

Relational Peace

- The Nature of Peace Determined by the Relations between Actors*

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I . Introduction

Relational peace has gained traction following peace studies' critical turn. In this conceptualisation, peace is seen to emerge through actors' interactions with one another and their environments (Kriesberg 2007). Crucial to this approach is recognising that where wars and violent actions may be construed as specific events. Peace is a *process* that is experienced differently over time, across space, and between actors. This approach is seen to act as "an idiom for advancing participatory, inclusive, pluralist, innovative, ethically responsible, grounded and legitimate approaches to processing conflict and building peace" (Brigg 2016, 57) that encourages caution and sensitivity when engaging with local participants and voices. At the same time, it can be used to scrutinize a wide range of actors, institutions and relations, from elites to subaltern peoples.

Researchers have drawn on relational ontologies and epistemologies for

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several decades, which have increasingly informed thinking around peace through concepts such as hybridity (Wallis and Richmond 2017) and friction (Björkdahl et al. 2016). A significant and increasing body of literature has been developed with this understanding of peace in mind, from the field of Conflict Transformation, where peace is understood as a quality of relationships (Klem 2018, 235), to burgeoning research exploring how peace is experienced and understood relationally, through localised and everyday perceptions (Firchow and Mac Ginty 2017). Interestingly, many contemporary approaches to peace bear little relation to earlier Conflict Transformation literatures which sought to repair or transform relations between previously conflicting parties by building trust, respect, and mutual understandings. While the findings uncovered by recent critical interpretations may inevitably inform such processes, relational ontologies and epistemologies have primarily been drawn on as an analytical tool to understand peace as a dynamic characteristic of interactions between actors.

This article explores how our understanding of peace can be further expanded and nuanced by adopting such relational approaches. As the relevant approaches have not been extensively introduced into the Korean scholarship, this article will firstly provide a somewhat extensive introduction to and critiques of the VoP framework on relational peace and other relevant discussions. Then, the approaches' relevance to the exploration of the peace(s) in the Korean peninsula will be discussed, with particular foci on: the states of peace, the important contexts, and bottom-up construction of peace. To integrate the detailed discussions into a simple term, this study argues that the relational approaches to peace(s) may enable researchers and policy makers to examine the complex and changing nature of peace(s), which have rarely been identified in the conventional studies in South Korea.

II. VoP Framework

Relationships can be defined in a multitude of ways and can exist between actors (whether individuals, groups of people, or the institutions they form) as well as between environmental phenomena (our relationship with the earth, for example). Relational approaches to peace explore peace as it emerges through these webs of relationships, and seek to understand where peace exists (which entities are at peace or might be considered peaceful) as well as what the characteristics of that peace are (Söderström et al. 2020, 2). Söderström et al. (2020) leverage a sociological understanding of relationships, conceived of as a series of continuous and repeated interactions between actors which can be measured and compared to understand their more or less peaceful elements.

Where relationships require repeated interactions to exist, relational peace requires actors within the relationship to have “*expressed* that they *share some-thing*, that there is a *sense of reciprocity* in their relationship, thus casting the other in the role of not an enemy, but a friend or fellow” (Söderström et al. 2020, 12). Thus, actors in a relationship must be able to influence each other’s behaviour, and, while power asymmetries will inevitably affect behaviours, actors within more peaceful or positive relationships will deliberately eschew the arbitrary application of power (domination) in pursuit of their interests for the sake of maintaining a positive relationship. Relationships are not static, and the extent to which they may be considered more or less positive (or peaceful) depends on a complex pattern of phenomena from both within and beyond the relationship. As such, relational understandings of peace must be cognisant of change, and the value of such studies increases if characteristics and interactions are measured and mapped across time to understand whether a relationship is becoming more or less peaceful.

Relational peace within the VoP framework has primarily been laid out by Söderström et al. (2020), who draw on Galtung's conflict/peace triangle to understand peace as it emerges in (a) behavioural interactions, (b) attitudes towards other actors, and (c) ideas of the relationship between actors. Here, nonviolent behavioural interactions facilitate the exchange of political ideas, while subjective attitudes reflect actors' opinions of the other and to a certain extent the degree to which relations may develop over time. Finally, the 'idea of the relationship' held by actors relates to the degree of friendliness (or, in negative instances, animosity). These dimensions can be seen as overlapping and mutually reinforcing, and though more research is needed, it is likely that a change in one dimension will have significant repercussions for others. Each dimension comprises several additional elements and degrees which will be briefly outlined below.

1. Behavioural interactions

Behavioural interactions are perhaps the most empirically observable dimension of a relationship as they emerge through speech acts and actions towards, or in regards to, other actors within a dyad (for example, when two states speak to or about one another in public forums). To explore the peacefulness of behavioural interactions, Söderström et al. (2020) propose focusing on (i) deliberation (ii) non-domination, and (iii) cooperation.

