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19/12/25

In Search of Peace: from the loss of Human Rights and Democracy

In this paper, I will explore how structural power leads to the loss of Human Rights, and Democracy using Galtung's theory of peace and democracy, and Gill & Thomson holistic peace framework, with case studies of the special rapporteur to the UN, to better understand its dynamics.

Introduction and Background

Peace is good, Gill and Thomson says in their introduction to *Understanding Peace Holistically: From the Spiritual to the Political* and millions of people around the globe agree that is so, as they march and demonstrate using all manner of non-violent approaches to let their leaders know. (Gill and Thompson, 2019, p.15).

However most if not all of the western political leadership are unable to hear nor able to act, or to consider the impact of what they do on their constituents, discarding the many for the few.

The Stop the War coalition founded in the UK in 2001 when the US prepared for war against Afghanistan and then in the lead up to the 2003 Iraq invasion. For the past 25 years then, millions in the UK and abroad continue to call for Peace.

Recently in November 2025 with the launch of a new socialist, 'Your Party' conference, along with Jeremy Corbyn), Zarah Sultana borrowed a well-known Gramsci quote, *'The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters...* (Sultana, 2025).

Fraser writing in 2019 borrows and modifies Gramsci's quote for the title of her book, *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born*; to articulate and confirm the old world that is dying reflects the collapse of the progressive neoliberalism with nothing to replace it. (Fraser, N. 2019).

"Our political crisis, if that's what it is, is not just American, but global. What makes that claim plausible is that, notwithstanding their differences, all these phenomena share a common feature. All involves a dramatic weakening, if not a simple breakdown of the authority of the established political classes and parties. It is as if masses of people throughout the world have stopped believing in the reigning common sense that has underpinned political domination for the last several decades. It is as if they have lost confidence in the bona fides of the elites and were searching for new ideologies,

organizations, and leadership. Given the scale of the breakdown, it's unlikely that this is a coincidence.” (Fraser, N. 2019, p8).

Almost prophetic, it stands to reason that this global political crisis did not happen over night but since that writing the decline of the old empire is speeding up at an alarming rate. As Fraser intimates we are in between the old and the new which is why *‘now is the time of monsters’* is a chilling reminder of where we are now.

Global erosion of the UN and Human Rights

THE UN Charter established in 1945 lays the foundation for United Nations. The main bodies are: The General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the UN Secretariat.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) created between 1946 and 1948 was officially adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948 as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

During that same time period, UN resolution 181 was passed on 29, November 1947 proposing the Partition Plan for Palestine allocating about 56% of the land to the Jewish state and 42% to the Arab state without any consultation with the Palestinians. (UN General Assembly Resolution 181 Partition Plan, 1947, p10)

Israel has yet to agree its boundaries *‘more than 75 years after Israel declared statehood’* reads the headline of a BBC article (BBC 2023).

Clean Break policy paper in 1996 announced plans for Greater Israel as Netanyahu’s new government laid out its plan. *‘Our claim to the land—to which we have clung for hope for 2000 years—is legitimate and noble’* (Feith, D. 2009)

In December 1990, UN Resolution 45130 passed calling for the right of self determination. Titled the *“Importance of the universal realization of the right of peoples to self-determination and of the speedy granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples for the effective guarantee and observance of human rights”* (UN Resolution 45130, 1990, p1)

Since then hundreds of resolutions have passed that Israel has not fully implemented and as well the US has vetoed dozens of such critical resolutions regarding Palestine. To maintain its integrity the UN is within its

rights to suspend and even expel any country that violates its aims and purpose for freedom, justice and peace. (UN Charter, 1945)

Palestine - Occupied Territory

Francesca Albanese, the special rapporteur, appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2022 to follow and report on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In the first of three reports she recommends that the UN:

‘Within the General Assembly, develop a plan to end the unlawful and unsustainable status quo constituting the root cause of the latest escalation, which ultimately culminated in the Gaza genocide, including through the reconstitution of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid to comprehensively address the situation in Palestine, and stand ready to implement diplomatic, economic and political measures provided under the United Nations Charter in case of non-compliance by Israel’ (Albanese, F. 2024, p25).

