

Situational Peace

- Exploring the Conditions of and for Peace(s)*

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I . Introduction

Perhaps the most traditional and commonly employed approach to studying peace is through situational analysis, where peace is considered a state of being or a condition within a particular geographic location. Here, peace is a structural, institutional, and societal phenomenon that can be measured empirically within a physical space across different levels, including internationally, regionally, or within and between communities (Johansson and Saati 2020, 7). Historically, situational studies of peace have tended towards quantitative approaches, where empirical tests are repeated to verify existing levels of peace and capture changes over time or across space. This strategy is apparent in a range of studies and datasets which capture, for example, the number of battle deaths (e.g., Uppsala Conflict Data Program or the Correlates of War Project), the implementation of peace accords (e.g., the Peace Accords Matrix), or various indicators assumed to correlate with the levels of peace within any region (e.g., the Global Peace Index).

As with many conceptions of peace, the precise dimensions or

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indicators used to differentiate and evaluate the quality of situational peace(s) have generated robust discussions (see, for example, Merry 2011; Wallensteen 2015; Goertz, Diehl and Balas 2016; Davenport, Melander and Regan 2018; Bellamy 2019; Caplan 2019). Frequently these have taken place between those seeking to restrict indicators for pragmatic and methodological purposes, and those seeking to promote holistic understandings of peace to ensure different elements of violence (including direct, structural, and cultural, see Galtung 1969, 1990) do not simply reproduce one another. Equally significant are those discussions over ‘whose peace’ is being measured (Pugh, Cooper and Turner 2016). While situational studies of peace remain, by definition, focused on a specific location, researchers have drawn on Human Security discourses (Kerckänen 2009; Paris 2011) to expand the focus of their analysis from state-centric to individual, community, and everyday experiences.

Against this backdrop, and without seeking to contest the precise indicators themselves, this article critically reviews the VoP’s conceptualisation of situational peace and its applicability to the Korean Peninsula, suggesting how it might be amended to produce more nuanced understandings of the experiences of peace across social contexts. It firstly introduces how the VoP framework conceptualises situational peace and critically examines a few conventional studies that had adopted the situational conceptualisations of peace(s). Then, this article will discuss how the discourse on the peace(s) in the Korean peninsula can benefit from the incorporation of a wider range of approaches related to the situational aspects of peace.

II. VoP Framework

Within the VoP project, situational peace seeks to explore the type and

degree of peace as a state or condition within a particular society within the confines of a particular geographical space (Jarstad *et al.* 2019, 6). Though a variety of dimensions can be measured in pursuit of this understanding, the authors suggest focusing upon broad categories of *security* and *political order(s)* within a given locality to ensure comparative utility.

1. Security

Contemporary research has increasingly considered peace to be more than simply the antithesis or absence of violence (Cortright 2008; Höglund and Söderberg Kovacs 2010; Richards 2005; Richmond 2005; Mac Ginty 2006). Indeed, burgeoning scholarship has recognised degrees of peace, in which actors within the same locale experience different levels of peace and violence simultaneously (Smith 2014; Miller 2005). Because of this, there has been a need to nuance and expand orthodox understandings of security, historically based on some minimum level of physical security (typically provided for by the state), to account for overlapping and contradictory experiences. Thus, Jarstad *et al.* (2019) conceptualise security across three dimensions: (i) the absence of violence and fear of violence; (ii) freedom of movement; and (iii) predictability that the current order and state of peace will last.

The first element, the absence of violence or fear of violence, is the most common understanding of peace (Davenport, Melander and Regan 2018), typically understood in relation to large scale and overt acts of violence between groups. Although important, this minimalistic understanding has rarely required the absence of *all* forms of violence, ignoring structural, environmental, gendered, etc., forms, and allowing for particular types of direct violence, such as low levels of violence produced through criminal enterprises. To overcome this bias, Jarstad *et al.* (2019) note the importance of understanding *degrees* of security,

where general experiences of peace within a population can be nuanced by focusing upon particular groups (such as ethnic or gendered minorities). The second element, “freedom of movement”, refers to an actor’s ability to travel to areas, such as to their work, the market, or places of worship without “harassment or fear of violence” (Jarstad *et al.* 2019, 7). This provides a more nuanced understanding of how populations experience peace in their everyday lives (Mac Ginty 2013) drawing attention to how they might satisfy their basic needs (Burton 1990). As such, it is closely related to the final element, predictability and stability, or the degree to which populations expect levels of relative peace to continue. This captures the ability for actors to predict and plan actions, allowing them to overcome security dilemmas and make decisions which improve and stabilise conditions rather than merely recuperate and plan for renewed violence during periods of relative peace (Wallensteen 2015, 5–6).