Deliberation is seen to be the basis for decision making and allows for the recognition of difference and inclusiveness. It relates to the ability for actors to meet and exchange ideas with one another in a variety of formal or informal social contexts and be treated with mutual respect and open-mindedness from their counterparts. While the benefits of deliberation are well examined within peace research (Hancock 2020; Nakagawa 2016), its necessity as an element of relational peace is

justified by its ability to enhance mutual understanding between actors, which is understood to generate higher qualities of peace over time (Dryzek et al. 2019). Deliberation allows actors to share differing and conflicting views with each other without fear of reprisal; furthermore, it requires actors to justify or explain their positions, providing a political process where key issues can be explored, addressed, and potentially transformed. In societies or relationships that are deeply divided, deliberation may also enable spaces for local experiences and understandings of peace to emerge which can challenge dominant discourses, increasing understandings across numerous actors while allowing for alternative interpretations to contest and potentially reshape values and identities. According to Söderström et al., (2020) deliberation can be measured by observing forums and broader social contexts where members of a dyad interact and exchange ideas.

Non-domination refers to the levels of non-interference within a relationship, where actors are free from arbitrary power (or the fear thereof) to pursue their interests. Its antithesis, domination, occurs when actors are seen to limit or censor their behaviour due to the perceived response of other parties, regardless of whether or not any explicit retaliation or behavioural change occurs. While it is rare for relationships to be entirely absent of dominatory elements, the exertion of power need not be arbitrary (in that actors can deem it legitimate), and levels of dominatory power tend to shift across issues and time within relationships. The extent to which an actor can compel another in pursuit of their preferences is largely dependent on other dimensions within the relationship as well, such as trust and reciprocity. Depending on these other factors, actors can exert different degrees of pressure to have their needs met without damaging the relationship; however, if they then fail to reciprocate the favour at a later stage, this may reduce the strength of the relationship (or its level of peacefulness) through a reduction of trust. Söderström et al. (2020) suggest that this particular

element can be measured by assessing the extent to which weaker actors in a relationship moderate their behaviour, and that actors can reduce the opportunities for domination through federal arrangements where groups are provided equal status during bargaining and deliberation, such as through a veto power.

The final and most active form of behavioural interaction is cooperation (both verbal and performative) which moves experiences of peace beyond the absence of violence and the mere “avoidance of coercion and destructive behaviour” towards the active formation and pursuit of complementary goals. According to Miall (2007, 69), there are three levels of cooperation between actors, which move from a low or first level, where actors make decisions to benefit other parties despite having separate goals, to a second level, where actors align their goals with other parties, and finally a third and the highest level of cooperation, where actors identify common interests with other parties. This last level of cooperation can lead actors to redefine themselves in response to the relationship by adjusting their interests and identities to be more congruent with other actors. While cooperation can occur in spite of dominatory aspects of a relationship, higher levels of cooperation and peace take place through non-dominatory interactions.

2. Subjective Attitudes

The second dimension is the subjective attitudes that actors hold towards each other (such as beliefs or emotions) which manifest through two key elements: (i) mutual recognition and (ii) mutual trust. Recognition is an intersubjective relation “constructed through rapport between an actor’s asserted image and the image returned by others” (Lindemann 2011, 70) and can be given “through symbolic or material concessions that seek to demonstrate peaceful intentions and attitudes held toward the other for the purpose of confirming the other’s self-image” (Söderström et al.,

2020, 10). Furthermore, “recognition is related to values such as dignity... honor, status, and prestige” (ibid) and thus can be seen to form a vital component of an actors Basic Human Needs (Burton 1990), where the denial of recognition can exacerbate, prolong, or renew conflicts. Recognition can differ in scale, with thin recognition (legal or rights-based) and thick recognition (where actors are acknowledged as being independent, and which can link to their perception of being legitimate, appreciated, or respected). The degree of recognition afforded to other actors within a dyad can move between low (acceptance of another’s right to exist) and higher levels, which entail a shared respect for each other’s identity, or in deeper contexts, shared empathy. The second subjective attitude considered by Söderström et al. (2020) is trust, understood as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another” (Rousseau et al. 1998, 395). Following conflict, trust can be built by resolving misunderstandings, reducing prejudices, and refraining from behaviour which is likely to antagonise or cause fear amongst other actors.

3. Perception of the relationship

The final element articulated in the VoP framework is the perception that each actor holds of the relationship, conceived as either legitimate co-existence or friendship. These comprise two ends of a continuum, which if extended beyond the focus of peaceful relations, might also include other relationship types (such as partners, foes, or enemies). A lower perception of actors within a dyad (termed fellowship) must still be considered positive where, at a minimum, each other’s right to exist is acknowledged. The relationship may be determined by self-interest, where actors disagree with each other and compete in non-violent ways, but they must still perceive or acknowledge the other’s position as

legitimate and continue to treat them with respect. Friendship, a higher or more positive perception of the relationship, implies a sense of intimacy between actors and a perception of the other and the relationship as being ‘good’ or worthwhile. Friendship connotes a “degree of moral obligation, and altruism” where actors develop shared visions and work on improving their relationship with one another, which its authors hold “clearly goes together with cooperation, non-domination, and trust” (Söderström et al., 2020, 13).

