

Towards Attaining the Unattainable

‘Strong Peace’ as a useful conception of mid-term peace in an African context

by

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1. Introduction

Since the ascent of conflict resolution as a domain of scholarly research, discourses on peace have oscillated between two extreme forms: ‘negative’ and ‘positive peace’. This tendency has resulted in two parallel, theoretical and practical-political tracks of conflict resolution; one focusing on war termination/peacemaking, e.g., ending one war, and the other addressing the root causes of conflict through peacebuilding, e.g., preventing a new war from starting. Although understandable from a practical standpoint, this dichotomous view of peace is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. First, negative peace, or the absence of organized, armed violence, not only tends to conceal vast human suffering, such as crime, political oppression or household violence; it also leaves structural factors such as poverty, illiteracy, ill-health and other injustices or inequalities intact, phenomena that may cause new wars. Second, while commendable in its aspirations, positive peace – the unstated goal of most peacebuilding missions – is so demanding that it cannot realistically be attained for several generations even under the best of circumstances. Hence, what is needed is a conceptualization of peace which is more demanding than the mere absence of violence, but more attainable, in the mid-term, than positive peace. Only by creating such mid-term benchmarks will it be possible to assess whether conflict resolution, say, a decade after the cessation of violence, is on the right track.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to begin to address this lacuna by introducing the concept of ‘Strong Peace’, being grounded in Holsti’s notions of vertical and horizontal

legitimacy, and alluding to what can be a realistic notion of ‘strong peace in a weak and war-torn state’. Based on Holsti (1996: 7, 84), we argue that the mid-term goal of conflict resolution should be to strengthen the “ [...] loyalty to the idea(s) of the state” (vertical legitimacy) and improve “[...] the attitudes and practices of individuals and groups within the state toward each other and ultimately to the state that encompasses them” (horizontal legitimacy). As civil wars are fundamentally about power, who governs, how and over whom, it is reasonable to conceptualize peace in terms of popular legitimacy towards the state and different social groups in society. Without improving the relationship between the state and its citizens, as well as between different groups in society, it is hard to see how peace can be consolidated in the long term. Equating peace with vertical and horizontal legitimacy also offers other benefits: (1) Since strong peace focuses on the perspectives of local communities and social groups, it is emancipatory and agency-driven, making it less amendable to the western-liberal biases of much of the peacebuilding literature; (2) improving popular legitimacy is a relative notion, referring to something more than negative, and less than positive peace. Strong peace would thus seem to be a suitable mid-term goal in the context of weak and fragile post-conflict states; and (3) it is, finally, a researchable concept that can be operationalized and applied to different empirical settings.

The hope is that this paper will make a contribution to the burgeoning literature on peacebuilding, by offering an empirically relevant, measurable mid-term vision of peace that can function as a stepping stone from the short-term goal of preventing the recurrence of civil war to the long-term aim of diminishing structural violence. The paper proceeds as follows. By providing an overview of the main trends in the literature on conflict resolution during the last 40 years, we hold that most scholars continue to conceptualize peace according to Galtung’s (1964, 1969) classical negative-positive dichotomy. This is followed by a presentation of some contemporary efforts to develop mid-term visions of peace. Arguing that this is a step in the right direction, we continue by outlining our notion of ‘Strong Peace’, and the benefits associated with its use. The paper ends by presenting a tentative list of explanatory variable clusters—associated with governance, resources and security—and potential operationalizations that may help us attain Strong Peace in Weak States.

2. Reviewing the Classical Concepts

Much of how we think and relate to the concept of peace can be traced back to the vigorous debate of the 1960s and 70s, on what the aims and boundaries of conflict resolution should be. Initially, peace and conflict research was dominated by what has been called the ‘North American pragmatist school.’ Headed by researchers such as Kenneth Boulding and David Singer, this group of scholars stressed the need to systematically collect and analyze data on conflict escalation. Motivated by the threat of nuclear annihilation, focus was less about removing the causes of conflict, than giving international organizations the tools to manage them (Boulding 1978, Singer 1972). This line of thought was heavily influenced by the emerging realist paradigm, who held it naïve, if not dangerous, to do anything but hinder disputes from becoming too violent (Richmond 2008: 47, 99-101).

This limited view of conflict resolution attracted criticism by ‘European structuralists’ or ‘maximalists’ who held that seemingly peaceful societies can obscure vast human suffering and inequalities that “make a mockery of peace”(Miall et al 1999: 44).¹ In addition, by merely focusing on physical violence, rather than the on root causes, the international community would never be able to consolidate peace after the cessation of hostilities, as there would always be new generations willing to take to arms (Schmid 1968). To contrast these two different visions of peace, Johan Galtung introduced the concepts of ‘negative’ and ‘positive peace.’ While the former was meant to depict the absence of a bad thing, direct physical violence, the latter symbolized also the presence of good things, such as measures of justice, fairness and wellbeing. Although negative peace was desirable, Galtung argued that more focus should be put on attaining positive peace. Not only was this the best way to prevent future wars, but also to build societies based on human empathy and solidarity (Galtung 1964, 1969; Miall et al. 1999: 15, 43-4).

