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Rethinking Galtung's Key Concepts: A Deliberative Agential Approach to Deep Positive Peace

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Abstract

Current peace and conflict studies typically overlook the deep-rooted social identity dynamics underlying intra-state armed conflict. This article addresses that gap by proposing a novel deep positive peace concept as the transformation of exclusionary social identity perceptions. Informed by horizontal inequalities (HIs) thesis, social identity theory, and realist social theory, it underscores the role of agents' social identity in shaping collective beliefs and social practices. It thereby advances our understanding of the deep-rooted dynamics of the (re)production and potentially transformation of HIs, and hierarchical relationships and structures. The article shows that incorporating the neglected social identity and agential lenses can supplement Galtung's structural violence, positive peace, and peacebuilding concepts, which are premised on the structural aspects of the agent–structure problem in social theory. It argues for an agential approach aimed at transforming exclusionary social identity perceptions as the deep-rooted drivers of structural violence (HIs), hierarchical structures, and intra-state armed conflict. It also shows how the proposed deliberative agential approach moves beyond post-conflict dialogical and institutionalist (structural) approaches and thereby supplements current peacebuilding and conflict transformation conceptualizations and practices.

Resumen

Los estudios actuales relativos a la paz y el conflicto tienden a pasar por alto las dinámicas en materia de identidad social profundamente arraigadas que subyacen al conflicto armado intraestatal. Este artículo aborda esa brecha proponiendo un novedoso concepto de paz positiva profunda como la transformación de las percepciones excluyentes de la identidad social. El artículo está basado en la tesis de las desigualdades horizontales, la teoría de la identidad social y la teoría social realista, y destaca el papel de la identidad social de los agentes en la conformación de creencias colectivas y prácticas sociales. Por lo tanto, el artículo proporciona avances con respecto a nuestra comprensión de las dinámicas profundamente arraigadas de la (re)producción y, potencialmente transformación, de las desigualdades horizontales, así como de las relaciones y estructuras jerárquicas. El artículo demuestra que el hecho de incorporar las perspectivas, que han estado descuidadas, en materia de identidad social y agencia puede ayudar a complementar los conceptos de violencia estructural, paz positiva y construcción de la paz de Galtung, que se basan en los aspectos estructurales del problema agente-estructura en la teoría social. El artículo aboga por un enfoque agencial que tiene por objetivo transformar las percepciones excluyentes de la identidad social, tales como los impulsores profundamente arraigados de la violencia estructural (desigualdades horizontales), las estructuras jerárquicas y el conflicto armado intraestatal. El artículo, también, demuestra cómo el enfoque propuesto de agencia deliberativa va más allá de los enfoques dialógicos e institucionalistas (estructurales) posteriores al conflicto y, por lo tanto, complementa las conceptualizaciones y prácticas actuales en materia de consolidación de la paz y transformación de conflictos.

Résumé

Actuellement, l'irénologie et la polémologie tendent à négliger les dynamiques identitaires et sociales profondes qui sous-tendent les conflits armés intra-étatiques. Cet article comble cette lacune en proposant un nouveau concept de paix positive profonde, à savoir la transformation des perceptions identitaires sociales exclusives. En s'appuyant sur la thèse des inégalités horizontales (IH), la théorie de l'identité sociale et la théorie sociale réaliste, il met en lumière le rôle de l'identité sociale des agents dans la formation des croyances collectives et des pratiques sociales. Nous pouvons alors mieux comprendre la dynamique profondément enracinée de la (re)production et de la transformation potentielle des IH, ainsi que les relations et structures hiérarchiques. Dans un premier temps, l'article montre qu'en intégrant les perspectives négligées de l'identité sociale et de l'approche agentielle, il est possible d'enrichir les concepts de violence structurelle, de paix positive et de consolidation de la paix évoqués par Galtung, car, en effet, ces concepts reposent sur les aspects structurels du problème agent-structure en théorie sociale. Dans un second temps, il plaide en faveur d'une approche agentielle afin de transformer les perceptions identitaires sociales exclusives, qui sont les moteurs névralgiques de la violence structurelle (IH), des structures hiérarchiques et des conflits armés intraétatiques. Enfin, l'article montre comment l'approche agentielle délibérative proposée va au-delà des approches dialogiques et institutionnalistes (structurelles) post-conflit. Ce faisant, il complète les conceptualisations et les pratiques actuelles en matière de consolidation de la paix et de transformation des conflits.