III. Relevant concepts and discussions

To date, few studies have drawn on this specific framework to scrutinize relational peace, and evaluations of each dimensions’ internal validity and linkages are still in their infancy (Kolli 2020). Those that have drawn on this framework have tended to employ an ideational approach to explore actors’ perceptions and understandings of relational and situational peace, rather than seeking to determine how repeated interactions between actors may strengthen or weaken the degrees of each dimension themselves.

For example, the notion of friendship articulated by Söderström et al. (2020), which might be considered a penultimate form of peace, will change depending on the specific relationship being evaluated. A close friendship between two individuals provides an incompatible comparison of a close friendship between two states, for example. There are however several broad overlapping qualities which emerge from a review of the various relational conceptions within this article that can offer some high-level characteristics that one might expect to find within more peaceful relations.

Jarstad et al. (2019, 12) classify an ideal relational peace as one which *“entails behavioral interaction that can be characterized as non-domination, deliberation and cooperation between the actors in the*

dyad, the actors involved recognize and trust each other and believe that the relationship is one between legitimate actors or an expression of friendship” (emphasis in original). While behavioural interactions are undoubtedly significant in terms of how a relationship manifests, other characteristics based on perceptions and understandings – or features that might be more approximately understood through ideational analysis – are also crucial to understanding the dynamics of relational peace, reaffirming the need for studies of peace to draw on all approaches.

Another dynamic common across higher degrees of relational peace is that of trust. For example, Sönderström et al.’s (2020) dimensions of trust, reciprocity and respect are all indicative of higher degrees of peace, and contribute to what Davenport (2018, 161) calls mutuality – a relationship characterised by “integrating and consistent behavior”, “created/trained” organisation, and “highly positive” language and values. While such characteristics may seem more appropriate for measuring relational peace between individuals or smaller groups, a significant body of research has explored understandings of ‘friendship’ within international relations (Koschut and Oelsner 2014; Van Hoef and Oelsner 2018) or as they emerge between states through international treaties (Devere et al. 2011).

Sönderström et al.’s (2020) inclusion of friendship and fellowship importantly delineates between what, for the purposes of simplification, we might determine to be passive (non-action) and active (action) components of negative and positive relationships (Boersema 2018). Here, we can see that there are significant differences in the quality of peace found within a relationship between actors who, for example, merely accept the right of another to exist, and a relationship in which actors actively attempt to develop and strengthen their ties or cooperate with each other to achieve shared goals. Diehl (2016), highlights this point by noting how that the relationship between Iran and Israel or the two Koreas is significantly different to that of the United State and Canada,

despite the lack of violent acts. The first two relationships contain dominating behaviour and lack of cooperation, and there is an overt lack of trust or recognition between the former hostile relationships. Thus, while it may be theoretically possible for a relationship to contain relatively positive or high degrees of behavioural interaction, recognition, and trust, the delineation between fellowship and friendship can be seen to increase the number and significance of interactions between actors, as well as connect the relational dimensions of peace to ideational approaches.

Lastly, Goertz et al.'s (2016, 27) conceptualisation of relational peace provides yet another understanding of positive relationships, which, given their system or state level focus, is perhaps most similar to Davenport's conception. Here, the highest level of relational peace, a security community (Adler et al. 1998), is characterised by joint war planning, the implausibility of war within the dyad, the resolution of the main issues within a relationship, institutionalised mechanisms for communication, extensive diplomatic relations, and robust institutions and agreements. As is clear, this articulation of a peaceful relationship shares an interest in resolving tensions through dispute resolution mechanisms and includes a series of agreements and institutions to affirm commitments, yet it also includes provisions for joint military exercises as a way of reducing the security dilemma between states. Thus, this more IR centric approach to understanding relations, while containing the same underlying motivations of extending understandings of peace can be seen to provide a distinct point of departure from other notions of peace explored here given the somewhat abstract nature of the entities it measures (states). Perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly, there are significant overlaps between the characteristics ascribed to relational peace above and those that emerge in studies of relationships and friendship. Here, it would seem prudent for future explorations of relational peace to cross disciplinary divides and draw more heavily on the understandings and

sensitivities produced in what is often viewed as the ‘softer’ areas of peace studies.