Albanese used the 1948 UN Genocide Convention, to define genocide *under international law* as acts committed with *intent to destroy a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, in whole or in part*, including killing, causing harm, preventing births, or forcibly transferring children. Those deemed as *‘committing genocide or any of the other acts enumerated in article III shall be punished, whether they are constitutionally responsible rulers, public officials or private individuals.’* (UN Genocide Convention, 1948).

Her second report reminds *all States of their legal obligation to act on their due diligence duties given the clearly serious risk of continuous breach of the Genocide Convention and Geneva Conventions, and urges States to consider and reach an urgent public determination as to what levers and tools each State has at its disposal to ameliorate that risk, whether acting alone or with other States, including at the United Nations; and to explain to the public and the international community the steps which it has taken and why.* (Albanese, F. 2024, p31).

In the 3rd report Albanese in the introduction writes:

*“Colonial endeavours and associated genocides have historically been driven and enabled by the corporate sector, ¹ Commercial interests have contributed to the dispossession of **Indigenous** people of their lands²— a mode of domination known as “colonial racial capitalism”.³ The same is true of Israeli colonization of Palestinian lands,⁴ its expansion into the occupied Palestinian territory and its institutionalization of a regime of settler-colonial*

apartheid.⁵ After denying Palestinian self-determination for decades, Israel is now imperilling the very existence of the Palestinian people in Palestine". (Albanese, F. 2025, p2).

And concludes with:

The present report is written at the cusp of a profound and tumultuous transformation. Globally witnessed atrocities require urgent accountability and justice, which demand diplomatic, economic and legal action against those who have maintained and profited from an economy of occupation turned genocidal. What comes next depends on everyone. (Albanese, F. 2025)

In her last two reports Albanese calls on the UN to act on the The ICJ Advisory Opinion January 2024

And the 19 July 2024 that ruled that Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territory unlawful

The ICJ issued arrest warrants for Israel and Hamas on the 20 May 2024.

Neither the US, UK and most western democracies have accepted these rulings and in fact the US has sanctioned the ICJ, and Francesca Albanese for their work to address the war on the Palestinian people.

At this critical juncture then, its important to search for answers to understand what is happening and look for ways to transcend this moment.

Peace by Peaceful Means

Turning to Galtung, In *Peace by Peaceful means*, (2019) he explores various dimensions of peace and violence, to transform conflicts nonviolently and creatively. It is a comprehensive overview of peace studies, emphasising a deep understanding of cultural, structural, and direct violence, as well as the underlying factors that contribute to peace. Arguing that peace cannot simply be defined as the absence of violence but instead, must include the active promotion of positive peace, which involves the presence of justice, equity, and harmony.

Structural Power: Defining Violence

The concept of violence is categorised into three main types: direct, structural, and cultural violence. Each type has unique characteristics and implications for peace.

Direct Violence is the most visible form, often associated with physical harm or aggression. This type of violence is where we most focus on as typically perpetrated by individuals or groups with clear intentions to inflict harm. But it is essential to recognize that direct violence often stems from deeper structural and cultural issues.

Structural Violence refers to the systemic inequalities and injustices is often invisible as its embedded within societal structures. This form of violence operates through established norms and institutions that perpetuate oppression and exploitation. Understanding structural violence is crucial for addressing the root causes of conflict.

Cultural Violence legitimizes both direct and structural violence through societal norms, beliefs, and ideologies. It manifests in various forms, including language, art, religion, and education, shaping perceptions of what is considered acceptable or normal behavior.

The text argues for the importance of addressing structural inequalities to create a more just and peaceful society. (Galtung, J. 2019)

There are four realms of power: cultural, economic, military, and political. And they all impact on each other (Galtung, J. 2019, p4)

Democracy: The Paradox of Democratic Belligerence

Democracy defined is a system of government where rights and responsibility of the individual, to engage and contribute is through elections.