2. Political Order

Political order relates to the formal institutions and mechanisms for managing conflicts peacefully. It nuances understandings of situational peace by considering how the benefits of peace and its effects are distributed within a given space, as well as whether actors may use political processes to better meet their needs. While this dimension has long reflected liberal understandings and practices of peacebuilding which prioritized strong Western stylized institutions (Paris 2004), critical efforts exploring hybrid political orders (Boege *et al.* 2008) have garnered greater awareness of alternative institutions that might better encourage non-violent political dispute resolution (Avruch, 2018). Jarstad *et al.* (2019) suggest three elements through which political order can be evaluated: (i) the institutions, mechanisms, and norms of nonviolent conflict resolution that exist (and arguably, are used) within a specific

community; (ii) the freedom and openness of a society, including the ability to both critique it and influence change; and (iii), the legitimacy of the political order and existing forms of governance.

Where the first element resonates with ideas central to democratic peace theory (Doyle 1983; Haas 1997; Gibler and Owsiak 2017; Hobson 2017) assessing how interests, values, and needs may be contested non-violently, the second element captures opportunities for civil engagement in a society, where people are able to speak and influence their lives (or critique those in positions of power) without fear of violent reprisal or suppression (Jarstad *et al.* 2020, 7–8). This freedom and openness also indicate the possible levels of representation within political processes, highlighting the extent to which all groups (e.g., women or ex-combatants) could be included in political processes. Closely related to this is the final element which seeks to capture the legitimacy of the political order(s). While legitimacy can be held and recognised by a variety of actors, given its inclusion as an element of situational peace we might interpret it to apply primarily to groups within the geographical space being measured (the internal legitimacy of a regime). Because of this, it is co-constitutive of the two prior elements of political order, as it may be improved through inclusive and pluralistic forms of politics which provide spaces to articulate and seek interests non-violently.

III. Application of Situational Peace

Situational peace is thus a behavioural or positivist concept which can be measured empirically. Its two dimensions and various elements point to a series of key indicators that can be used to determine what data is collected and analysed which allows for geographical and temporal comparisons. Each of these resonate with understandings of peace

prevalent in contemporary research. For example, the expectation of institutions that may provide for nonviolent conflict resolution have long informed discussions of peace (Boulding 1978, 201; Sullivan 1991). Similarly, freedom of movement and the predictability or stability of regimes have featured prominently in recent discussions on quality peace given their ability to increase its durability or duration (Wallensteen 2015; Joshi and Wallensteen 2018), while political freedoms and openness in societies are considered fundamental to capturing societal rather than simply elite perspectives of peace (Moe 2011; Wardak and Hamidzada 2012). Within the context of this framework, an ideal situational peace can be understood as “a condition in a given locality where people enjoy security and where there are institutions and norms for managing conflicts without resorting to violence that allow people to participate on an equal and just basis and exert influence in decision-making” (Jarstad *et al.* 2019, 6).

The framework assumes that as reconciliation efforts take effect they will encourage higher degrees of each dimension, increasing the durability, duration, and overall quality of peace(s) experienced. While causal pathways are difficult to isolate, it is clear that each dimension and element can interact and affect one another (as well as on other types of peace) (Johansson and Saati 2020), reflecting contemporary understandings of peace as a complex and interlinked phenomenon (Millar 2020). For example, Mac Ginty, Joshi and Lee (2019) suggest that a more durable post-conflict peace emerges when comprehensive peace agreements have been implemented to disarm combatants and reintegrate them in political processes, free and fair elections have been held and results have been accepted by all parties, and local institutions have been established to govern groups equally and justly. Such an interpretation is reflected within the dimensions of situational peace, which captures the ability for groups to participate in political processes, the legitimacy or acceptance of ruling institutions and systems of

governance, and the predictability that peace will endure.