Other works which have drawn upon this particular framework have employed it even more loosely, though are perhaps truer to a dynamic and relational approach. Lee (2021), for example, operationalises these dimensions through the everyday peace agenda to explore the overlooked, everyday, and mundane interactions of non-elite peoples, which are seen to reflect and produce different experiences and qualities of peace. Leveraging an inductive approach to evaluating social reconciliation, Lee assesses how former conflicting actors in Cambodia interact with one another, paying attention to three alternative dimensions: plurality, subtly and connectivity. Though Lee’s application of the relational approach advocated by Söderström et al. (2020) remains relatively muted, there are direct overlaps between the two approaches. For example, Lee’s (2021, 28) understanding of plurality, conceived of as the “multiple levels and forms of peace” which coexist “within and between local communities”, was captured through his evaluation of the subjective attitudes and perceptions of various actors. Equally, subtlety, where actors excluded, ignored, or shunned former rivals, reflects various elements of Söderström et al.’s (2020) dimension of behavioural interaction. Finally, while Lee’s evaluation of connectivity, where he explores how elite orchestrated peacebuilding initiatives were impacted by local social and governance structures, is not mirrored within any of the dimensions of relational peace advocated by Söderström et al., (2020), yet other conceptualisations of relational peace do include institutions and structures as a dimension worthy of analysis (Davenport 2018). By adapting the relational peace framework through the lens of the everyday, Lee observes and evaluates a host of interactions and behaviours (or negative actions) which would otherwise remain unnoticed if more limited and strict understandings of peace were drawn on. Lee’s approach shows the need to adjust dimensions and ground relational

analysis to the context being explored, in order to ensure their relevance and utility.

Similarly, Jarstad and Segall (2019) employ a relational perspective to understand post-war peace in Northern Mitrovica to expose the existence of a low level complex peace that emerges through small and repetitive actions. For example, they interpret behaviours, such as not changing automobile licence plates while driving through areas controlled by former rivals, as an instance of co-existence, an important indicator of inter-group contact and a low level of trust. Like Lee (2021), this analysis was conducted through interpretivist methods, combining interviews, informal conversations, and field notes with ethnographic observations to understand previously overlooked interactions which might indicate or comprise a low level of relational peace. Here, they observed casual and everyday communications between actors (such as market vendors), acts of cooperation (such as in discouraging antagonist behaviours of youths) and instances of peaceful coexistence as Serbs and Albanians communicated matters of mutual concern to one another. Again, the authors adapted the relational approach laid out by Söderström et al. (2020), this time by assessing both manifestations of peace and conflict, and by focusing on specific issues rather than wider levels of friendship or fellowship – perhaps due to data limitations or the limited interactions between Serbian and Albanian peoples. As such, the relational approach allowed the researchers to identify manifestations of peace and conflict across behaviours, attitudes, and issues, and successfully demonstrated the nuanced understanding of peace that emerge through a focus on the everyday interactions and behaviours of post-conflict peoples. Their analysis demonstrates the significant degree of flexibility that can be employed through relational approaches, which, while beneficial for deepening our understandings of peace, perhaps limit comparisons across time, between other dyads, or even with other post-conflict spaces – a significant impetus of the VoP project.

Goertz et al. (2016) also understand peace relationally, though their focus is the evolution of peace within the international system as a whole. As is increasingly common, they consider peace to be a continuum that swells from negative to more positive interpretations, and they attempt to map different relationships across this scale based on security dynamics, levels of communication, the extent to which contrary issues have been resolved, and the presence and extent of agreements, institutions and diplomatic relations. These dimensions are typologized as severe rivalry, lesser rivalry, negative peace, and positive peace, which consists of either a warm peace or, in greater instances, a security community (Goertz et al. 2016, 27). Similar to Söderström et al.'s (2020) understanding of foe, the authors use the term rival to indicate a negative relationship – the opposite of which is generally understood to be a friend. Though there is not the space to unpack these definitions in significant detail here, it is important to note that understandings of friendship expose some of the cultural constraints when exploring these relationship types through the English language. For example, in the Arabic language, familial relationships have much more specific language and terms than in English, each of which connotes a different level, experience and expectation of the relationship, which are not necessarily comparable to Western conceptions. Ultimately, while this conceptualisation bears many similarities to the relational peace explored earlier, the authors' interest is upon interstate dynamics and peace as it is experienced across the international system. This focus, while not unwarranted, is perhaps too macro and high-level to deal with the more minute and intricate experiences of peace sought here – with its reliance on dynamics such as 'security communities' making it ill-suited to exploring peace within the Korean peninsula.

Perhaps a more congruent approach to relational peace has been proposed by Hunt (2017) who leverages the concept of symbiosis to explore how evolving networks of actors co-produce social orders across

the dimensions of security and justice. True to the ontological foundations of relational sociology, Hunt (2017, 212) argues “that it is the nature of the *relationships between* entities rather than the *characteristics of* entities that matters most for understanding how hybridisation occurs and how hybrid (dis)orders emerge.” Moving from an ontology of entities to one of relations, Hunt explores the networks and inter-linkages between security and justice providers which comprise emerging orders. This phenomenological approach to understanding the production of social orders as an aspect of peace might be seen to contradict VoP’s positioning of political orders as a dimension of situational peace, and is likely caused by the different ontologies and epistemologies underpinning each endeavour. Where the VoP approach uses a relatively static notion of political order as an indicator of a more or less peaceful situation, Hunt’s approach explores how this order is produced through interactions, providing an understanding of both relational peace, and, depending on the types of order evaluated, situational peace.