Galtung's explores 'democracy' in relation to peace, questioning the assumption that democracies are inherently peaceful but engage in belligerent actions, often justified by national interests. (Galtung, J. 1996)

That democracies can be belligerent, refers to the '*engagement in war and war-like acts*'.

One example of this is Kemi Badenoch, conservative leader speaking to Sky News, Trevor Phillips on 25, May 2025 and it sounds as though Britain still thinks itself as an empire. She said that:

"Israel is fighting a proxy war on behalf of the UK just like Ukraine is on behalf of the west of Western Europe against Russia." (Badenoch, K 2025)

Neither the UK nor other western democracies voted for either so one can only conclude as Fraser had earlier that we are in the midst of a global

political crisis that has been growing over a long period of time and now deteriorating.

Galtung gives several examples of instances of belligerent democracies:

“And yet the USA, for instance, has used arms abroad more than 200 times (averaging about once per year) – each time supposedly against a strong isolationist and pacifist inclination.... (Galtung 1996, p56).

“War activities have often been referred to by other names, such as ‘punitive expeditions’ (a British tradition for at least two centuries”.... (Galtung 1996, p56).

“Exploring this brings us to a rather disturbing aspect of the track records of the democracies of Northern America and Western Europe (including Australia/New Zealand): with very few exceptions they all engaged for centuries in such major forms of international violence as slavery and colonialism.. But that underscores the same point: what the democracies did (the USA, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands) was similar, bordering on the identical, differences being minor” (Galtung 1996, p56).

After World War II the countries most frequently engaging in war have been the USA, the UK, France and Israel; all of them democracies. Most countries in the ‘US-led coalition’ against Iraq in the Gulf War were democracies.... Democracy is indeed compatible with large-scale exercises of violence – (Galtung 1996, p57).

There is a saying in the US, *No matter who you vote for, you always wind up getting John McCain*, is a way of saying that it doesn't matter who you vote for in US Presidential elections you will always get 'John McCain' who was known to be quite hawkish on foreign policy. It expresses a frustration that although the people vote for a president (which ever political party) that promises peace, once in office they continue on the forever wars track.

Galtung suggests why there is this compunction for war.

It seems we focus more on the readiness to engage in war rather than ‘peace by peaceful means’, to preserve the status quo rather than peace. (Galtung 1996, p67).

Ideology and religion are the most common usage for war as well as *Patriarchy, the state system with its monopoly on violence, and the super-state or superpower system with the ultimate monopoly of the hegemon.* (Galtung 1996, p8).

Understanding Peace

In chapter one, *Gill and Thomson* writes that peace has intrinsic value. *“That is, peace is essential and natural in its own right, not only for the individual striving for inner peace but also in relationships, community and in socio-political, economic structures.”* (Gill and Thompson, 2019, p.24).

They suggest that we view ‘peace’ not so much as a noun or a verb but rather as an adjective or adverb. In this way peace is no longer abstract, but becomes concrete, *a set of qualities*. (Gill and Thompson, 2019, p.24).

Now ‘peace is not just intrinsic, it is also instrumental, *“because it facilitates or leads to wellbeing.*’ (Gill and Thompson, 2019, p.24).

Very powerfully, Gill and Thomson suggests that *well-being requires that a person perceives her life as having primary value. This is a fundamental form of self respect, which does not depend on what one does or has done. It is independent of achievement.* (Gill and Thompson, 2019, p.26).

This is such a timely reminder as unfortunately we are preoccupied with the idea that to have intrinsic value we must be successful at what we do. Instead we are reminded that it is the “I” that has intrinsic value.

No Just War

Gill and Thomson in chapter nine, *Peacefulness In Global Political Systems* interrogates the just war theory which is a doctrine referred to as a tradition of military ethics that aims to ensure that a war is morally justifiable through a series of criteria, all of which must be met for a war to be considered just.