Even though it has been more than 40 years since Galtung conceptualized the differences between a pragmatic and maximalist view on peace, it still functions as a lens through which we classify and evaluate peace. This is evident from contemporary discourses of war and peace that often contain seemingly dichotomous statements such as ‘we must first stop the killing’ and ‘no peace without justice.’ Depending on which point of view we adhere to, our thoughts on conflict resolution vary; either a realist-inspired strategy aspiring to address the behavior and interest of the armed actors or a structuralist approach aiming to

¹ Originally formulated by Schmid (1968), quote from Miall.

reduce economic and political inequalities, human right abuses and social marginalization. The following section highlights how the scholarly debate on how to attain and measure peace is still largely confined to Galtung's negative-positive nexus.

2.1 The 'Negative Peace' Tradition

During the Cold War era international peacemakers had few possibilities to forcefully intervene in states experiencing civil wars. With the US and Soviet Union jealously guarding their respective spheres of influence, and respect for state sovereignty being a well-established norm, it was too sensitive for the United Nations to sponsor peace by reforming domestic political institutions and socio-economic structures. Instead the international community was obliged to restrict its engagement to mediation and supervision of ceasefires (Mac Ginty 2006a: 156).

The academic work on conflict resolution reflected these policy restrictions and consequently focused on issues such as how to get the armed factions from the battlefield to the negotiation table and identifying the most optimal mediation techniques for persuading belligerents to sign an accord (Richmond 2008: 99-101). Within this tradition Zartman's (1989) theory on ripeness and the hurting stalemate gained much notice. With its focus on identifying ripe moments for mediation, it was essentially a realist framework; belligerents would only accept peace proposals once a certain military balance of power was attained (Zartman 1989: 10). Inspired by Zartman, scholars such as Haass (1990) and Stedman (1991) refined his framework by identifying other indicators for when conflicts were ripe for resolution, f.e., internal political changes of the parties (leadership change, division of a united leadership or consolidation of a divided leadership) and withdrawal of outside support for armed groups. While these new thoughts on ripeness were less overtly realist by expanding the analysis to include internal dynamics of the parties, it was still cast within the pragmatic school through its emphasis on wartime actors and on stopping the fighting.

By the early 1990s there appeared a shift in the focus of conflict resolution. Rather than seeking to identify the conditions and instruments needed to persuade belligerents to sign a peace agreement, researchers started to pay greater attention to factors facilitating the successful implementation of accords (Hampson 1996; Stedman & Rothchild 1996). In the wake of several failed peace process, where armed groups reneged on their commitments to

peace, such as Afghanistan, Rwanda and Sierra Leone, peacemakers discarded beliefs that the implementation of accords was a purely legalistic affair (Stedman et al. 2002: 1-4). The question was rather why some peace agreements held, while others fell apart (Ohlson 1998). This shift was to a large degree a function of UN launching its first peacebuilding missions in countries such as Cambodia, Namibia and Nicaragua and Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *An Agenda for Peace* in 1992. The later even identified peacebuilding as a tool to "[...] identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" (Boutros-Ghali 1992: 11). These events symbolized UN's intentions to support the consolidation of peace agreements by more clearly intervening in the domestic affairs of member states.

Despite this 'reinvention' of root causes and structural factors, many scholars continued to evaluate peace implementation through the lens of negative peace. Much attention was, for example, given to how to prevent wartime actors, such as guerilla groups, security forces, paramilitaries, warlords, commanders and ex-combatants, from resorting to violence. Pragmatic and realist influences were clear, as emphasis was either on identifying suitable carrots and sticks, whereby peacemakers could raise the benefits of peace and simultaneously increase the costs of war, or alleviating the security dilemma plaguing the belligerents. Carrots included aspects such as elite power-sharing (e.g. Hartzell & Hoddie 2003), disarmament, demobilization and reintegration assistance to ex-combatants (DDR) (e.g. Berdal 1996; Spear 2002), autonomy for ethnic minorities (e.g. Gurr 2000) and assistants to transform rebel groups into political parties (e.g. Manning 2004; Söderberg Kovacs 2007); while sticks concerned issues such as forceful intervention by peacekeepers (Fortna 2008) and different types of sanctions (Eriksson 2010; Wallensteen & Staibano 2005). Bridging strategies of enticements and threats was the literature on spoiler management. By identifying typologies of various types of spoilers, scholars such as Stedman (1997) sought to develop guidelines for when peacemakers should co-opt respectively marginalize armed challengers. Meanwhile, to address the post-accord fears of the armed actors Walter (1997, 2002) proposed third-party security guarantees and Kaufman (1996) partition of ethnic groups.

The underlying logic of these perspectives was that without handling the men and women that controlled the means to do harm, there would be no peace. This preference for indicators measuring direct violence is lucidly captured by Stedman et al. (2002: 49) who

hold that “[i]t is not that we should avoid striving to attain good things like economic growth, equitable development, and good governance; it is that these goals form a useless standard of evaluating implementation actions that take place in a short period of time.”

