a coalition to deter the opposition. If the opposition is still strong, then resolving the issue in a peaceful manner, in addition to monitoring it, must be established. Regardless of what the opposition demands, it must be agreed upon by all parties that war is the root of the problem and must be avoided. The opposition and the system in power must look for opportunities in a peaceful change or adaptability in their new treaties. Holsti placed high significance in his last prerequisite, which is, the importance in the responsibility that both policy and peace makers have in anticipating future conflict. The more a situation involved these eight prerequisites, the more sustainable the peace will be (Ramsbotham et al., 2009: 38).

Holsti's work provides a framework for how peace can be achieved, but his framework is solely rooted in a post-war conflict and the attempt at avoiding future conflicts. It does not

address the root issues of conflict in the first place. For this issue, we will look into the peace-building theories of Johan Galtung.

3.2 Johan Galtung's Three Models of Violence, Conflict, and Peace

Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung's theory on peace-building centers around creating a sustainable peace by focusing on the root causes of violence and conflict, and seeking to quell those root causes. For Galtung's theories to be properly articulated, triangles are used in place to model his work. A Conflict is a triangle: contradiction between two or more peoples, attitudes that develop over time towards one another, and behaviors that reflect these attitudes (Ramsbotham et al., 2009: 9). When each of these components influence one another, the conflict then manifests itself into another triangle: one of structural violence, direct violence, and cultural violence. Because these problems are modeled in a form of a triangle, then a three step solution must also be modeled. If we want an end to structural, direct, and cultural violence, we must tackle oppressive systems that are rooted in structural contradictions. We must also attempt to change behaviors, thus changing attitudes. This triangle is peace-building, peace-making, and peace-keeping.

But what is this peace that we are aiming to achieve? For Galtung, there is a positive peace, and a negative peace. Negative Peace is the cessation of direct violence, such as the various peace treaties that Holsti based his work on. Positive peace is the cessation of structural violence by amending the initial contradictions (Ramsbotham et al., 2009: 11). Galtung's definitions of negative and positive peace lead us to believe that there various definitions of peace in conflict resolution, but others would argue that even these definitions are inherently flawed.

3.3 A Call For Many *Peaces*: Wolfgang Dietrich And Wolfgang Sützl

A 1997 article co-written by Austrian peace researchers and political scientists Wolfgang Dietrich and Wolfgant Sützl titled, "A Call for Many Peaces", addresses the issues with defining peace under our current notions of it. They argue that Western philosophies and structures have placed a monopoly on the term. Peace, in a Western sense, is rooted in the ideals of "progress" and "development". Post Enlightenment and European Colonial thought has led us to believe that peace is progress, and progress (along with development) are terms

applied to the civilizing the savage man (Dietrich and Sützl, 1997: 9). This argument implies that peace, for Westerners, is a win-lose situation, and not a win-win situation. For even win-win situations in a western framework lean towards the idea that cultures assimilate into the power structure (hence Holsti's argument for assimilation). Dietrich and Sültz view the party that assimilates is the party on the losing side of the spectrum.

The article goes on to elaborate that in the German language, peace originally stands for "treating members of one's own kin" (Dietrich and Sützl, 1997: 11). Assimilation and tolerance will not lead to peace. Respect on the other hand, such as the respect we would display towards our kin, will. Dietrich and Sützl also discuss peace philosophy in African, Javanese, and Mayan cultures. In these examples, the closest concept of peace isn't assimilation, like their European counterparts, but the focus on energy and harmony – a harmony with one's self and an overall respect for other beings in the universe. Since these ideas and concepts of peace are so different from our European framework, it would be difficult to apply our notions of peace over theirs.

Ultimately, they conclude that peace does not come from understanding. Rather, peace comes through respect without the need for an understanding. Therefore, the authors conclude we must embrace the idea of many peaces. This still provides a conflict in the context of ongoing structural, direct, and cultural violence. For one's idea of peace may not just be different from others, it may also harm others.

4 Israel and Palestine: A Multi-Layered Approach to Peace

One contemporary conflict where there are obstacles to defining peace is the conflict in Israel and Palestine. While there are calls on both sides to the end of violence, there are different methods of getting there, and there are different examples of what that peace is. For Israelis who lean towards the Right, peace means security from terrorist attacks. For many Palestinians, justice (a different form of peace, albeit not entirely exclusive) means Right of Return for Palestinians who had homes in Israel Proper before Israel declared its independence in 1948. One way to address these issues of defining what peace would entail would be to solve the conflict in a multi-tract approach to diplomacy.