They argue that war is not acceptable on any level because as described in chapter one and two, the individual I the intrinsic I, the person that I am will ultimately dehumanized in war, whether I give consent to fight or not is irrelevant as we're intrinsic peaceful beings, it would not be a peaceful experience and everyone involved directly or indirectly will suffer in terms of their wellbeing and traumatized, and pass on those traumas generationally.

And the second point they make is that, in war we're treated as objects. And they give an example of Napoleon saying that he could lose 30,000 soldiers a month. so people are calculated and identified in numbers and are therefore dehumanized and treated as objects... (Gill and Thompson, 2019).

So it presents a justifiable means of war with justice being an objective of armed conflict. So opponents of the war theory are pacifists proposing that there has never been nor can there ever be a justifiable basis for war, or they may be more inclined towards a more permissive nationalist standard, posing that a war need only to serve a nation's interest to be justifiable. In many

cases, philosophers state that individuals do not need to be plagued by a guilty conscience if they're required to fight. And a few philosophers ennoble the virtues of the soldier while they also declare their apprehensions for war itself. A few, such as Rousseau, argue for insurrection against oppressive rule. So this tradition has been passed, have been applied, in various wars across the ages. This tradition also consider the writings of various philosophers and lawyers through history, and examines both their philosophical vision of war, ethical limits. In the first- 21st century there has been significant debate between traditional just war theorists who largely support the existing law of order and develop arguments to support it, and revisionists who reject many traditional assumptions, although not necessarily advocating a change in the law.

Literature Review - Galtung and Gill & Thompson

Key Similarities

There is much similarity and between Galtung and Gill and Thomson's view of peace and violence.

First they both recognise that a narrow view of peace is insufficient. *'peace isn't even merely the absence of war and violence Because peace also has positive attributes'* (Gill and Thompson, 2019, p13).

Choose Health as a Starting point

Second they both choose as a starting point to define and understand peace in relation to health. Galtung with health/disease and Gill and Thompson with health/healthy.

"Peace studies are so similar to health studies that the triangle diagnosis prognosis-therapy can be applied. There is the common idea of a system (of actors, of cells), of well-states and ill-states. The word-pairs 'health/disease' from health studies and 'peace/violence' from peace studies can be seen as specifications of these more general labels" (Galtung 1996, p9).

No doubt peace studies, like health studies, is based on a steep gradient between violence and peace, disease and health; yet it should be open to the yin/yang nature of these contradictions. (Galtung 1996, p20).

Gill and Thomson refer to Aristotle use of distinguishing between health and healthy to distinguish between peace and peaceful. *"Aristotle distinguishes between primary and secondary uses of the word 'healthy'. He argues that the primary sense of 'healthy' concerns having a body in excellent functioning shape; other uses are derivative."* (Gill and Thompson, 2019, p14).

Structural Roots of Violence

Both *recognise and address violence embedded in social systems*

Differences

Galtung focuses on violence while Gil & Thompson develops intrinsic wholeness and relational harmony

Gil & Thompson specifically speak to the issue of coloniality, and capitalism, while Galtung's framework speaks to domination and Imperialism.

Economy

Galtung doesn't care much for economists but I do appreciate Gill and Thomson's acknowledgement of Micheal Hudson and Thomas Picketty. I have been fascinated with Hudson ever since he talked about Debt Jubilees in the past which is very powerful particularly how debt both individually and countries are spiralling out of control. and as both of them including Fraser talk about the financialization of western economies while deindustrialising western societies are struggling which China and other Asian countries are growing. Picketty has been able to do research on France and the UK going back very far think to the time of the French Revolution so is able to come up with very good data.

Media

The media has a responsibility to educate and inform not just to entertain and promote one point of view.

The role of a democratic media to my mind reports on the different sides of an issue, to bring people together for ideas, dialogue discussion and debate so that the viewers can learn, and think for themselves and decide what is true for them.

Along with the launch of the new socialist 'Your Party', the Green Party, has recently blossomed to over 100,000 under new leadership. Zack Polanski talks about 'affordability' and though he is given some air time, its rare. it is mostly to humiliate and ridicule.