Although scholars have increasingly shifted their attention from the peace implementation to the peace consolidation phase, it is still common to employ the war-no war dichotomy as an indicator for peace.² This is especially true within the quantitative literature on conflict resolution, which habitually defines peace based on specific numerical thresholds, such as less than 25 or 1,000 battle-related deaths in one year (see e.g. Doyle & Sambanis 2000; Fearon 2004; Fortna 2008; Glassmyer & Sambanis 2008; Harbom et al. 2008; Hegre 2004; Walter 2002, 2004).³ Hence, by continuing to focus on the violent behavior of the armed actors – and commonly using rational choice perspectives such as costly-signaling, cost-benefit analyses and opportunity structures – similar studies continue to be tapped in the realist tradition of the pragmatic school.

Critique of Negative Peace

There are several advantages of conceptualizing peace in the tradition of the North American pragmatic school. For analytical purposes it is vital to have indicators that distinguish between the presence or absence of large-scaled organized killings, such as civil wars. Barring such definitions it would, for example, be impossible to explain why some civil wars end in peace accords, while others do not. Another benefit is that the negative peace paradigm tends to emphasize the role of agency. By focusing on the interests and behavior of the belligerents, domestic actors are not treated as static entities, passively reacting to the intervention of outsiders – which is often the case amongst scholars working in the tradition of liberal peacebuilding. This does not, however, imply that work and research on conflict

² Whether the focus is on war termination or peacebuilding, the minimalist requirements of negative peace must obviously obtain. The point here is that a mere focus on individual, group, organizational or state security issues is not enough for peace to be consolidated.

³ For example, much of the contemporary quantitative studies bases their analysis on data and definitions for armed conflicts developed by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP): *minor armed conflicts* (a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year, but fewer than 1,000) and *war* (a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 1,000 battle-related deaths in one calendar year) (Harbom et al. 2008).

resolution should be confined to the notion of negative peace. Three main arguments can be raised against the concept.

First, recent research on post-civil war societies has proven that Galtung's assertions of the shortcomings of negative peace are largely correct. Economic hardships are, for example, a reality for citizens in most war-ridden societies. Chronic unemployment, damaged infrastructure, as well as lack of investments and savings mean that "[...] economic conditions usually worsen after civil wars end."⁴ As a consequence ordinary people seldom benefit from the so-called 'peace dividend' (Mac Ginty 2006a:114-5, 2006b: 46). These difficulties are often compounded by structural adjustment programs, whereby public employment, economic redistribution programs and patronage become less attainable for members of society. In countries such as El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Mozambique, similar economic reforms even threatened the viability of the peace process (Paris 2004: 99, 154). Furthermore, although it is customary for contemporary peace accords to include provisions of political liberalization and democratic reform, many incumbent governments renege on such commitments. Using strategies of intimidation and electoral fraud, such governments often set up 'façade democracies' that only pay lip service to democratic principles. Peace under such circumstances can be seen as what Höglund and Söderberg-Kovacs (2010) refer to as 'fearful peace,' and frequently result in the systematic oppression of opposition groups. In the Republic of Congo, for instance, President Denis Sassou-Nguesso and his Congolese Labor Party (PCT) systematically marginalized ethnic groups from southern Congo from the political process by tampering with electoral lists, indicting oppositional leaders for war crimes and arresting political opponents on trumped-up charges. This was in sharp contrast to the rhetoric of reconciliation, democratic reforms and national dialogue of the 1999 Brazzaville Accords (Themnér 2011). Thus, by merely evaluating peace through the lens negative peace, we not only neglect to see other forms of human suffering in post-conflict societies, there is also an overt risk that peacemakers freeze, rather than solve, armed conflicts (Mac Ginty 2006a: 95). Scholars have, for example, identified structural factors, such as economic grievances and political oppression, as some of the main determinates for why men and women take to arms in the first place (Regan &

⁴ The quote is taken from Woodward (2002: 184).

Norton 2005; Sambanis 2002). Seemingly peaceful societies, fraught with economic, political and identity-based injustices, can therefore easily relapse into armed conflict.

Second, equating peace with the absence of war also means that we overlook other forms of direct violence that can be just as inhibiting for the development of post-conflict societies. It is, for example, common to define peace as when the number of battle-related casualties drops below 25 deaths per year (Harbom et al. 2008). Although this may be a necessity for methodological reasons, it can give a distorted picture of local socio-political and military dynamics.⁵ This underlines the argument that societal feelings of insecurity and vulnerability are not always a direct function of the level of organized violence; in some instances even relatively small levels of violence can hold whole communities hostage. Two additional forms of direct violence that are likely to be overlooked, when applying a framework based on negative peace, are criminality and gender-based violence. Due to faulty disarmament processes, weak states and a culture of impunity, many post-war societies suffer from high rates of criminal violence (Mac Ginty 2006b: 110). In countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Guatemala, El Salvador and the Solomon Islands, violent crime has replaced political violence as the main source of insecurity (Höglund & Söderberg Kovacs 2010: 381; Mac Ginty 2006a: 125). In fact, in some countries “[...] postwar peace is more violent than the war it succeeds”, easily bringing into question the legitimacy of the new peace order being built (Mac Ginty 2006b: 101). The same is true for gender-based violence. Studies have, for example, shown that after the cessation of formal hostilities, there is frequently an increase in domestic violence against women. Hence, for some women the level of violence experienced is constant; it is just perpetrated by different assailants and takes different forms. The problem of criminality and gender-based aggression gives rise to complex moral questions. Should international resources and manpower be withdrawn from seemingly ‘peaceful’ post-war societies, even though presence of the instruments of war, death and suffering may be on the same level or even higher than during the original war?