One of the key benefits of a situational analysis is the ability to move beyond traditional state-centric *foci* to look at smaller localities or intrastate conflicts. For example, Nordhag (2021) explores peace through Hancock and Mitchell's (2007) 'zones of peace' concept in the Kurdish zone of Rojava, Northern Syria. Where a high-level analysis suggests that these spaces do not constitute zones of peace (or instances of situational peace), Nordhag (2021, 10) demonstrates how a more careful analysis in which security is nuanced by elements of political order uncovers a relatively stable version of democratic confederalism, where Kurdish peoples sought to radically transform their society and create "autonomous, direct democratic communities and semi-autonomous regional cantons underpinned by values of feminism and ecologism".

Other studies have scrutinised how space itself may produce and shape experiences of peace. Here, bridging the situational with material sensitivities (Mac Ginty 2017), scholars have focused on borders or frontiers (Anderson 2013) of conflict spaces to examine the frictions produced through politics, power, and culture. For example, Çaykent (2010) explores the impact of physical demilitarised border zones on Cypriot and Korean communities' experiences and perceptions of peace. Çaykent (2010, 340) argues that the demilitarised spaces which divide nation-states "hinder individual identities and hopes", further exacerbated by "economic embargoes and privileges". While these spaces are physical, they are reproduced within national identities, shaping and limiting the parameters of acceptable negotiations and discussions. This focus emphasises questions of "citizenship, identity, political loyalty, exclusion, inclusion and of the ends of the state" (ibid, 1), drawing on situational, relational, and ideational understandings of peace to examine how demarcating territories and cultures shape identities and provide territorially defined manifestations of the imagined communities which inhabit them.

Thus, where situational approaches to studying peace must focus on specific geographically defined territories to remain analytically distinct from other approaches, researchers can eschew or extend their traditional focus on hard or negative aspects of peace by examining how situational experiences of peace are reproduced ideationally and relationally. Thus, the approach laid out within this article benefits from its articulation of two key dimensions, increasing its comparative utility, as well as its integration within a broader analytic framework which can account for relational and ideational experiences of peace.

IV. Implications for the Korean Context

Drawing on a situational approach to peace allows for the capture of softer or non-traditional elements of security, the inclusion of new dimensions surrounding the political order and their impacts on perceptions and behaviours, as well as an increased sensitivity towards marginalised perspectives. As such, it provides a much-needed departure from existing studies of peace within South Korea which have traditionally drawn on IR, Political Science, and Security Studies frameworks to scrutinize harder dimensions of security and focus on state or elite narratives. Indeed, the three proposed elements of security, even by themselves, can be seen to provide a first step towards accounting for different actors' experiences and qualities of peace.

For instance, in the context of Korea, they can demonstrate how experiences and perceptions of violence and peace differ across communities, providing a rich tapestry of data which more deeply reflects the community being evaluated as well as their subjective interpretations of episodic issues (e.g., conflict at the border areas, North Korea's missile experiments). Likewise, a deeper interrogation of how communities can freely move about offers significant space for improving

understandings of their everyday lived experiences, accounting for the continual formalised movements and exchanges of people across the demilitarized zone on humanitarian and economic grounds, as well informal or non-sanctioned movements within and beyond the broader Korean peninsula. Finally, interrogating peoples' perceptions of stability and predictability can provide new insights into the fragility of the current peace within the region which, according to international law, remains at a state of 'war' and suffers from numerous (episodic) military frictions. While each of these elements provide ample opportunity to refine understandings of peace in Korea, the real utility of this framework emerges when they are evaluated alongside dimensions of political order, as well as relational and ideational aspects of peace.

1. Everyday Peace

We now turn to offer some examples of the new research avenues that can be explored through this framework below. As increasingly noted within other contexts (Richmond, 2011; Pogodda and Richmond, 2016; Lee, 2021a), people's everyday experiences of peace frequently differ from dominant national or political-elite experiences. The situational approach to peace enables researchers to challenge and problematize orthodox and simplifying narratives of peace. For example, while inter-Korean peace is seriously affected by North Korea's nuclear experimentation at the state level, inhabitants in Seoul frequently manage their daily life without being disrupted by this threat, indicating a different experience of peace and security to that of the state (Kim 2020). Conversely, where large scale economic and cultural indicators suggest a highly positive experience of peace at the national level of South Korea, these metrics tend to ignore the varying experiences of individuals, many of whom face misogyny, casual racism, stressful economic competition, and depression in their everyday lives.