In contrast to notions of reconciliation and the everyday used by Lee (2021), as well as Jarstad and Seagall’s (2019) exploration of the relational elements of peace, Hunt (2017, 219) employs the concept of symbiosis, defined as “the association between two or more dissimilar entities coexisting and displaying interdependence, each member receiving succour that may but not necessarily constitute a net benefit for them”. Through this, Hunt constructs a typology of symbiotic relations (noted as predatory amensalism, parasitic commensalism, and mutualism) between security and justice providers through which different relations can be interpreted and evaluated. Each of these types determines (or is determined by) the relations of actors, yet the focus of Hunt’s framework emphasises the temporal nature of interactions somewhat more than those emerging out of the VoP project, which have, to date, been used to scrutinize only particular points in time. To Hunt (2018,

90) “it is these continual processes ... that lead to subtle new systemic patterning and substantively different forms of emergent order.” Again, while Hunt has interpreted political orders somewhat differently to the dimensions laid out within the situational approach to peace, the dynamic and fluid understanding that might emerge through this particular relational approach is perhaps more in tune with the contemporary understanding of peace as a process.

IV. Implications to the Korean Context

The particular approach to exploring relational peace provided within the VoP project need not be the only path that scholars use to assess these dynamics either, and several other conceptions drawn on within this chapter suggest how this framework might be expanded or nuanced to improve its application within a wider range of cases. In this section, it will be discussed how these conceptual and analytical features can benefit the examination of peace(s) in the Korean Peninsula.

1. States of Peace

The relational approaches to peace(s) that focus on how interactions between security and justice providers produce various orders (rather than peace writ large) may provide a template which is more relevant to the Korean context, specifically when we consider the emerging body of research that highlights the complex web of relationships and cooperation that must be maintained and managed by authoritarian regimes to stay in power (Sutton 2018).

In fact, peace between South and North Korea has usually been considered as a political outcome, rather than a process, which is judged by political or security issues such as peace agreement, end-of-war

declaration, and denuclearization. In some groups, the unification between the two Koreas has always been highlighted as the most important indicator of peace. When the states of peace are identified based on these indicators, the changes in inter-Korean peace over the past few decades may not be examined in a nuanced manner. For instance, during the Moon Jae-In administration between 2017 and 2022, the leaderships in the two sides have presented many signs of rapprochement. Some notable examples include North Korean delegates' visit to PyeongChang Winter Olympic (2018), the first summit between the two political leaders in Panmunjom (2018), and President Moon's official visit to Pyongyang (2018). While the political interactions between these sides had substantially reduced since the failure of the US-North Korea summit in Hanoi (2019), the two sides continued to exchange letters to confirm their no hostile relations. In short, the Moon administration had maintained a relatively stable and collaborative relationship with its counterpart, which is considered as one of the government's biggest legacies.

Nevertheless, when paying attention to the political outcomes, things may look significantly different. Apart from a peace agreement that was signed during Moon's visit to Pyongyang, there have not been many political agreements that are substantial and binding. More importantly, the North Korean nuclear issues that are considered by many Koreans as a salient obstacle to peace still persist. Kim Jong Un has conducted more than a dozen missile tests (Shin, 2022). Accordingly, when evaluating the inter-Korean peace by focusing only on outcomes, the value of such stable and positive relationship maintenance cannot be accurately measured.

Hence, in order to perceive peace from the relational perspective, it requires a suitable framework for analysis. Particularly relevant in this regard is, for instance, the perspective of 'stable peace' proposed by Boulding (1978). In his term, stable peace refers to a situation where

there is little chance of war so the parties involved do not “enter into the calculations of any” (Boulding 1978, 13), but are still in a situation of unstable peace, and where the periods of peace without armed conflicts are long but the probability of the war is never entirely eliminated. When peace is understood from this perspective, the road to the peace in the inter-Korean relations begins with the period of rapprochement and reconciliation in which hostile narratives and identities are deconstructed and mutual understandings are gradually boosted (see for example, Kupchan 2010). Moreover, the key indicator for measuring peace is about ‘how stable and sustainable the collaboration between the two sides can be’ rather than outcome-oriented indicators such as ‘if the national unification is achieved.’

From a broader perspective, Davenport’s (2018) exploration of *qualities* of peace further conceptualises such views. The ideas of quality of peace were developed based on how shared identities and inter-communal ties produce different experiences of peace, merging ideational and relational elements. Within such a framing, identities are seen to shape and be shaped through interactions, and can explain different behaviours which are more or less conducive to peace. For example, actors may emphasise particular identities to more clearly distinguish themselves from competitive partners and to give form to the animosities they hold towards others.