⁵ This is clear when looking at a case such as that of the Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance’s (MFDC) rebellion in southern Senegal. During much of the 1990s, MFDC-government violence generated more than 25 battle-related deaths per year (minor armed conflict). However by the early 2000s the intensity of the fighting decreased and from 2004 and onwards it has not been categorized as a minor armed conflict. Scholars working within the confines of the negative peace tradition could for good reasons draw the conclusion that international efforts should switch from peacemaking to more general development aid. However, in reality MFDC has continued to carry out armed attacks since 2004, still controls much of the local drug trade, in effect resulting in a continued militarization of Casamance society. Taken from UCDP: Senegal. Available at http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=135®ionSelect=2-Southern_Africa (last visited 30 May 2011).

A third shortcoming is that if we merely conceive peace as the lack of war, there is little guidance for when peacemakers should cease supporting war-afflicted countries. When should, for example, the international community stop providing third-party security guarantees, withdraw peacekeepers or push for national elections rather than support the institutionalization of governmental power-sharing? Scholars working within the pragmatic school judge the efficiency of these measures by their ability to prevent the re-eruption of armed conflicts. They are, however, more vague when it comes explaining the circumstances of when such measures are no longer necessary. A common technique is to refer to the elapse of a certain time period, such as 30 months or five years (Ohlson 1998; Walter 1997). Seldom are specific reasons given for the selection of these cut-off points, but appear to be based on the assumption that as time passes post-war societies stabilize and the window of opportunity to engage in spoiler behavior decreases. In other words, even though these scholars focus on the presence or absence of war, they inadvertently refer to the necessity of some other, deeper and more entrenched empirical manifestation of peace, though without spelling out exactly what this might be constituted of.

2.2 The ‘Positive Peace’ Tradition

Before the end of the Cold War the positive peace paradigm had limited influence on the study of conflict resolution. A desire to develop measures to uproot socioeconomic and political injustices was instead spearheaded by structuralists and Marxists active in adjacent fields of social sciences, such as development studies and international relations (Richmond 2008; Wallerstein 1984). It was first with the demise of superpower rivalry and the fall of the Soviet Union that more maximalist views of peace gained a larger following. This was chiefly the result of the first UN peacebuilding missions, which not only sought to facilitate the cessation of hostilities, but also alleviate the structural conditions that made armed conflicts possible (Richmond 2007: 36, 157). By supporting an array of mechanisms such as DDR, constitutional, judicial and market reforms, poverty reduction, and anti-corruption drives, as well as organizing elections and temporarily taking over administrative control, UN and other international agencies hoped to build sustainable societies less susceptible to mass violence. Behind these interventions was a belief that “[p]eace could be constructed by those who had the material resources and normative legitimacy” (Richmond 2008: 36). How close

UN's vision of peace was to that of the "European structuralists" is apparent from the following statement of the President of the Security Council in February 2001 (Call 2008a: 181):

"These actions [peacebuilding] should focus on fostering sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and inequalities, transparent and accountable governance, the promotion of democracy, respect of human rights and rule of law and the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence."

Seeking to assess the efficiency of peacebuilding missions, there was an upsurge in scholarly works in the 1990s analyzing post-conflict societies such as Nicaragua, Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Guatemala (Paris 2004: 3-4, Barnett: 88). Having a general positive view of international actors' ability to eradicate the root causes of conflict, many researchers began to conceptualize peace along the lines of UN (see, e.g., Cockell 2000; Miall et al. 1999: 56-7; Paris 2004). Paris, for example, held that:

"[...] peacebuilding agencies [...] should at the very least: 1) not cause fighting to resume; 2) not exacerbate preexisting conditions that previously led to civil violence within the host state; and 3) not create new conditions within the host state that are likely to spark a resurgence of fighting" (Paris 2004: 57).