Key words Galtung, positive peace, structural violence, horizontal inequalities, conflict transformation, peacebuilding, intra-state armed conflict, identity transformation, social identity theory, realist social theory, agents–structures nexus, social transformation, agency, forward-looking responsibility, agonistic peace, ontological (in)security

Palabras clave Galtung, paz positiva, violencia estructural, desigualdades horizontales, transformación de conflictos, construcción de paz, conflicto armado intraestatal, transformación de la identidad, teoría de la identidad social, teoría social realista, nexo agentes-estructura de la transformación social, agencia y responsabilidad moral

Mots clés Galtung, paix positive, violence structurelle, inégalités horizontales, transformation des conflits, consolidation de la paix, conflit armé intraétatique, transformation de l'identité, théorie de l'identité sociale, théorie sociale réaliste, lien entre agents et structures dans la transformation sociale, agence et responsabilité morale

Introduction

Despite the optimism of the 2000s,[1] intra-state armed conflict remains a global reality (Davies et al. 2025). The frequent recurrence of intra-state armed conflict (United Nations General Assembly 2006, 84; Walter 2011), especially since the 1990s, is often attributed to "the poor quality of peace" built in post-conflict societies (Richmond and Mac Ginty 2014/2015, 171). That is, "the concept and practice of peace" have failed to address the root causes of armed conflict (Richmond and Mac Ginty 2014/2015, 171; Joshi and Wallensteen 2018, 6–8; Paris 2018, 491–3). The report of the Advisory Group of Experts (2015) on the review of the United Nations (UN) n.d. peacebuilding architecture acknowledges that UN peacebuilding practice has been ineffective. This review led to concurring resolutions of UN General Assembly (2016, A/RES/70/262, 2) and Security Council (2016, S/RES/2282, 2) that emphasized the importance of "a comprehensive approach to sustaining peace," which involves addressing the root causes of violent conflict, not only in post-conflict contexts, but rather continuously, in addition to facilitating social inclusion and national reconciliation through resilient institutions (Advisory Group of Experts 2015, paras. 1, 26–7). In short, these documents urge the pursuit of sustainable, *positive peace* without, however, using that term.

Scholars argue that there is still a gap in defining peace beyond simply the absence of war or armed conflict (Davenport et al. 2018, 9; Diehl et al. 2021, 606). Recent studies have focused on providing measurable definitions of positive peace among states (Goertz et al. 2016), or among actors at multiple levels, including intra-state and subnational levels (Davenport et al. 2018, 30–1), with the primary aim of providing scales to peace and advancing quantitative peace research (Söderström et al. 2021, 485–6). The dominant empiricist scholarship in peace studies typically rejects thick conceptualizations of positive peace in favor of empirically observable concepts of peace (Hvidsten and Skarstad 2018, 111–3). This article, however, follows Johan Galtung's tradition of thick positive peace theorization, building on the premise that theory, or ideas and ideals, can shape social practices (Kant 1793/1996,

[1] For accounts on global peacefulness linked to "successful" United Nations activism, see Doyle and Sambanis (2006), Pinker and Mack (2014, 88–91), Walter (2017, 473–74), and Goldstein (2011, 276).

paras. 8:309–8:313; Cederman et al. 2013, 223).[2] It offers an original concept of self-sustaining, deep positive peace, by incorporating the understudied agency and social identity dimensions in Galtung's positive peace and structural violence theory.

For peace to be sustainable, I argue that (a) the deep-rooted causes of violent conflict must be sustainably addressed, and (b) peace must be embedded in deep socio-cultural structures and agents (individual actors as collectivities). I therefore propose a concept of deep positive peace, taking socio-economic, political, and status horizontal inequalities (HIs) among identity groups as the main drivers of grievances and intra-state armed conflict,[3] and social identity dynamics as the deep-rooted drivers of HIs. This would help embed peace in deep socio-cultural structures, given that agents' social identity shapes their collective practices and thereby deep structures, as elaborated later. As an outcome, deep positive peace refers to the absence of social identity-based drivers of HIs (i.e., latent fundamental conflicts or exclusionary social identity perceptions), HIs, and out-group domination. As a process, it refers to the transformation of exclusionary social identities into inclusionary ones entailing horizontal inter-group equality and egalitarian structures within societies. As such, deep positive peace involves comprehensive conflict transformation and "sustaining peace"[4] in all cycles, especially in pre-conflict contexts as well.

This article therefore contributes to Galtung's—and broader—positive peace(building) and conflict transformation theorizing. It advances the study of intra-state (positive) peace and armed conflict by filling gaps in and contributing to existing scholarship in the following four ways. First, few studies have focused on social identity theory and non-material motivations to explain armed violence from an ontological perspective (Kalin and Sambanis 2018, 250–5),[5] and those that do so mostly consider social identity as a factor that fuels or protracts conflict (Strömbom 2020, 17). This article contributes to Galtung's positive peace theorizing and conflict transformation literature by adding social identity and agency lenses to explain the deep-rooted causes of structural violence and inter-group conflict ontologically, and conceptualize deep positive peace in a way that entails adopting an agential approach aimed at transforming exclusionary social identities.