Jeffrey Sachs speaking at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum 2025 in April's Live Debate, said that Trump's signing of several executive orders aimed at boosting the U.S. coal industry policy to bring back coal was '**wilful destruction of well-being.**'

Jeffrey Sachs calls for diplomacy, dialogue, negotiations, and all strategies to avoid war. He is a calming, reassuring voice for peace, an American economist and public policy analyst and not visible in the US, UK mainstream media.

These stories rarely make it into mainstream news though they give voice to many thousands of peoples crying out for peace and justice. They've marched through the Iraq war, the environmental activist group, Just Stop Oil protests, enduring years of austerity, corruption and forever wars and Palestinian Action.

Peace - A Way forward?

We bear witness to a trauma that will be with us for decades to come particularly for the Palestinians but also the Israelis and many others around the world.

What's missing is a wholesome vision that both Galtung and Gill and Thomson addresses and it is vital for our wellbeing as we know that where there is no vision, the people will perish.

Still there is knowledge and wisdom all around us that can help us if we are willing. Indigenous knowledge still have connections with the land and with each other that can help to light the way.

So what can we do... the first step we'd have to do is with education that has a global perspective, but a local connection. We need to focus on ideas of belonging, not on categories of hierarchy.

We need to remember that we all have intrinsic value. And as such, our education can focus on community, listening, dialogue and discussions.

So there's work to be done. We have to decolonize the mind, decolonize the soul, and transform. We have to transform in this moment, and peace building is that transformation. So there's an opportunity that we're in right now. But, it's very difficult to see.

And we don't want to see where we're headed, but we have these little green shoots and this needs to be our daily task to get back our indigenous wisdom and how we care for our environment and care for each other.

CONCLUSION

As Frasier identified, there's been a total complete global breakdown economically and in terms of empire.

This includes institutions such as UN is unable after three years to reach a peaceful solution. Similarly the International Court of Justice (ICJ) after a long delay finally issued arrest warrants, but no country has yet agreed that they would take responsibility.

Many countries signed up and are obligated under the Geneva Convention on genocide but are reluctant.

Still countries such as South Africa and a number of others have brought cases to the ICJ but as members are being sanctioned the outcome is uncertain

Quoting Francesca Albanese, *everyone is responsible*. It's up to everyone to do what they can and not be bystanders. There is also much difficulty, in doing this research as it's ongoing. So it's very difficult and complicated to be able to really make a pronouncement on it.

However, the direction that it's going, we can only hope that more people get involved. But potentially communities could develop as vibrant communities, working as peace builders, and peace workers,

These are the little green shoots that gives one hope

Gill and Thompson use of Aristotle to theorise health. And Galtung does the same, and also talks about therapies, where Gill and Thompson also uses psychology and spirituality. Gill and Galton connects those therapies to wellbeing .

Structural Power represented by the four discourses of economic, military, cultural and political shapes the way the genocide in Gaza, and war in Ukraine. other countries around the world such as Sudan, Somalia and many others. Venezuela, Haiti and Cuba struggle but we do not hear what is going on.

Gill, Thompson and Galtung agree that the nation state is not peaceful. And and they have offered suggestions but the history of colonialism, imperialism settler colony, capitalism has brought us where are now. And I think media, the internet is another form of structural power.

So what can we do... But we are the many and that is plus if we can come together as peace builders. And the first step we'd have to do is to decolonize our minds. Education begins with having a global perspective, and a local connection. Focus on the ideas of connection/belonging, not... on categories of hierarchy

Part of decolonizing is to recognise how identity categorises us and then create barriers between people. And that's why it's important to remember that we all have intrinsic value.

So there's work to be done. We have to transform the mind and soul. We have an opportunity to transcend this moment, 'as peace has the potential to offer that transformation. We're in a difficult period right now. And, it's very difficult to see. And it's not clear to see where we're headed, but we have these little green shoots that need to be watered. and this needs to be our daily task to get back our indigenous wisdom into how we care for the planet and care for each other.

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