The trend towards a deeper and broader understanding of peace also gained impetus from the appearance of new concepts and principles, such as Human Security and Responsibility to Protect, which sought to improve the security and welfare of citizens.⁶ The normative discourses on human security and the responsibility to protect were in line with the wider constructivist trend in the study of international relations that sought to demystify the realist notion of military security as something unique. The widened security agenda of the Copenhagen School, for instance, identified how other sectors, such as health, gender

⁶ The former was, for example, an attempt by UNDP to build up a battery of indicators that could assist policymakers to think of security in new terms—economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security—and subsequently develop strategies for how to attain these social goods (Paris 2001; UNDP 1994). Meanwhile, spearheaded by the Canadian government and African Union (AU), the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1674 in 2006, which committed member states to intervene in countries that fail to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

relations and the environment, could also be securitized (Buzan et al. 1998). Thus, peace could also be defined in line with these criteria and not only through the lens of negative peace.

Since 2000, some of the strongest proponents of a broader and more holistic vision of peace have come from critical theorists, who have questioned the ability of contemporary peacebuilding missions – commonly referred to as ‘liberal peacebuilding’ – to actually solve the root causes of conflicts (see, e.g., Chandler 2010; Duffield 2007; Mac Ginty 2006a; Richmond 2007 & 2008). Based on experiences from countries such as Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Timor-Leste, they argue that international interventions to support peace constitute a western-liberal project, which takes little consideration of local needs and interests. Rather than engaging in dialogue with local actors for how to build peace from the bottom-up, peacebuilders construct ‘western’ state institutions that are often seen as illegitimate by domestic audiences. As a consequence they inadvertently reinforce inequalities and social tensions, reproducing oppressive structures both within post-conflict societies and between countries. In its most hybrid form, peacemakers set up ‘neo-trusteeships’, thus depriving local communities of the right to self-determination.

By analyzing the discourses of the western-liberal notion of peace critical scholars stress that the latter is not something given, but a social construction. There is thereby room for alternative visions of peace. MacGinty (2006a), for example, argues that this can come about if peacemaking takes a more problem-solving approach, whereby broader segments of the population – not just local elites, wartime actors and international actors – are included into the peace process. For this reason, peace should be envisioned in a much broader sense: “[f]acilitation of non-exploitative, sustainable and inclusive social relationships free from direct and indirect violence and the threat of violence” (Mac Ginty 2006a: 24). In essence peace is thereby seen as an ‘emancipatory’ process that “[...] reflects the interests, identities, and needs of all actors, state and non-state, and aims at the creation of a discursive framework of mutual accommodation and social justice which recognizes difference” (Richmond 2008: 109). Even if this version of peacebuilding radically differs from the one initiated in the early 1990s, essentially a top-down approach, its ultimate objective is fairly similar to the one propagated by the UN and Roland Paris; a maximalist vision of peace reaching far beyond the absence of war.

Critique of Positive Peace

The trend towards a more holistic vision of peace, through the work of UN, liberal peacebuilders and critical theorists, has made important contributions to the field of conflict resolution. By showing that direct as well as indirect forms of violence are commonplace in what is usually referred to as ‘peaceful’ societies, researchers within the maximalist tradition have shown that conflict resolution should not end with the cessation of hostilities and demobilization of warring factions. Peace should, in this sense, be seen as a process that we continuously invest in, rather than as a fixed end-point. Yet, there are also problems associated with defining peace in this broader, structural sense.

First, eradicating structural deficiencies, such as poverty, illiteracy and poor health, is a long-term project that often takes several generations to attain. In the Republic of Congo, for example, there was no improvement in life expectancy between 1999, which marked the end of the bloody civil war (1997-99), and 2009.⁷ Lacking capital and well-functioning infrastructure, as well as being constrained by structural adjustment programs, means that many war-torn countries simply do not have the capacity to invest the necessary resources to address structural deficiencies such as these. Due to restricted budgets and pressure to intervene in new crises areas, it is difficult for donors to compensate for a lack of domestic investments with international funding. This entails that it is often unrealistic to expect national and international actors alike to be able to address the root causes of conflicts until long after the cessation of hostilities. Hence, beyond pointing out the necessity of having a more holistic vision of peace, which seeks to ensure the utmost degree of security and well-being for citizens of post-civil war countries, the maximalist paradigm does not provide any mid-term benchmarks for how to move towards positive peace. In other words, given that there is no civil war, and it takes several generations until structural forms of violence are reduced to acceptable levels, how do we know if peacemakers are on the right track at any given point, five or ten or more years after the event of negative peace?

Second, positive peace has become a catch-all concept which practitioners and researchers alike fill with all the desirable social goods that we hope to attain, but are unable

⁷ In both years the life expectancy in the Republic of Congo was approximately 54 years. World Bank: Life expectancy at birth, total (years). Available at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN/countries/CG?display=graph> (last visited 30 May 2011).

to attain in the short run. Also, by broadening the meaning of the concept of peace there is an imminent risk of ‘conceptual stretching’; although it appears that we are capturing more dimensions of peace, we may in fact be “[...] saying less in a far less precise manner” (Sartori 1970: 1035). This quandary was admitted to by Schmid (1968: 223) who already at that time observed that positive peace had become “[...] an umbrella concept, devoid of meaning of its own, which people fill with their own subjective values.” The problematic nature of the term positive peace becomes all the more clear when trying to implement it. For instance, in order to prevent xenophobia and ethnic violence in post-conflict societies, it may be necessary to censor local media sources. However, such tactics obviously undermines other social goods, such as freedom of speech. Hence, working with one aspect of positive peace, may actually undermine efforts done in other areas. More generally, the stated goals of peacebuilding, such as security, democracy, development, good governance, stability, justice and reconciliation are often at odds with each other, making it difficult to assess when positive peace has been attained on an overall, aggregated level.