Second, this article adds to studies, which draw on the social constructivist paradigm to conceptualize sustainable peace and peacebuilding (Wallis and Richmond 2017, 422; McCandless and Donais 2020, 126–7), by providing an agent-focused critical realist[6] analysis of the deep-rooted dynamics that impede positive peace and requisite social transformation. In addition, diverging from previous constructivist studies that typically highlight local agency and local-international dichotomy (Howe 2020, 123–4), it focuses on agency–conflict nexus, specifically the transformation of social identities underlying conflict-prone local power structures. Third, the article innovatively integrates related theoretical frameworks, specifically theories of peace and conflict, social identity theory, and Margaret Archer's realist social theory to provide an ontological analysis of what sustainable positive peace entails. Finally, it offers an original conceptualization of deep positive peace and a deliberative agential framework, building and expanding on my earlier work (Turan 2015) by drawing on said theories to supplement existing peacebuilding and conflict transformation models.

In short, this study applies previously overlooked social identity and agential dimensions to advance the study and, potentially, the practice of peace(building), conflict transformation, and conflict prevention. The deep positive peace conceptualization aims to contribute to positive peace theorizing by considering social identity transformation as a means to sustaining peace when HIs and hierarchical structures already exist, rather than considering peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and reconciliation as post-conflict measures once inter-group competition has become extremely dehumanizing.

This article begins by defining deep positive peace and explaining its premises and relevance for addressing structural violence and armed conflict within states. Second, drawing on the central premises of HIs theory of conflict, realist social theory, and social identity theory, it examines Galtung's peace and conflict theories to show how the proposed deep positive peace concept supplements understudied aspects in Galtung's works. Third, it critiques liberal and alternative peace(building) conceptualizations and their institutionalist and dialogical approaches to conflict transformation and peacebuilding to show that deep positive peace and its deliberative agential approach are distinct from and supplement these existing concepts and

[2] For a detailed discussion drawing on realist social theory premises, see the text accompanying footnote 18. As such, the present article draws on Wendt (1987, 370, 355), who argues for applying to the social sciences a critical realist perspective on ontology, which focuses on "the underlying causal mechanisms" (agent-structure problem), rather than merely the dominant empiricist perspective relying on "observable regularities."

[3] For HIs theory of intra-state armed conflict, as a variant of grievance theory, see Stewart (2008). For the consensus that HIs are the main causes of intra-state armed conflict, see Cederman et al. (2013) and Hillesund et al. (2018).

[4] For a detailed account, see de Coning (2018).

[5] Instead, Sherif and Sherif's (1953) realistic group conflict theory (RCT), which claims that conflict is driven by conflicting material goals, has influenced the mainstream grievance and HIs theories of conflict, see cited in Cederman et al. (2013, 39). Cf. Northrup (1989, 77, 81) considers social identity dynamics as root causes of conflict, but dismisses identity transformation; see also Lederach (2003, 31) elaborated in text accompanying footnote 31.

[6] Price and Martin (2018, 89) argue that Archer's realist social theory inspired critical realism. This article uses the former term for clarity.

their approaches. Lastly, it discusses how deep positive peace may be operationalized by specifying its deliberative agential framework's core objectives, functions, guiding principles, and participants. Given the article's focus on the gaps in conceptualizing lasting positive peace, this final section only provides a general framework, and leaves more sophisticated discussion to practice-focused future research.

Deep Positive Peace and Its Agential Dimension

Deep positive peace as an *outcome* refers to the absence of *latent fundamental conflicts*, namely collective exclusionary social identity perceptions underlying collective discriminatory practices, HIs, out-group domination, hierarchical structures, and armed conflict. As a *process*, deep positive peace includes efforts to transform latent fundamental conflicts into inclusionary social identity visions. The concept of latent fundamental conflicts refers to socio-psychological drivers of HIs and hierarchical structures that deny out-group equality and equal status.[7] This article's core premise is that exclusionary social identity perceptions are the deep-rooted drivers of discriminatory practices toward out-group(s), that is, *manifest fundamental conflicts*, which engender HIs, HIs-producing and hierarchical (power) structures, and hegemonic or positional inter-group competition for higher in-group status. This argument derives from the central premises of social identity theory (Tajfel 1982, 22; Reicher 2004, 933; Hogg 2006, 122–4; Cuhadar and Dayton 2011, 276) and realist social theory (Archer 1982, 470–6, 1996, 693), which suggest that social identity shapes collective cognitive (ideational) frameworks, including in-group beliefs, perceptions, norms, values, and goals, which then shape collective practices and behaviors.[8] Social identity theory explains that identity groups seek "positive distinctiveness" or differentiation for in-group self-esteem, which may generate inter-group competition involving out-group discrimination (Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Building on this, the present article links the dynamics of HIs to social identity needs through the concept of latent fundamental conflicts.[9]