One example of these overlooked experiences emerges when examining the everyday lives of foreign migrants, who, while legally residing within South Korea, face continual institutional and structural discrimination. Following changes to legislation in 1995, when South Korea began to offer employment to foreign workers and permitted inter-marriage between Korean men and non-Korean women, there has been a sharp increase in migration leading to approximately 1.4 million foreign workers in 2016, of whom 250,000 were married or held residency. Over the past three decades, these migrants have played important roles in promoting industrial development as well as transforming social dynamics within South Korean society. However, while they comprise an integral part of the community fabric, they experience substantially different levels, forms, and characteristics of peace in their everyday life as compared to the majority ethnic Korean population (Lee, 2021b). For example, migrants have been noted to experience higher levels of crime including sexual abuse and cultural discrimination in regions and districts typically considered safe and culturally prosperous by most ethnic Koreans (such as Youngdeungpo, Seoul). Moreover, when engaging in social activities with the majority Koreans, migrants strongly sense the inter-group power disparity in favour of the majority Koreans who remain ignorant of these dynamics. Under such a circumstance, the identities and cultural heritages of foreign migrants are normally under-valued and, often, the very presence of multiple cultures within the South Korean society was ignored (Lim 2010). These discrepancies in everyday experiences of peace exist not only between foreign migrants and the majority Koreans, but also between minority groups within these populations.

Peace, then, is experienced differently depending on a migrant's ethnic group, the geographical location in which they live, their commonalities and support received from other groups, and their broader skills, such as in language proficiency, which enable them to better integrate within the

broader society. From a theoretical perspective, even within the same society, the conditions of peace look significantly different depending on 'whose peace' researchers focus on. As such, situational analysis can illuminate complexities inherent in how peace is experienced, which changes dramatically depending on the level, space, and community being scrutinized. To adopt an analogy, peace in South Korea may be more akin to a mosaic of peace(s) that reflect the different conditions and experiences of peace faced by its communities. Where conventional studies offer more generalized assessments of the societal conditions and focus primarily on inter-Korean relations, situational approaches can supplement these understandings by shifting the focus of peace beyond state/national units and overcoming tendencies to simplify the complex array of characteristics integral to experiences of peace within societies.

2. State violence

The situational peace framework also allows for the identification of new and novel indicators to evaluate the nature, perceptions, and experiences of peace by victims of state violence. During the 1940s, the Korean peninsula experienced strong ideological competition between Communism and Capitalist democracy and a large number of people were victimised by the violence based on this competition. Especially after the Korean War, the political and social environments in South Korea were suppressing the people who were suspected as communists. These *alleged* communists had experienced levels of security substantially lower than their neighbours across all three elements (violence, freedom, and predictability) as a result of structural violence, even after the war. For example, anti-communist sentiments were rooted in the division situation, where policemen and civil servants continuously monitored their daily activities and whereabouts, making it difficult to maintain a normal life. Neighbours avoided direct interaction with them for fear of

being considered leftist sympathizers. In these environments, victims had to endure perennial hatred, suspicion, and surveillance.

The everyday situation produced insecurity for particular groups which simultaneously reproduced the communist threat and otherness of the North Korean regime in the minds and everyday actions and understandings of South Koreans. In terms of freedom of movement, while their physical mobility was not technically prohibited, they were continually surveilled by state agencies. Moreover, they and their descendants were prohibited from getting jobs in the public sector due to their alleged communist sympathies. In the 1980s and 1990s, the overall political suppression in the country was gradually lifted due to the ‘democratisation’ campaigns that had been conducted in the country. Nevertheless, the descendants of the *alleged* communists would face even more challenging issues when attempts to overturn authoritarian regimes were made. The power holders had attempted to protect their power grounds by galvanizing people’s fear of the potential threats from North Korea; in this process, the alleged communists and their descendants had feared that they might be subjected to new types of suppression or violence mobilized by the recurring autocracies.