A final shortcoming concerns the limited role that—in practice though not in rhetoric—is oftentimes accorded to local agency and ownership within the positive peace tradition. This is especially true for policymakers and more liberal-oriented peacebuilders. Not only are local communities in practice seen as, or treated as, passive receivers of economic aid according to structural conditions defined by international agencies, it is also assumed that it is the latter which possess the expertise necessary to craft efficient state institutions.⁸ Even seemingly emancipatory concepts such as human security, treat citizens as static entities rather than as local actors which peacebuilders should actively engage with. Such approaches constitute a serious impediment, as it is not possible to gain a good understanding of whether a society is at ‘risk’ by merely referring to structures; it is people that either award or withhold legitimacy to a peace process, not structures, just as men and women—and not structures—make war. Richmond (2008: 13) has lucidly described this bias for structure in the following manner:

⁸ On the other hand, a problem often faced by peacebuilders is to find the ‘right’ actors—organizations, authorities or individuals—with which it is most fruitful to cooperate in order to achieve stated, common goals.

“[t]he role and agency of individuals and societies in the creation of peace tends to be less valued, the focus instead being on grand scale political, military, social and constitutional peace projects undertaken beyond the ken and capacity of the individual.”

3. Searching for a New Concept

Hence, from the 1960s up until today, definitions of peace have oscillated between two extreme forms – negative and positive peace. Although these two versions fulfill a purpose by providing policymakers and researchers with min-max criteria for successful conflict resolution, they are for practical, and some would argue also ethical, reasons unsatisfactory. To make peacebuilding more efficient it is instead necessary to develop a different conception of peace that goes beyond the mere absence of war, but which at the same time is more attainable and realistic, at least in the mid-term, than the lofty aspirations of the maximalist paradigm.

In the contemporary literature on conflict resolution and peacebuilding it is possible to identify an embryo of such an alternative definition.⁹ These generally equate peace with the establishment of functioning state institutions that can mitigate the risk of armed conflicts. Call (2008a: 173), for example, holds that peacebuilding should be seen as successful when there is no relapse into large-scaled organized violence and when there are “[...] political and institutional elements that minimally indicate a state capacity for resolving social conflicts peaceably.”¹⁰ Barnett (2006), on the other hand, favors what he calls a ‘republican peace;’ that is, post-war societies which possess local institutions based on elements of deliberation, representation and constitutionalism. Such institutions do not necessarily have to be tapped in the western-liberal tradition, but can take many different forms, as long as they contain the three above-mentioned components. Meanwhile, scholars such as Kahler (2009) talk of relaxing the strict criterions for successful peacebuilding by focusing on ‘good enough governance.’ He (2009: 299) envisions this as “[p]olitical institutions that are both inclusive—avoiding political divisions that could lead to violent conflict—and open to future political change.” A somewhat different approach is taken by Doyle and Sambanis (2006). One of the criterions they use for measuring successful

⁹ Many of these scholars are working within what is sometimes referred to as the literature on ‘statebuilding’. For a good overview of this literature, see Krasner (2004) and Paris & Sisk (2009).

¹⁰ Similar thoughts have been developed by Call & Cousens (2008).

peacebuilding is the presence of “participatory peace,” defined as “a minimum level of political openness” (excluding those regimes that are the most authoritarian) (Doyle & Sambanis 2006: 18, 73). Achieving participatory peace ensures, according to them, that future conflicts will be negotiated in accordance to a set of constitutionally defined, or otherwise previously agreed upon, rules.

We believe that these alternative conceptions of peace constitute a step in the right direction. In all civil wars, irrespectively if they concern control over the state apparatus or a specific territory (irredentism), governance is at the heart of the matter. As such, any mid-term definitions of peace need to take into account aspects related to the state and the functioning of the institutions that holders of state power use to steer society in the direction they want. There are, despite this, some limitations associated with similar visions of peace. First, institutions in themselves mean little. They may represent no more than a number of official buildings, with little content, limited budgets and low infrastructural capacity, not to mention ‘ghost’ workers that are on the payroll without doing any actual work. To give ‘institutional’ forms of peace meaning, it would therefore be necessary to bring their capacity to acquire resources and deliver public goods into the equation. Such adjustment might risk to render the concept useless, as it could come close to maximalist versions of positive peace. An alternative is, of course, to delimit institutional capacity to the aptitude to regulate future conflicts non-violently, as is suggested by Call and Doyle/Sambanis. This would, however, generate a new set of problems, as institutional capacity is more or less equated with the presence or absence of armed conflict, in other words with negative peace. A second shortcoming of strictly institutional approaches to peace is that they, just as many from the maximalist paradigm, overlook the centrality of agency. Little is thus said about local actors’ interests and identities, and how they interact with each other and with international actors within and outside the confines of different institutions.

