Johan Galtung - A Mini Theory of Peace

The basic point is that peace is a relation, between two or more parties. The parties may be inside a person, a state or nation, a region or civilization, pulling in different directions. Peace is not a property of one party alone, but a property of the relation between parties. Saying that in no sense belittles the significance of the party's intent and capability to build peaceful relations. But, like a marriage, it is not the sum of the capabilities of the parties. Which is why we can have lovely people related in a less-than-lovely marriage. And vice versa.

What kind of relations can we have? Three types, it seems:

NEGATIVE, DISHARMONIOUS: what is bad for one is good for the Other.
INDIFFERENT: a non-relation, they do not care about the Other.
POSITIVE, HARMONIOUS: what is bad-good for one is bad-good for Other.

In the real world relations may be mixes of all three. When the negative relation is brought about with intent, the party is an actor, we talk about direct violence, or harm, and about war if the actor is collective. If the violence to a party is not intended (but watch out for acts of commission, more or less intended!) it maybe referred to as indirect, often caused by inequitable structures producing harm - structural violence. And then the role of culture legitimizing either or both types of violence: cultural violence.

From this follow two concepts of peace:

NEGATIVE PEACE: the absence of violence, like a cease-fire, like keeping them apart, not negative but indifferent relations.

POSITIVE PEACE: the presence of harmony, intended or not. They are as different as negative health, the absence of (symptoms of) illness and positive health, the feeling of wellness and the capacity to handle some illness.

From this, then, follow three types of peace studies:

NEGATIVE PEACE STUDIES: how to reduce-eliminate negative relations.

POSITIVE PEACE STUDIES: how to build ever more harmonious relations.

VIOLENCE-WAR-ARMS STUDIES: the intent and capability to inflict harm.

The third, very frequently found, may be useful, but only when coupled with studies of the intent and capability to build harmony. One approach to negative peace studies opens for PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES, seeing violence-war as the smoke signals from the underlying fire of a conflict. And that leads to a major approach to negative peace: remove the conflict, by solving it or, more modestly, by transforming it so that the parties can handle it in a nonviolent way, with empathy for each other, and with creativity.

The root of a conflict is always a contradiction, an incompatibility or clash of goals which then easily translates into a class of parties and violent behavior. At any stage in this process negative attitudes may enter - and attitudes, behavior and contradictions then feed into each other in vicious cycles. In the wake of those processes are traumatized parties and actors with festering wounds on body, mind and spirit.

That leads us to the two key tasks in search of, as a minimum, negative peace:

MEDIATION to resolve the incompatibility, and CONCILIATION, healing the traumas, removing them from the relation between the parties, and closure. If some closure is brought about without conflict resolution we should not talk about conciliation but pacification - a non-starter. A useful metaphor is to turn the page in the history of their relations, opening a blank page. If that page remains blank, nothing positive, nothing negative, only indifference has been obtained. Arguably better than hatred and harm, but a non-relation may easily remain one.