This is not to deny that material interests, goal incompatibilities, or greed may also encourage inter-group conflict; rather, to emphasize how social identity dynamics, typically neglected in peace(building) and conflict transformation research and practice, help explain the deep-rooted drivers of conflict-prone incompatibilities. It is also not to deny that intra-state conflicts may be one-sided conflicts (waged by state or non-state actors against civilians) or non-state conflicts (among groups for material resources), that is, not always state-based conflicts (between rebel groups and governments) typically over political or identity issues (UCDP n.d.). While such conflicts may prima facie rule out social identity-based explanations or remedies, greed-based motivations can still be traced to the out-group's exclusion when it comes to sharing material resources,[10] thus validating a latent fundamental conflict lens. Furthermore, there is a consensus that structural violence, grievances, and societal distrust (Collier and Hoeffler 2004, 570; Regan and Norton 2005, 322)—and, by extension, social identity dynamics—are the root causes of intra-state armed conflict, whether as violent extremism, terrorism (Schmid 2013, 4, 13, 17; Schils and Pauwels 2010, 81–2, 91; UN General Assembly 2015; Ghatak et al. 2019, 442–3), or thuggery.[11] Therefore, the deep positive peace conceptualization is relevant for peace(building), and conflict transformation research and practice because, like Galtung's positive peace, it requires tackling structural violence, which "presupposes latent personal violence" (Galtung 1969, 179, 172) that increases the likelihood of *manifest* personal violence (armed conflict).

Drawing on social theory and social identity theory, this article argues that the sustainable transformation

[7] This article further develops the concept of fundamental conflicts in my earlier work (Turan 2015, 106–07, 120–3), which refers to "identity divisions" or antagonistic and exclusionary inter-group relations and perceptions, by more comprehensively defining the concept by introducing its latent and manifest variants drawing on Galtung's (1969, 172) conceptualization of violence, and social identity and realist social theories. For a more detailed account of the concepts of latent and manifest fundamental conflicts, and their theoretical underpinnings and nexus with HIs, grievances, and identity threats, see Tuba Turan 2025. "Taking Social Identity-Driven Dynamics of Intra-State Armed Conflict and Horizontal Inequalities Seriously." [Manuscript submitted for publication].

[8] Hogg (2006, 122–4) explains how culture and group norms, initially defined through social identity perceptions, influence collective behavior. Reicher (2004, 933) argues that social identity perceptions and associated beliefs precede collective attitudes and practices. See also studies cited in Cuhadar and Dayton (2011, 276) for the consensus that discriminatory/violent behavior follows "cognitive structures and processes (e.g., negative beliefs and stereotyping)"—or , as I put it in this article, latent fundamental conflicts—and "negative feelings" and attitudes. For social theory accounts on the nexus between social identity (including collective beliefs/norms) and actions, see Archer (1982, 470, 475–6, 1996, 693–4) and Wendt (1999, 148–50, 346). See also Jenkins (2016).

[9] For accounts that SIT hypotheses are valid and generalizable, see Reicher (2004), Rubin and Hewstone (2004), and Hogg (2016, 6, 824–5).

[10] Kalin and Sambanis (2018, 250) argue that identity/self-esteem and material motivations are mostly fused, while Cederman et al. (2013, 20–27) show that grievance-sceptic theories are weaker in explaining intra-state conflict. For greed as a fuel rather than a cause of violent conflict, see also Bar-Tal (2000, 353, 2007, 1432) and Zartman (2000, 256–57, 2009, 329).

[11] Millar (2012, 726) argues that identity causes conflict, even those economic gain-driven or one-sided ones. For Galtung (1969, 179–80), thugs or mercenaries may be used by benefitting actors to preserve inegalitarian structures and consequent structural violence. Similarly, Mueller, cited in Kaldor (2013, 6), claims "thug" violence is political, requiring state-building.