4. Theoretical Grounding of ‘Strong Peace’

Instead of the institutional approaches discussed above, we suggest the notion of *Strong Peace*. Rather than focusing on institutions in the structural sense, strong peace represents what Holsti (1996) refers to as the *vertical* and *horizontal legitimacy* of the state, its constituent organs and groups of citizens. According to Holsti, it is imperative to analyze these two factors

since low legitimacy scores are two of the main determinants of whether countries end up in civil war. With no or limited vertical and horizontal legitimacy, states do not have sufficient strength – that is “[...] the capacity [...] to command loyalty – the right to rule – to extract the resources necessary to rule and provide services, to maintain the essential element of sovereignty, a monopoly over the legitimate use of force within defined territorial limits, and to operate within the context of a consensus-based political community” – to prevent armed mobilization (Holsti 1996: 82-3). As such legitimacy becomes a marker, indicating if states are at ‘risk.’

More specifically, Holsti (1996: 84) describes vertical legitimacy as “[...] authority, consent and loyalty to the idea(s) of the state and its institutions,” which touches upon questions such as whether the population believes that state bodies have the right to legislate and implement laws and regulations that affect them. If not, parts of the population may withdraw their loyalty to the state, at worst challenging it with arms. The latter scenario is, according to Holsti (1996: 85), especially likely in situations when there is no distinction between the state (as a set of institutions) and the government (as a ruling party/conglomerate of elites), whereby the former becomes the personal domain of one or a group of individuals. Meanwhile, horizontal legitimacy “[...] refers to the nature of the community over which formal rule is exercised” and “[...] the attitudes and practices of individuals and groups within the state toward each other and ultimately to the state that encompasses them” (Holsti 1996: 87). Hence horizontal legitimacy can be seen as perceptions amongst the populace and ruling elite about who is to be included in the demos. Ultimately this concerns processes of ‘in’ and ‘out’ group, whereby social groups award negative and positive attributes to themselves and ‘others’ (Tajfel 1974). At worst this can generate xenophobia attitudes that may not only trigger ethnic rebellions and riots, but also genocide, as was the case in Rwanda in 1994 (Gurr 2000). Since the state is the focal point and main source of grievance in most civil wars – either because the belligerents fight over the nature and composition of its institutions or over its boundaries – it is reasonable to conceptualize mid-term visions of peace in terms of popular legitimacy. To sum up the argument, vertical legitimacy is about responsible authority and voluntary subordination, horizontal legitimacy is about mutual acceptance and tolerance at elite and mass levels. Without improving the relationship between the state and its citizens, as well as between

different groups in society, it is difficult to perceive how peace can be consolidated in the long term.

There are three reasons for why strong peace, understood as degree of vertical and horizontal legitimacy, has the potential to function as a stepping stone for peacemakers and peacebuilders as they go from the short-term objective of preventing old wars from re-erupting towards the ultimate goal of attaining some degree of positive peace. First, just as the institutional approaches to peace, strong peace focuses on governance. However, it does so in a more dynamic and holistic manner. By defining strong peace in terms of legitimacy, rather than the mere presence of a certain type of institutions, it is about agency, rather than structures. This allows us to ask questions such as whether citizens award loyalty to the new state being built and if there are any radical, racist or extremist discourses in society. As previously discussed, capturing the sentiments of the populace should constitute better indicators for whether war-torn societies are at risk. It is, however, crucial that agency has a wider scope than in the minimalist version of peace, which tends to focus on elites and other wartime actors. Ten, fifteen years after the cessation of hostilities there may be other actors challenging the status-quo: new generation of youths, vigilante groups or marginalized ethnic minorities that did not take part in the previous war. By focusing on legitimacy, it is also possible to avoid the trap of western-liberal bias; rather than assuming that all people desire a given set of institutions, strong peace does not *a priori* ascribe which types of state or systems of governance that local communities award their loyalty to.

Second, strong peace has higher ambitions than negative peace, but it aims at being a more realistic benchmark in the mid-term than its positive equivalent. Ensuring horizontal and vertical legitimacy necessitates more than the mere absence of war. It may take several years before individuals who have suffered at the hands of security forces or ethnic militias are able to trust state institutions and members of other ethnic groups.¹¹ This does not, however, mean that horizontal and vertical legitimacy are unattainable social goods. The reason for this is that they are not dichotomous variables – either existing or not existing – but are rather positioned on a continuum; moving between higher and lower levels of legitimacy (Holsti 1996: 90-1). Strong peace is thus operationalized as a *relative improvement* in vertical and horizontal legitimacy of a given state, allowing for a context-sensitive approach

¹¹ In Bosnia-Herzegovina, for instance, studies have shown that ten years after the end of the civil war, reconciliatory attitudes between Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs had not improved (Kostic 2007).

to conflict resolution. This is crucial: countries will differ in the legitimacy that citizens award to its institutions directly after the cessation of hostilities. Increasing the loyalty towards the state and acceptance between groups also promises to improve our chances to move towards positive peace.