Davenport too proposes a typology of relationships, which are determined by evaluating four dimensions of interaction between actors (behaviour, organisation, language and values). As with Söderström et al. (2020), each dimension is comprised of more or less positive elements which shift the corresponding level of peace within a relationship – from opposition, to overt aggression, latent aggression, indifference, latent cooperation, overt cooperation, and finally, mutuality. For example, a situation where violent behaviours exist might implies an oppositional

relationship with low (or no) levels of peace, whereas a relationship with high levels of cooperation and integration would indicate a higher degree of mutuality and peacefulness. These peace types are applicable to relationships across all levels (identified as international, regional, national and subnational).

Within such a conception, Davenport defines peace as “a situation where distinct actors (viewed in a dyadic interaction) exist in a situation of ‘mutuality’ (i.e., one in which there is some degree of shared identity, reflected within behaviour, organization, language and values),” which is “juxtaposed against the conception of ‘conflict’ whereby distinct actors exist in a relationship of opposition (i.e., one where there is some degree of competing identities, reflected in behaviour, organization, language and values)” (Davenport 2018, 147). As this approach to understanding peace was developed in conjunction with understandings of peace as a continuum, interactions can be seen to shift the type of relationship and its corresponding quality of peace over time, enabling the capture of change. Here, more positive experiences of peace might be established if actors began to construct a shared supra-identity which can accommodate a plurality of identities without assimilating and reducing each other’s individuality.

2. The necessity to engage with context

A common feature of all relational approaches explored here is that they remain cognisant of the importance of context. It is important to recognise power asymmetries between actors, that are formed due to broader historical and structural factors. To highlight this issue, Brigg distinguishes three ontological forms of relationality (thin, thicker, and thick) which can be drawn on to better explore relational dynamics and their impacts on the peace processes.¹⁾

1) It must be noted that Hunt specifically draws on Brigg’s understanding of

Thin understandings of relationships draw “attention to under-appreciated relations among entities or structures” (Brigg 2016, 66) yet are problematic, as they do not consider “how entities come into being” (ibid, 58). As such, this focus can depoliticise practices and processes (Chandler 2010). Thicker “identifies the ways entities are mutually conditioned and changed through interaction” and thick “gives conceptual priority to relations over entities and thus embraces a more fluid and fundamentally dynamic understanding of the social and political world of peacebuilding” (Brigg 2016, 58). Rather than assuming fixed relations, thicker explorations of relational peace explore “how entities are mutually conditioned and changed through interaction” (ibid, 67) exposing how interactions reshape “governance and the mechanisms for pursuing peace and order” (ibid, 59) and the ways that actors’ norms, behaviours and understandings are transformed through interactions (Richmond 2013). Such an understanding is well suited to contemporary understandings of peace ‘as a process’, and can perhaps encourage explorations of relational peace to shift their focus from determining the extent to which a relationship is peaceful or not, to how behavioural interactions, attitudes towards each other, and ideas of the relationship can be harnessed to expose phenomena likely to increase levels of peace. At the very least, relational peace could benefit from this further nuance and by capturing all three schemas of relationally as they apply to the three dimensions of relational peace laid out by Jarstad et al. (2019).

The emphasis on contextualised approaches to relational peace sheds light on the analysis of the peace(s) in the Korean peninsula. One issue area that is particularly relevant to it is the victims of the political violence in the 1940–50s in South Korea. While the approach requires

relationality and asserts his focus on thick forms. Given the relatively open-ended manner in which his framework has been laid out, it is possible that these dimensions could factor into analysis; however we feel that, as this has not been explicitly articulated in his framework, the critique is still warranted to ensure this element is taken seriously by researchers.

for social members emerging from violent conflict to promote behavioural, attitudinal, and perceptive realizations of relationship, social circumstances that victims and their families have gone through in the aftermath significantly hamper the accomplishment of this aspect.

The relations between these political victims and the wider society (or the political powers) and the victims' behaviour have been critically influenced by the power structure in the country. First and foremost, the political conditions have favoured the perpetrating groups following the violence under the repressive regimes. The state agencies and the associates had remained in power during the Cold War period, and their brutal actions had been legitimized as actions to protect the country from the communist traitors. Hence, the victims and their family members have suffered from social stigma and suppression, disabling their recognition as ordinary social members, who enjoy the rights of citizens. Inequality towards the victimized has been widespread throughout the past years, and so victims are put in "absent-present" position, meaning the ambiguous social position in post-conflict societies (Brewer et al. 2018, 13).

Second, the culture of denial and the absence or inconsistency of apology significantly constrain the ontology of relationship after the violence. Since the perpetrating groups as well as the state have hidden the historical fact of mass killings and the presence of innocent victims even when their families asked to find the truth (Wright 2015), victims were denied the opportunity to the right relationship or reconciliation. Although President, Roh Moo-hyun once delivered apologetic messages to victims of the Cheju 4.3 Uprising and other events, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established thereafter in 2004, apology has not been consistent in the following governments. The struggle of victims continues while the unjust historical facts have been not adequately addressed nor documented. From the needs-based perspective, this context discourages victims' willingness for reconciliation, through

which both sides can enjoy the sense of empowerment and restore the moral status (Kang and Lee, 2022).