The dimension of political order nuances this understanding of security by drawing attention to how authoritarian and right-wing groups stigmatized victims and sought to exclude and restrict their access and participation in society, making them into second class citizens. Here, the label of communist (or leftist sympathizers) was used by the regime (and its citizens) to restrict victims’ access to resolution mechanisms such as the judiciary system, and prevent them from participating in political processes, denying them the opportunity to nonviolently contest their political preferences. As such, victims’ experiences of political legitimacy were also significantly different, constructed and maintained through regimes of authority and discipline which prevented them from speaking out or participating in public political life. These aspects of suffering

were structurally imposed by the political power elites within South Korea as well as the Cold War system in the region and wider world.

In short, situational understandings of peace can demonstrate how different communities within a geographical space/period of time experience peace differently. In the aforementioned example, some elements of situational peace, such as political order, substantially affected other communities' situational peace (such as security). The victims of the political violence in South Korea had experienced were minimal across all elements within security and political order. While organized physical violence had mostly ceased, systematically imposed structural/cultural violence continued to minimize victims' experiences of peace and deny their access to political or social mechanisms to reconcile with the state or broader society in an effort to improve their condition. Since the late 1990s, the indicators relevant to both security and political order have been radically transformed due to the election of a new and more liberal political leadership. Since then, the government has acknowledged the state conducted violence against these victims and has promoted social integration and reconciliation amongst these communities, establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to promote political mechanisms to resolve historical injustices and characteristics of situational peace. In such an instance, the situational approach to peace enables not only an understanding of peace beyond the state, but analysis of how the state impacted everyday experiences, capturing the gradual and positive changes to victims' experiences of peace across dimensions as changes within political order positively impacted on perceptions and experiences of security.

3. Perceptions of Situational Peace

While the situational approach to peace has numerous applications to the Korean context, it is important to reiterate that explanations and

understandings should not be generated in isolation from relational and ideational approaches to peace. For example, one of the core elements of situational peace, the absence of violence or fear of violence at the interstate level, tells us relatively little about experiences of peace unless we account for ideational and relational experiences as well. In doing so, we can expand understandings of security and political order within a specific space to examine how community experiences and perceptions are reproduced within the social and political consciousness of other groups and across nations. This point is particularly important in explaining the South Korean public's attitudes to national security including their perception of stability within the Korean peninsula. Multiple public surveys confirm prevalent public (mis)perceptions of the regions security conditions, where South Koreans tend to under-estimate the security risks, in part due to the intractable nature of the conflict with the North where its duration and relatively low levels of violent incidents have eroded people's fear and made them indifferent to external changes and escalations in the status-quo (Kim 2020). Such perceptions of security can often be divided along ideological and political lines, as evidenced by responses to major security events. For example, while an official investigation into the sinking of the South Korean naval ship *Cheonanham* (2010) found North Korea to be responsible, this was rejected by opposition parties in the left who claimed the investigation was manipulated by the right-leaning government and U.S. interference. Similarly, South Korea's adoption of the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) missile defense system (2017) has splintered opinions across party lines, with right-wing sympathizers deeming it necessary to defend against potential missile attacks from the North while left-wing proponents oppose it on the grounds that it is not defensive and serves U.S. interests against China.

Such persistent divisions in public opinion are closely associated with different social groups' perceptions of security conditions vis-à-vis North

Korea. Referring to the theoretical discussions on ontological security (Mitzen 2006; Giddens 1991; Lating 1969), individuals decrease fear through routines, habits, a feeling of biographical continuity and its relations with other people. At the state level, even a harmful or conflicting relationship can provide increased ontological security, preferring main conflicts to the potential destabilisation of their self-identity and relationship with others should the conflict end. In the context of conflict, both feelings of ambivalence about what they know and the capacity to accommodate and assimilate new information is lost. Consequently, transforming those beliefs that have provided a sense of stability is regarded as a threat to their being (Chhabra 2016).

Having experienced persistent and significant security threats, all of which have narrowly avoided catastrophic outcomes, many South Koreans have developed their own (mis)perceptions on the quality of peace and security. For instance, even in the face of the North Korean nuclear threat, the Roh Moo-hyun government (2003–2008) not only followed the engagement policy toward the North of the Kim Dae-jung administration (1998–2002), but also remained firm in reframing North Korea's identity as a partner for peace and cooperation on the Korean peninsula. In its response to the North Korean Nuclear test in 2006, the Roh government declared that it would not support any UN resolution including military measures against the North in return for its nuclear development (The Guardian 2006). The Roh government and its proponents believed that North Korea's nuclear development was defensive in nature and intended to respond to hostile US' policies towards the North rather than to be used against the South. This highly optimistic perspective by progressive politicians was further evidenced by the removal of language stating the North to be the "main enemy" from its defense white paper in 2005 – though this was later reinserted by the conservative president, Lee Myung-bak (2008–2012) (Lee 2017). Since then, the controversy on whether North Korea is the main enemy