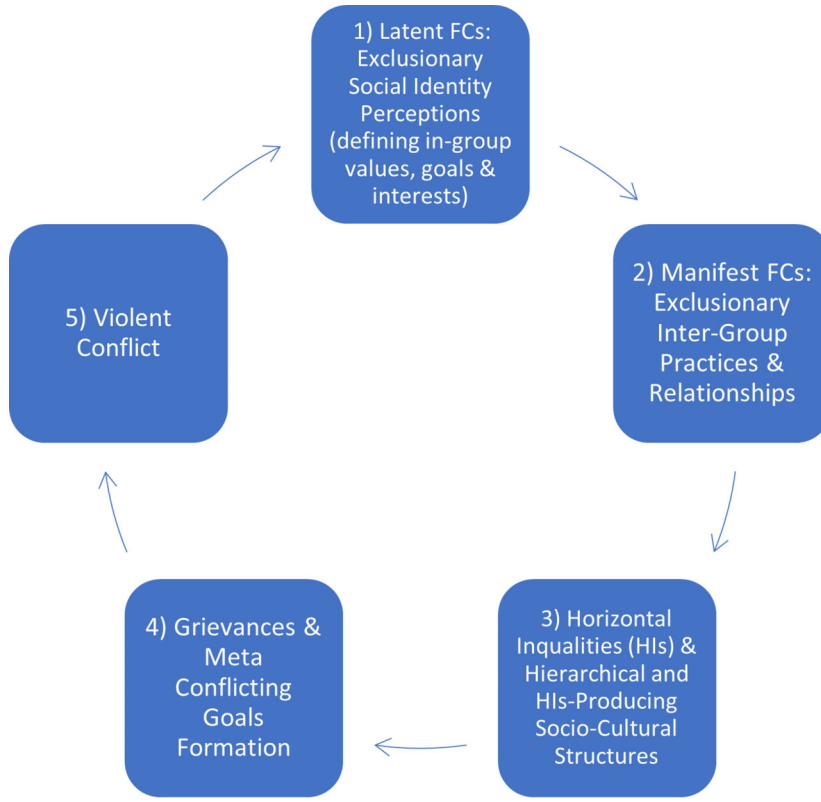

Figure 1 Cyclical nexus between fundamental conflicts, HIs, and conflict

of structural violence, conflict-prone hierarchical structures, and inter-group relationships also requires transforming agents' exclusionary social identities. Therefore, deep positive peace entails an agential dimension[12] to transform agents' exclusionary social identity perceptions rather than merely addressing the latter's consequences in the form of HIs, conflicting goals, antagonistic inter-group relationships, and ultimately violence (fig. 1).

This is essential to ensure that peace takes root both in agents (*qua* identity groups) and deep socio-cultural structures, which are mutually reinforcing. Hence, as elaborated later, deep positive peace differs analytically from, and can therefore supplement, Galtung's and recent positive peace(building) and conflict transformation conceptualizations, which overlook the influences of social identity and agency. Furthermore, while deep positive peace is premised on identity transformation, building on Kelman (2001, 2004) and Bar-Tal's (2000, 355–9, 2007) reconciliation frameworks, it does not merely seek reconciliation through out-group re-humanization as a post-conflict relation-building measure.[13] Rather, it seeks also nondomination among groups and reciprocal removal of exclusionary social identity perceptions. Because it only targets the exclusionary aspects of social identities, it would not necessarily mean abandoning the "core" of social identities (Kelman 2001, 194–5), which typically risks provoking violent reactions to ensure identity security (Rios et al. 2018, 245). As Kelman (2001, 194–5, 2010, 4–6) argues, dehumanizing others is "not a necessary condition for preserving identity." Thus, transforming identity to eliminate extreme out-group negation would not inherently threaten it, and latent fundamental conflicts even less so. Furthermore, efforts to transform latent fundamental conflicts require the reciprocal will and commitment of relevant groups. Therefore, deep positive peace would not inadvertently make identity groups more salient than they origi-

[12] For agent-focused analyses of the transformation and reproduction of culture and other deep structures, see Archer (1982, 469–70, 1995, Chapter 8). For the nexus between identity and structural transformation, see Wendt (1999, 185–8, 357, 366, 372).

[13] As Kelman (2004, 119) and Paffenholz (2015) argue, reconciliation is essentially a relation-building task for peacebuilding and conflict transformation. See also Galtung (2007, 16), Staub (2014), and Strömbom (2020, 17–9). Cf. Kelly (2021, 506–9) for a thick conceptualization of reconciliation. The following section on contrasting deep positive peace and its agential approch with existing dialogical approaches provides a detailed discussion.

nally were, risk assimilating particular identities,[14] or necessarily provoke "ontological insecurity."[15]

According to social identity theory scholarship, the social–psychological needs of positive in-group differentiation and self-esteem do not intrinsically require in-group socio-economic, political, or cultural domination or negative out-group discrimination and exclusion (Reicher 2004, 930). Hence, the objective of directing relevant groups to transform just their exclusionary identity perceptions would not be unrealistic, especially because social identities and corresponding ideational systems are mutable. As explained in the next section, this is because agency enables each group member (social actor) to prioritize personal over social identity, thereby filtering out the influences of existing cultural and ideational (belief) systems and structures shaping exclusionary social identities (Archer 2003, 6–7, 116–120, 342). As Giddens (1995, 75 cited in King 2010, 256) puts it, "[w]e [actors] are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves."