Whether thin or thick relationality, the relationship building does not occur in a contextual vacuum. The aforementioned contexts shed light on how the social and political conditions can make the relational peace happen. What is critical for the case of mass killing in South Korea in the relational perspective is to satisfy the emotional and instrumental needs for victims as well as perpetrators, both of whom are entangled in the cycle of mistrust and enmity. Truth, apology, and power, for example, are the key promoters for relational peace. The historical injustice should be able to be transformed with the virtue of relationship, and it is possible when shared understanding of the past and mutual recognition of each other are sustained over time.

3. Bottom-up construction of peace

Local and indigenous scholars might benefit from drawing on grounded theory approaches or their own understanding of the history and context of Korea to develop more appropriate and relevant relational dimensions, which can be used to increase the applicability and utility relational approaches. For example, behavioural interactions such as that of avoidance and subtlety identified in both Cambodia (Lee 2021) and Northern Mitrovica (Jarstad and Segall, 2019) can be understood as minimal coping or survival strategies in some contexts (Mac Ginty 2014) but might also indicate low levels of respect and cooperation, where actors avoid particular subjects and behaviours that are important to them in order to continue building relations. Such acts may increase opportunities for interaction or trust and be based on the expectation that others will later reciprocate – all of which would provide a deeper understanding of relations and possible avenues in which the peacefulness of a relationship might be increased.

When applying this point to the Korean contexts, foreign migrants who live in South Korea have faced various cultural challenges that are due to South Korea's solid myth of its homogeneity. This myth assumes that Korea has been the country of the ethnically and culturally unified Korean nation for roughly 5,000 years. Such a perception of Koreans on their identity has formed exclusive concepts of denizenship and citizenship that largely deny the belongingness of these migrants. Such exclusive concepts were also targeting the so-called 'multi-cultural families' that, in the South Korean contexts, denotes the families having Korean husbands and their non-Korean spouses. Moreover, Koreans tend to treat economic migrants as "cheap, expendable commodities," "threats to social cohesion," or "a danger to the livelihoods of (...) 'real citizens'" (Lim, 2010, 55). For instance, a recent survey demonstrates that the majority of foreign migrants have experienced various types of discrimination due to their ethnicity (44.7%), nationality (47.7%), skin colour (24.3%), countries of origin (56.8%), and low Korean proficiency (62.3%) (National Human Rights Commission of Republic of Korea 2019). In short, the conditions of migrants' everyday peace were largely influenced by their inter-personal or inter-group relations with the Korean inhabitants.

Accordingly, migrants' everyday peacebuilding aims to uphold their human dignity that is frequently undervalued by the majority Koreans. Specifically, this involves two types of actions: preservation of their own identity and pursuit of social acceptance. Firstly, migrants attempt to preserve their own cultural identity while living in South Korea, which is important for their own self-dignity. This type of self-identity is recognised by Giddens (1990) as a core element that ensures people's ontological security. To pursue this desire, migrants develop formal or informal associations with the people from their home countries, in which they celebrate their own cultural festivals, promote the platforms for mutual-help, and collectively engage in the Korean society. Regarding

their engagement in the Korean society, in particular, many migrant groups organise cultural performance groups and participate in various events hosted by the Korean communities. In other cases, they become proactively involved in economic activities using the proficiency in their mother tongues or cultural knowledge. By doing so, they hope to get the acknowledgement of the value of their cultural identities from the majority Koreans (Chun, Kong, and Chung 2014). The other type of migrants' effort is related to the social acceptance of migrants as part of the Korean society. Indeed, migrants engage in various activities to prove themselves as valuable and trustworthy members of the local communities. Among others, to learn and practice Korean language has been highlighted as by far the most important one. In the Korean social contexts, many foreign migrants feel that to master Korean is a prerequisite to stepping into the local society. In addition, migrants also participate in various community activities, charity organisations, as well as religious associations including churches.

In this regard, migrants' promotion of everyday peace in South Korea is partly about the process of turning their relationship with the majority Koreans in a more positive direction. Migrants hoped to change the social stereotype that identifies them as "cheap, expendable commodities" (Lim 2010), to be viewed as people with rich cultural backgrounds, economically competent capabilities, and good will to contribute to the Korean society. While this section pays particular attention to foreign migrants' everyday peace, there are many peace issues in South Korea that present similar dynamics. For instance, the other two examples that this forum has continued to introduce and examine – the peace(s) that the victims of the political violence experience and the peace between North and South Korea – reflect similar relational issues. The peace(s) that the victims of political violence as well as North Koreans who currently live in South Korea experience, in a sense, is strongly affected by the relationship in which they engage with the majority Koreans.