of the state has resurfaced in every presidential election and has been used as a common yardstick to identify candidates' ideological leanings. The highly positive perception of peace among some South Koreans can only be explained through the strong ethnic nationalism constructed as an anti-imperial ideology under the Japanese colonial rule, which views the North as a brethren nation to be reunited, rather than a hostile enemy.

It is likely that such divisions can be further nuanced amongst various communities in Korea, and a more extensive application of situational peace could benefit our understandings of peace by delineating overlaps and differences between groups based on, for example, education, ethnicity and financial security.

V. Problematising Situational Peace

In many ways, the conceptualisation of situational peace posited above seeks to move beyond the simple war/non-war binary to indicate the types and characteristics of peace experienced. Here, higher degrees of each dimension indicate a more desirable and durable peace, akin to a quality peace in which “there is little incentive to challenge the interests of the state or other societal groups... [and w]hen group preferences suggest that the status quo is the preferred condition” (Davenport *et al.* 2018, 17). The proposed dimensions tell us something about this quality, including the levels of security perceived by inhabitants (or the regime), and the likelihood that conflict might renew if groups are unable to meet their needs or contest their preferences through nonviolent political processes. Despite this potential, and acknowledging the necessity of exploring situational peace alongside its relational and ideational phenomena, these provisions do little to overcome long-standing problems in generating universal understandings of peace. Indeed, the specific dimensions of situational peace and their corresponding elements

have been selected for their universality and comparative utility. This same flexibility, however, means that the types and degrees of peace(s) identified are significantly dependent on the actors focused upon, the understandings of key terms (such as violence), and the methods used to capture data. As acknowledged by the authors, fundamental questions, such as “peace for whom?” remain (Jarstad *et al.*, 2019, 8), and will continue to reflect the biases, constraints, and interests of power and researchers. Such issues are well known by critical peace researchers, who have illustrated how scholars continue to exclude experiences of violence (and thus peace) on the basis of methodological pragmatism (True, 2020) emphasising the need to adopt a decolonial (Smith, 2021), emancipatory, and feminist (Visoka and Richmond 2017; McLeon and O'Really 2021) sensitivity in research.

To this end, scholars typically adjust their criteria and indicators to better account for the level or type of actor they are investigating – who makes peace, or who the peace is for. For example, Kasten (2017, 30) introduces the concept of peace, where their interest in inter-state peace leads to a focus on three essential dimensions (“state behaviour – what states actually do; decision-makers’ expectations – what they expect from each other now and in the future; and the stability and duration of these behavioural and perceptual patterns”). Other scholars interested in everyday understandings of peace and peacemaking have increasingly sought to generate indicators and dimensions of peace from the ‘bottom-up’, or the lived experiences of local communities (Mac Ginty 2010; Firchow 2018). Given they tend to be relationally and ideationally constructed, they nevertheless refer to relationships and ideas between actors *within a specific territory* and thus could suggest alternative metrics through which to understand situational peace. Through in-depth ethnographic consultations, studies, and surveys, these ‘crowd sourced’ understandings of peace (Mac Ginty 2013) can be used to increase understandings of local experiences (situational) and perceptions

(ideational) of peace. The benefit of this approach has been to offer greater insights into how events affect the “relative peace and stability of a community” including how they are perceived and will potentially affect behaviours in the future (Firchow and Mac Ginty 2017, 22).