Track One Diplomacy, that is, traditional governmental diplomacy (USIP, 2015), the conflict has been framed in previous peace negotiations overseen by the United States and Other U.N. nations, most significant ones being held in Oslo and Camp David. Former U.S. envoy to the Middle East Dennis Ross proposes a 12-step solution, six responsibilities from the Israeli

government, and six responsibilities by the Palestinian Authority. To summarize, Israel needs to halt settlement expansion and even decree incentives for settlers to re-enter Israel proper, and Israel must allow more Palestinian sovereignty in certain areas. For Palestinians, it is their responsibility to acknowledge Israel's legitimate right to exist and invest in their country's infrastructure (Bloomfield, 2012). Ross's plan, an example of Track I Diplomacy, tackles Galtung's structural, direct, and cultural violence from both parties, but does his plan address the contradiction, behavior, and attitudes of Israelis and Palestinians? This is a task for that may be better off solved by other modes of diplomacy.

Track II Diplomacy, or diplomacy initiated by NGOs (USIP, 2015), religious groups, and academic leaders, engages in unofficial dialogue and conflict resolution workshops to bring about a discussion among conflict stakeholders as well as outsiders. Some groups are able to bring in affiliated and non-affiliated individuals to engage in dialogue with High Ranking officials as well as grassroots organizers to discuss possible roadmaps to peace. While Track II Diplomacy may be successful for these organizations, they attract only a specific type of individual. Can peace be achieved through these functions alone? They can inspire and influence leaders for tomorrow, but conflict stakeholders are still affected by every day issues. That is why a third option is available.

Track III Diplomacy is the opportunity for the conflict stakeholders to engage in one on one dialogue with communities deemed by their own as "hostile" (USIP, 2015). Two examples of this occurring in Israel is the Parents Circle Family Forum. A reconciliation group composed of over 600 Israelis and Palestinians who have lost loved ones through the violent conflict. Another campaign, initiated by Israeli graphic designer Ronny Edry, is the Peace Factory: a social media platform that aims to connect individuals from all communities in the Middle East together as a way to become friends in social media networks and beyond[4].

Overall, if defining peace in theory leads social scientists to argue for multiple models of peace, then it must also be applied to in its practice. Peace will not be achieved if only one of the goals is met. There must be an understanding of what peace is and what it will entail from all levels of society.

[4] Since forums are not being properly quoted, their links can be found here:
http://www.theparentscircle.com/Content.aspx?ID=2#.VZJSQEs0hg0
http://thepeacefactory.org/why-about-bepart

5 Bringing The Pieces Back Together

In this paper we outlined some of the contributions to the ongoing efforts in defining and in usage of different notions of peace. Since the term *peace* is at the heart of many very different endeavors from academia to *Realpolitik*, in spite of looking for a (non-existing?) *common denominator* between all these areas, it might be worthwhile considering peace as a dynamic multitude of layers in which all the different notions are captured. Taking a look at what kinds of definitions exist, many discussions center around a mostly fruitless debate on normative arguments for the one or the other definition of peace, guided by the human desire to find common meaning through scientific investigation. However, as we lined out, it tends to be forgotten that this kind of meaning analysis is looking for a real definition of peace, and that this is just one kind of approach to definition. Some authors even go this far as to conceive of real definitions as useless in the realm of empirical social science (Atteslander, 1969: 44). Other kinds of definitions tend to be relative and interchangeable according to the object investigated and method used. As such, operational definitions – in the way they are understood here – capture various aspects of nominal as well as real definitions, and can be used in empirical investigation asking to what extend the posited definition is actually measurable in real life.

One way to account for different conceptions of peace and the operational nature of defining would be to consider of peace as a dynamic latent concept that is *operationalized* – and hence put into empirical terms – only when contrasted with a certain kind of conflict. Following this, peace would have to be considered different when used a setting like the Israel-Palestine conflict (and contingent on the eye of the observer)[5] or for example in the setting of racial discrimination in the United States. In both cases there are going to be voices who argue that peace is not fully achieved – yet they will relate to largely different notions of peace. In the same vein, peace might be conceived of as a multi-layered concept, concluding different aspects from the mere absence of physical violence to structural and society-wide reform or intra-personal peace. *What kind of peace* we consider thus depends on the actual situation of conflict faced, the inquiry's proposal, and the assumptions we make about agency. When the facet of a conflict is an especially violent one, and the proposal of the inquiry is to address a possible halt to ongoing slaughter, it would make sense to refer to the layer of negative peace, while in a different scenario it might be more fruitful to consider a structural notion of peace.

[5] It's important to note that no makro-conflict like "Israel-Palestine", etc. is just *one* conflict. There are always facets of makro-conflicts, like religious grievances, economic inequality, and so on between some party A and some party B, as well as many other conflicts that amount to "Israel-Palestine" and so forth.

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