Related to this, a point to consider is the extent to which these approaches to peace escape the old dichotomies of peace and war or violence. Here, Sönderström et al. (2020), explicitly state that relational peace requires the absence of violence between actors. As such, while actors may experience elements of peacefulness and violence simultaneously, it seems that these cannot be produced through or within the same relationship. While this would certainly be expected in more peaceful relationships, when talking about relations between larger dyads such as states, it seems necessary to delineate between structural and direct forms of violence. For example, smaller countries may simultaneously benefit from military alliances with larger countries yet suffer from trade policies shaped and enforced by those same entities – such as between Costa Rica and the United States. To claim that peaceful relationships cannot require any systematic forms of violence would potentially limit our viable cases to the point of contrasting the perceptions of those actors themselves if we were to include structural forms of violence within this caveat. Equally, to apply this provision only to direct forms of violence is to take a normative position which minimises other forms of violence, including structural and cultural forms, which to some, may be unjustifiable. This is different to Davenport's approach which suggests that actors (or relations) can experience both conflictual and mutual phenomena within a relationship simultaneously, and the extent to which this dynamic can be considered peaceful is dependent on measuring each element in relation to one another – suggesting that we can weight each interaction appropriately and calculate the peacefulness based on this sum. Ultimately, it is unlikely that any consensus will be reached over such a provision and highlights the continual need to question whose peace is being scrutinised and to what purpose.

V. Conclusion

The increased understanding of peace and violence as a continuum has elevated the need to scrutinise relational peace (Davenport et al. 2018), given that both peace and conflict are produced and reproduced through multiple interactions simultaneously. There are significant benefits to exploring how peace(s) in the Korean Peninsula manifests as both a characteristic of relationships as well as through the interactions of actors within them. At a minimum, this enables understandings of relationships beyond the simple war/no-war dichotomy, as well as the identification of relational elements which could expose and strengthen commonalities between actors or reduce tensions. While similar findings may be possible through alternative approaches, such as situational peace, the focus on dyads rather than territories provides flexibility to explore and measure peace between actors even when spatial dynamics change, as can be the case when a political group is ousted from power but not annihilated.

We must also emphasise the temporal nature of relationships to ensure that relational peace is understood as a dynamic process – shifting the focus from merely whether or not a relationship can be conceived of as peaceful, to exploring how these interactions may be leveraged to improve the relations themselves. Such an approach would allow for longitudinal analysis which can consider how relationships between a variety of dyads have changed over time; for example, relationships between political elites can be evaluated even as actors lose or regain power. In the instance of Korea, this approach could facilitate a longer evaluation of relations between the Kim dynasty and other elites before and after the establishment of North Korea. Again, by synthesising and developing the various dimensions of relationality, we encourage greater attention to the internal and external power dynamics which shape the identities, perceptions, and behaviours of the various actors being scrutinized.

Specifically, this article highlights three areas of conceptual benefits. Firstly, the consideration of the relational dimension of peace enables us to capture the complex and changing features of peace(s) in different areas of the Korean Peninsula. Secondly, the examination of relational peace requires a nuanced understanding of the contextual factors that have formed and transformed the power dynamics between actors, which is particularly important in understanding the peace(s) in the Korean contexts. Thirdly, the attention to relational peace offers researchers good opportunity to examine the bottom-up processes for constructing peace, which are taking place in the South Korean societies. As a caveat, the application of relational approaches is not always practical. For instance, the examination of the relational peace(s) between the grassroots in the two Koreas is less relevant, due to the physical, ideological, and communicatory barriers. At the very least, however, the Korean context suggests that relational approaches to understanding peace need to pay greater attention to power dynamics than authors have so far indicated.

Thinking of broader theoretical implications, a relational analysis of peace could be expanded or augmented by altering the specific characteristics of the interactions evaluated. It is already clear that the specific dimensions and indicators drawn upon by researchers will vary significantly depending on their own ontological and epistemological assumptions, the specific relationships that are of interest to the researcher, and of course, the historical, social, and political contexts which inform and are interpreted by actors. In the process of writing this review, approximately 100 different indicators of peace (situational, relational, and ideational) were identified, many of which have been previously summarised by Davenport et al. (2018), and Caplan (2019), and need not be recounted here.

It must be noted, however, that the number of possible indicators and, as we suggest, the need to explore both indigenous and exogenous influences on a relationship poses a significant problem for scholars who

must determine which dimensions and their corresponding indicators should be measured, as well as how these should be valued or weighted. While Davenport (2018, 182) suggests evaluating the degree to which these elements “cohere in some common factor or latent variable concept”, this complexity also speaks to the external and top-down approach to which these dimensions have been attributed to what is ultimately an external and potentially Eurocentric understanding of relationships. Thus, while the dimensions proposed within the VoP project explicitly exclude the Korean peninsula as an instance of relational peace, formulating these dimensions and their corresponding indicators from the ground up may provide more contextual and culturally sensitive dynamics through which to interpret relations of peace within specific communities. Equally, augmenting analysis to include temporal elements to include understandings of relations between the division may enable the capture of early political differences and their transformation over time, despite the physical and political barriers that now exist.

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