Another example, De Rivera’s (2004; 2009) multi-factor analysis of seventy-four developed countries, delineates four cultural dimensions of peace (liberal development, violent inequality, violent means, and nurturance) across political, military-diplomatic, and socio-economic indices. While the indicators used to explore these relationships were largely drawn from the eight dimensions articulated by the UN (Resolution A/53/243), they call for the capture of highly detailed elements including the diversity of members holding political office, homicide rates, and levels of literacy across populations. Without needing to go into the plethora of different indicators and dimensions that have been produced through such endeavours, a meta-analysis of these works has found that these can generally be grouped into issues of: conflict resolution institutionalisation; justice / law; social integration; reconciliation; trust; harmonious relationships; order; and human rights, including equality/non-discrimination, political freedom/ civil rights, as well as issues of socioeconomic opportunity (Davenport, Melander and Regan 2018, 47). All of this is to suggest that the dimensions of security and political order should be treated with a healthy degree of scepticism, and scholars need to ensure they are fit for the experiences of peace they are attempting to capture, considering factors such as “the role of civil society during and after peace processes; the aims and capacities of the signatories to peace agreements; the contents and comprehensiveness of peace agreements; the types of institutions (re)built or strengthened by peace processes; and the form and impact of international involvement” (Jarstad *et al.* 2019, 10).

Ultimately, all of these endeavours illuminate new thinking around peace, but struggle to promote uncontentious conclusions and findings

due to their inevitable need to prioritize and exclude particular indicators and dimensions. This leads to issues of ontological under- and overload (Kasten, 2017, 28), where scholars fail to include all “essential constitutive dimensions” of peace, while frequently mischaracterising “exogenous causes of different levels of peace” as endogenous dimensions. While an increasing number of scholars would argue in favour of localised and people- rather than state-centric conceptions of peace, their contextual nature poses obvious problems for those seeking to draw more universal or comparative understandings – as the VoP project seeks to do. The noted lacuna of research on peace might perhaps suggest that at this stage it is better to capture as many understandings of peace as possible, so that alternative datasets such as a Correlates of Peace (Wallensteen, 2012) can be generated; scholars may also consider shifting the focus of particular dimensions to ensure their contextual suitability. We explore several opportunities for this below.

Perhaps first and foremost is the need to problematize the ‘absence of violence’, or fear thereof, within understandings of situational peace. Recent research has done well to challenge traditional conceptions of violence by contesting its dichotomous interpretation, instead acknowledging how peace and violence can exist simultaneously – but even this framing offers only a partial solution. An example of this can be seen in the ‘peace continuum’, a scale upon which violence is not entirely absent from considerations of peace (Davenport, Melander and Regan 2018). While this delineation is conceptually clear, with violence and peace at opposing ends of a scale, it nevertheless forces an ordering of different types of violence – a process which has been known to reify focus on direct violence due to its more observable and immediate presence (Gnoth 2020). The question that such a framing thus raises, is to what extent scholars should preference direct violence over its cultural and structural forms (Galtung 1990)? While it is undoubtedly necessary to capture all forms of violence, these tend to be impractical to measure

and their occurrence potentially impossible to create. Yet, to speak only of direct violence is to make a normative (or perhaps analytical) statement about other forms of violence which are as pervasive and can lead to the same destruction of life. There is no easy way out of this quagmire, as researchers must order experiences hierarchically if they are to compare experiences and degrees of peace, but even attempts to do this based on the lived experiences of communities have proven challenging given how priorities change – especially in relation to the proximity of different types of violence (Firchow 2018). While Jarstad *et al.* (2019) are entirely cognisant of this issue, it warrants noting, simply to challenge scholars to more openly justify how they have defined elements of violence on a case-by-case basis in the hope that more ambitious and positive understandings may be developed as benchmarks through which this specific element is assessed.

Other dimensions and elements within the framework may equally benefit from critical scrutiny in the hopes of offering more contextual or potentially revolutionary understandings of peace. For example, acknowledging that “the production of socio-political order is contingent on the interaction of myriad sources of social governance” (Hunt 2018, 78) suggests the need to more critically disaggregate notions of political order and legitimacy, to focus on the myriad institutions from which they are comprised. While the provisions laid out by Jarstad *et al.* (2019) leave the interpretation of these concepts open, the statist imagery through which these terms tend to be interpreted fails to match postcolonial or post-conflict contexts (Pogodda and Richmond 2016). The issue here is not simply our ability to recognise difference and alternative types of legitimacy (Chandler and Reid, 2020; Randazzo, 2021), but to also reconsider the referents of these objects – including notions of the state, political order, governing authorities, and political subjects.