Galtung's Positive Peace Theorization: Room for Deep Positive Peace?

This section elaborates Galtung's peace and conflict theories, particularly overlooked aspects regarding the central premises of HIs theory, social theory, and social identity theory. It shows how the proposed deep positive peace supplements Galtung's positive peace by emphasizing neglected social identity dynamics and HIs among identity groups. Beyond critiquing and supplementing Galtung's theories, this is significant because it challenges the assumption, widely shared in broader peace and conflict research, including grievance and greed theories of conflict, that conflicting material goals set off conflict.[16]

For Galtung, direct violence results from incompatible goals (based on values, basic needs, and/or interests) that trigger "Self vs Other" divisions, followed by frustration, aggressive attitudes, and violent behavior. Galtung's conflict triangle portrays violent behavior (B) as underpinned by latent attitudes and assumptions (A), consisting of "hostile emotions," and "negative cognitions" or beliefs and perceptions toward others (Galtung 1996, 72), and contradiction (C) or goal-incompatibilities (Höglund and Kovacs 2010, 373–5). Yet, although Galtung initially acknowledged that manifest conflict may emerge from either negative attitudes/assumptions (A) or behavior (B), leading to conscious and overt contradiction (C) (Galtung 1996, 72), he later argued that contradiction (C) is "the *root* conflict" provoking conflict-prone attitudes/assumptions and behaviors toward "the other" as the "meta-conflict" (Galtung 2007, 15–7, 30). The Galtungian conflict triangle is enabled by a violent culture that legitimizes violence, which is consequently reproduced (Galtung 1996, 72).

In his pioneering article, Galtung (1969, 183, 185–6) defined negative peace as the absence of manifest (direct) violence, and positive peace as the absence, not just of direct violence, but also of indirect or structural violence, namely social injustices. Structural violence, such as premature death due to "avoidable" starvation, is the result of "inequality . . . in the distribution of power [and] . . . resources" (Galtung 1969, 168, 175). This violence is indirect and "non-intended," unattributable to individual actors, because it results from pre-existing structures, including culture (Galtung 1969, 170–1, 1996, 31). For Galtung (1969, 183), positive peace entails pursuing vertical equality among individuals through egalitarian development. He later defined positive peace positively as the presence of other life-enhancing conditions, such as freedom, dialogue, solidarity, and participation, in addition to (vertical) equity (Galtung 1996, 30, 32).

Deep Positive Peace: A Gap Filler

Deep positive peace, defined as the absence of latent fundamental conflicts (exclusionary social identity perceptions), identifies the specific deep-rooted drivers of armed conflict and structural violence to be tackled. It can also be defined positively as the presence of inclusionary social identity visions entailing harmonious, non-hierarchical inter-group relations, and substantive socio-economic, political, and cultural status equality within societies. Like Galtung's positive peace, both definitions denote a positive condition, particularly "harmonious" inter-group relations premised on social justice (Galtung 1996, 79). Yet, deep positive peace differs from Galtung's conceptualizations by underscoring the agential and horizontal aspects of social injustices.

Underscoring agential aspects, deep positive peace conceptualization does not suppose that structural violence is purely "unintended" (Galtung 1969, 171–2; Galtung and Höivik 1971). Although Galtung (1969, 178–80) acknowledges the responsibility of actors in reproducing structural violence and the underlying structures, this

[14] For a critique of assimilating social identities and radical shared identity creation or "de-ethnicization" in post-genocide Rwanda, see Bargués-Pedreny and Mathieu (2018, 289–91) and Purdeková and Mwambari (2022, 25, 33). Due to such risks, Northrup (1989, 81) argues that relationships rather than identities should be transformed.

[15] For Kinnvall and Mitzen (2020, 240, 244), ontological insecurity emerges if the "cognitive consistency" of self-identity or "being," including associated routine practices and narratives, is threatened.

[16] Like grievance and HIs theories, greed and opportunity theories (maintaining that maximizing material interests and goals drives conflict) are also premised on Sherif and Sherif's RCT (1953) that focuses on conflicting material goals rather than social identity dynamics, see Cederman et al. (2013, 39, 13–20).

remains underexamined in Galtungian theories (Höglund and Kovacs 2010, 375). In contrast, this article views persistent structural violence, particularly HIs among identity groups, as the ongoing reproduction of current agents motivated by their particular exclusionary social identity perceptions. This view is premised on the central arguments of social identity and realist social theories, namely that the (re)production and transformation of social-cultural structures necessarily depend on agents' actions shaped by social identity. Thus, the deep positive peace conceptualization assumes there is a nexus between agency, social identity, and structural violence, thereby filling the gap in Galtung's theorizations of structural violence and positive peace by focusing on the overlooked role of agents and their social identity.[17]