A third and final advantage of employing the concept of strong peace is that it is easy to delimit and apply to different empirical settings without risking ‘conceptual stretching’. Vertical legitimacy can, for instance, be measured by asking different categories of individuals (all the citizens of a state, certain age-groups, men/women, ex-combatants or internally displaced persons) how they perceive the state and its institutions, while horizontal legitimacy can be assessed by investigating attitudes and stereotypes that members of different groups (such as ethnic and religious communities, or political factions) have toward each other. To capture how such groupings award or withhold legitimacy, it is possible to utilize an array of technique—in addition to statistical and small-n comparative analysis—ranging from large-N surveys, focus group interviews, and discourse analyses of traditional (newspapers, TV, radio) and social media (facebook, blogs, twitters). Here it is possible to draw inspiration from a number of scholars that, even though they are not working with legitimacy, employ similar techniques to capture the micro-dynamics of peace, such as Humphreys & Weinstein (2007), Blattman (2009) (surveys on ex-combatant reintegration), Kostic (2007) (surveys on inter-ethnic reconciliation) and Söderström (forthcoming 2011a) (focus groups on former fighters’ democratic attitudes).

5. Conceptualizing and Measuring ‘Strong Peace’

NB: Sections 5 and 6 of this paper are under elaboration and a handout outlining the contents will be provided to panelists and others that attend this panel session.

The argument offered sofar in this article goes as follows:

There are myriad ways of conceptualizing positive peace from an academic perspective. There is a plethora of objectives listed in the academic, policy making and practitioner literature on peacebuilding. This adds up to unrealistic wishlists and ‘musts’ and an endless list of objectives (security, democracy, development, good governance, justice, stability, human rights, reconciliation, etc) with an ensuing and even more huge list of potential

explanatory variables to combine in the causation of ‘positive peace’.¹² This is unsatisfactory and calls for a more realistic mid-term conceptualization, here referred to as ‘strong peace’.

The continuation of the reasoning/argument thus goes like this:

This, in turn, calls for the identification of the most crucial dimensions of the dependent variable (vertical and horizontal legitimacy as motivated in section 4 above) as well as of the independent variables. Our reasons for choosing and zooming in on security, governance and resources as the key explanatory variables that in some form of combination (causal mechanism[s]) generate strong peace are based in three arguments. First, they are intuitively obvious and as such represent what is sometimes referred to a ‘grounded theory’. Second, the notion of legitimacy is clearly linked to the state’s willingness and ability to provide various collective goods to citizens in exchange for loyalty, taxes, etc. This is one basis of Buzan’s (1991) reasoning on the three pillars of the state and their links to security, and these concepts motivated Holsti (1996), in turn, to link the pillars of the state specifically to his own notions of vertical and horizontal legitimacy. Third, as argued frequently above, we want to focus also on agency, not just on structural and contextual factors. To expand a bit more on these three points and how they combine: What do leaders do with the resources at their disposal—no matter how meager these resources may be—and why? Do they try to create conditions for legitimate rule and strong peace? Do they seek personal enrichment? What are the causal mechanisms at work in these processes? The analytical framework suggested here holds potential factors, mechanisms and interactions between security, governance and resources in the causation of war and peace. Whether driven by need, greed, creed or any other ambition, it asks questions about how actors utilise political systems/systems of governance and the externally and internally generated resources available to them to pursue various policies and objectives, and the bearing this has on either conflict causation or conflict prevention/resolution/strong peace.

In sum, the matrix below uses Buzan/Holsti’s three pillars, three key explanatory variables and measurables that can help us develop research, policy and political practice

¹² For recent global literature on this, see for example Call 2008b, Chetail 2009, Coletta 2008, Darby & Mac Ginty 2008, Dayton & Kriesberg 2009, Junne & Verkoren 2005, Mac Ginty & Williams 2009, Paris & Sisk 2009. Though all the listed works also deal with African examples, there is also a literature specifically dealing with the African context, including Francis 2008, Kotzé & Solomon 2008, Nhema & Zeleza 2008, Sandbrook 2000, van Wyk 2007.

towards the goal of (realistic and researchable) *Strong Peace in Weak States*. In the nine squares in the matrix are placed some suggested observable indicators/operationalisations.

<i>3 pillars Key indep. variables</i>	Security	Governance	Resources
Idea of the state			
The states's physical basis			
The state's institutional expression			

The text will elaborate on the nine cells of the matrix, discussing how the suggested operationalizations may serve to illustrate the causal impact of the three explanatory variables security, governance and resources on the dependent variable ‘strong peace’, measured as degree of vertical and horizontal legitimacy as proposed by Holsti. In other words, this matrix tries to capture, in a very preliminary way, our ambition to introduce ‘Strong Peace’, with a particular reference to post-conflict weak states in Africa, as a relevant, realistic and researchable concept for the mid-term perspective.

6. By Way of Conclusion

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