While some limited attempts to overturn traditional and Weberian

notions of legitimacy exist (see, for example, Boege *et al.* 2008; Johnson and Hutchison 2012; Dagher 2021), it is difficult to see how these more hybrid and occasionally contrasting conceptions could be captured and valued by researchers through the quantitative and top-down methodologies typically employed in studies of peace as a situation. Here, the limited and continually changing understandings of researchers themselves pose continued problems for how terms such as order and legitimacy are measured and understood. A significant example of this can be seen in attempts to challenge securitisation discourses and the notion of failed states (see, Clements *et al.* 2007; Chandler 2010; Richmond 2014), where Eurocentric understandings of political order, governance, and legitimacy demarcated other spaces as failed or failing which provided a rationale for international intervention (Richmond 2014). Here, the wealth of literature that emerged in the late 2000s around hybrid political orders sought to explore the institutions and conceptions of legitimacy that emerged in post-conflict communities through the clash of Weberian and traditional or customary norms and understandings (Clements *et al.* 2007, 46). While the intent was to reconceptualise failed or failing states and increase tolerance of a plurality of state and governance systems (Boege *et al.* 2008), this reframing led to a significant backlash from commentators as to whether differences should be merely accepted or, more problematically, encouraged (Millar 2014; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2016; Gnoth 2020). Several years on, hybridity and its recognition of difference are more common place (Wallis *et al.* 2018), but the experience of prescribing hybridity and the attempts by scholars and peacebuilders to simultaneously recognise customary institutions and alternative paths towards legitimacy show the immense methodological problems in capturing these elements of ‘political order’ and legitimacy. As with violence, recognising, understanding, and normatively evaluating the notion of difference is an exceptionally contested process, which

highlights not only the complexity involved in such judgements, but perhaps the hubris in assuming that proposed dimensions can be measured and captured consistently across different contexts to generate understanding (Mende 2005).

Broader understandings of the ‘freedom of movement’ element may also offer a more complex and nuanced understanding of people’s experiences of peace. Inspired by Marxist critiques of international order, in which the state-based system allows for the free flow of capital but not human labour, a more expansive reading of movement may go beyond scrutinizing a population’s ability to move predictably and safely through a territory to also account for their ability to go beyond the state and its borders. This is a particularly important distinction to include in the context of Korea given the restrictions on movement and demilitarized zones, but also between other territories where state-controlled borders and visa requirements physically prevent people’s ability to move to improve their quality of life, and which are frequently maintained through force or the threat thereof (such as Palestinians movement in and around Israel).

VI. Conclusion

Thus far, this article has presented that a situational approach to studying peace in the Korean Peninsula can provide many previously overlooked understandings and experiences of peace. Specifically, three particular areas for further investigation have been raised as the representative examples. Firstly, it was discussed that the situational approaches to peace may enable people to see how experiences and perceptions of violence and peace differ across communities. Moreover, an area that could be further examined through the situational peace lens is the conditions for peace that have been shaped and transformed

under the Cold War power structure. Finally, the situational peace approaches are suitable for interrogating peoples' perceptions of stability and predictability of the inter-Korean peace(s).

Having said this, it is important to note how the selection of each dimension potentially limits the capturing of more positive or expansive experiences of peace, which may be of equal or greater importance to the peoples and communities affected. For example, a more positive notion of peace suited to dealing with issues of structural and cultural violence might contain, or focus on, provisions to capture dimensions related to social justice and the natural environment to allow for critical and timely understandings of peace, as has been the case in a variety of literatures (Anderson 2004; Galtung 1971; van Santen 2021). The absence of such progressive dimensions, despite their contested nature, returns us to the purpose of conceptually distinguishing approaches to peace in the first place. If the purpose is to develop greater understandings of peace as it exists or is experienced and perceived across communities, we may fail to capture the aspirational or positive elements of peace which increase its duration, as well as desirability (Galtung 1969).

We also have to consider how situational peace excludes external considerations. While it is supposed to relate to a very specific geographic region, and not necessarily the actors within that region, this demarcation is also dangerous, and may overlook countries with high levels of freedom and violence (Davenport 2018), as might be the case for the USA. Thus, if situational peace is created at the expense of other aspects, we would question the level of peace that might be gleaned from analysing only its internal dynamics. Countering this trend by disaggregating terms and attempting to overcome Eurocentric framings may provide a path for improving the situational analysis of peace, but it also reduces the frameworks comparative utility. Ultimately, however, we feel this to be a positive and worthwhile endeavour.

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