Social theory[18] maintains that agents and structures influence each other (Wendt 1992, 1999, 1987, 350, 355-6; Archer 1996, 691, 693–5). Archer's realist social theory emphasizes that agents as collectivities are "social product[s]," who nevertheless possess agency and influence on deep structures, including those underlying their social identities (Archer 1982, 470–1, 476, 1996, 693–4, 1995, Chapter 8). Prevailing structures can only condition agents to take particular actions; that is, agents can determine their actions through their social identity and/or personal identity "concerns" rather than being forced by structures (Archer 2003, 8, 132–4). Notably, agency inherently entails that any person can prioritize personal identity over social identity, which is acquired by being a member of a particular group based on ethnicity, religion, race, or any other social marker/status (Archer 2003, 6–7, 116–20, 342). Although not all actors may always act consciously or use their agency,[19] their collective social practices still have unintended aggregate effects on reproducing or transforming structures (Archer 1982, 469, 1995, 91–2, Chapter 8). This, prima facie, justifies Galtung's analysis that structural violence, which stems from inegalitarian structures, cannot be traced back to particular actors because structures and the resulting structural violence are the unintended consequences of agents' interactions. However, structures are still ultimately agents' social constructs because structures and agents are mutually emergent. Therefore, a nexus between structural violence (as HIs) and agents can be presupposed, especially because agency necessarily entails responsibility for actions and inactions,[20] even if done unconsciously or unintentionally.

Furthermore, research suggests that persistent socio-economic and cultural HIs result from political HIs, such as exclusionary governance and government provision of resources to in-group members (Horowitz 1985, cited in Cederman et al. 2013, 27; Kaldor 2013; Stewart 2016, 4, 5). This is not to deny that HIs in different spheres are ultimately mutually reinforcing and therefore persistent; rather, it emphasizes that socio-economic, political, and cultural status HIs depend on political actions to be tackled. HIs and corresponding human rights abuses are thus political instruments, not just for preserving in-group self-esteem and dominant status, but also for advancing government interests and power bases (Marks 2011, 76–7; Kalin and Sambanis 2018, 250; Fagan 2024, 226), including those regarding economic and natural resources. This supports this article's argument that persistent HIs are not simply unintended consequences of pre-existing structures but rather social/political products of actors.[21] These findings, however, contradict Galtung's purely structural explanation of conflict attitudes by power imbalances or domination within gender, generation, class, and race categories,[22] which considers domination resulting from naturally emerging hierarchical structures in social systems (Galtung 1969, 176–7). Instead, this article accepts that social domination or "hegemony" across identity groups has both structural and agential aspects,[23] while focusing on the latter. It explains inter-group domination agentially by considering social hierarchies, domination, and conflict attitudes as outcomes shaped by agents' latent fundamental conflicts.[24] It therefore presupposes that the deliberate interventions of "strategic actors," who possess strategic mobilization and policy-making powers (Archer 1995, 259–60), can stimulate either the reproduction of domination or social transformation (Joseph 2008, 116–9, 125) toward a more egalitarian social order.

[17] This article expands Galtung's (1969, 175–6, 178–81) acknowledgement of the actors–interaction–structure nexus.

[18] For this consensus, including Giddens's structuration theory, underpinning Wendt's IR constructivism, see King (2010).

[19] Cf. for a particular emphasis on agents' interactions, see Crossley (2022).

[20] For accounts arguing for actors' forward-looking, moral, or political responsibility for (in)actions, see Sikkink (2020, 39–41), McKeown (2021, 4–8), and Galtung (1969, point 4 at 180).

[21] For the "significant aggregate powers" of non-strategic actors as collectivities, namely "Primary Agents," on structures that strategic actors (Corporate Agents) operate, see Archer (1995, 279, 266–70, 2003, 343).

[22] Although divisions within these categories may provide a basis for focusing on HIs among identity groups, Galtung's (2007, 21, 28) Table 2.2 does not explicitly focus on HIs or social identities. While Galtung (1990, 293) highlights the deprivation of identity needs as cultural violence and drivers of direct violence, there is however no analytic focus on social identity. Galtung's (1996, 67, 271) concept of "horizontal structural violence," which refers to cultural injustices that keep similar groups "apart," is also distinct from the concept of HIs, that is, socio-cultural, economic, and status inequalities among distinct identity groups.

[23] This builds on Joseph's (2008, 120–5) conceptualization of hegemony in the international sphere.

[24] This is not to ignore the conditioning effects of deep structures, including cultural ones, on shaping social identity. Yet, as Dessler (1989, 444) and Wendt (1999, 186, 316–7) maintain, temporal omitting or "methodological bracketing" of the effects of structures on agents, and vice versa, is necessary for analytical purposes. Furthermore, as elaborated earlier, agency and personal identity nevertheless enable agents to filter out such structural effects, see text accompanying footnote 18.

This analytic focus on agential and social identity aspects does not deny, however, the necessity for the peace-conducive, non-hegemonic structures that Galtung (1976, 302) argues for, given that structures condition agents' actions by shaping social norms. Neither does this focus undermine Galtung's original structural violence formula or structural approach to positive peace,[25] given that agential and structural dimensions—and approaches—are interrelated and mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive. Furthermore, I propose deep positive peace to supplement Galtung's structural approach to positive peace-building in order to enable the conditions of Galtungian positive peace to emerge in the long term. These include cooperation, equity, and a culture of peace (Galtung 1996, 32–3), and peacebuilding as "depolarization" and out-group re-humanization in actors' "inner worlds" (Galtung 2007, 16, 29). More particularly, deep positive peace entails conscious efforts toward transforming the deep-rooted exclusionary social identity perceptions that prevent Galtungian conditions required to achieve positive peace.[26]

Regarding the second aspect of social injustices, deep positive peace differs from Galtungian positive peace in considering horizontal rather than vertical inequalities as the main drivers of intra-state conflict, drawing on the academic consensus on the nexus between HIs and conflict and taking groups rather than individuals as the main actors (Cederman et al. 2013, 3–4, 22–3). Therefore, unlike Galtung's proposed egalitarian vertical development approach or currently prevailing human rights-based peacebuilding approaches that typically target inequality and discrimination among individuals, deep positive peace focuses on tackling multidimensional inequalities among groups. The prevailing individualistic human rights approach to equality and HIs-reduction is insufficient to tackle HIs *qua* groups (O'Cinneide 2023, 138; Turan 2023, 13–7; Fagan 2024, 225–6). Defining deep positive peace as the absence of latent fundamental conflicts, rather than merely the absence of HIs, permits a focus on identity groups and the social identity dynamics underlying HIs. It therefore intrinsically entails an approach targeting the deeply rooted drivers of inter-group inequalities and armed conflict—in Galtungian terms, the *latent* variants of structural and direct violence, respectively.

Latent fundamental conflicts involve cognitive denial of the out-group's parity with the in-group, although it is not intrinsically necessary to satisfy the social–psychological need of positive distinctiveness. The concept presupposes that social identity perceptions and associated beliefs precede group members' "attitudes or acts toward others"

[25] For Joshi and Wallensteen (2018, 9–10), Galtung's approach is "too" structural.

[26] The next sections will elaborate on this.

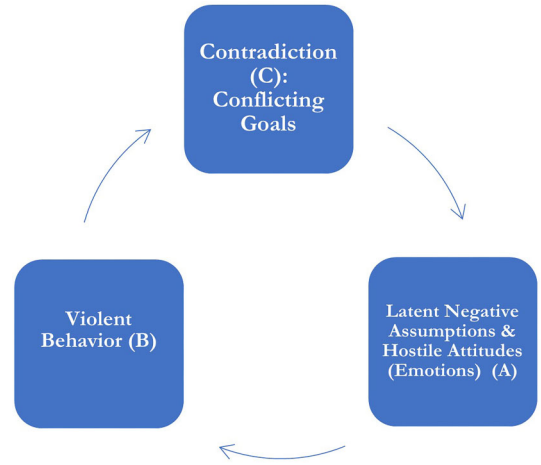

Figure 2 Galtung's conflict triangle (replicated)

(Reicher 2004, 933).[27] Thus, latent fundamental conflicts are located in the latent attitudes and assumptions (A) corner of Galtung's conflict triangle. Deep positive peace diverges from the premises of Galtung's conflict triangle by considering assumptions and attitudes as separate phases (A1 and A2). That is, agents' negative assumptions (perceptions) toward and inferior categorization of out-group(s) shape the negative emotions and attitudes that encourage discriminatory practices against out-groups. Thus, I consider latent fundamental conflicts as the underlying drivers of collective manifest negative attitudes and out-group discriminatory behavior (manifest fundamental conflicts). Through the concept of latent fundamental conflicts, deep positive peace focuses on the dynamics generating mutually exclusive conflicting goals among identity groups (Galtungian contradiction (C) corner), thereby supplementing Galtung's and other peace and conflict theories.[28] As figure 2 shows, by viewing contradiction as the root cause of conflict, preceding negative attitudes/assumptions and violent behavior, Galtung's (2007, 22) conflict theorization overlooks the role of social identity dynamics in provoking antagonistic relationships and conflicting goals (contradiction).

In short, in focusing on the attitudes/assumptions (A) part of the Galtungian conflict triangle, deep positive peace adds a layer involving latent fundamental conflicts (A1) as the driver of inter-group competition, including negative attitudes (A2), discriminatory behavior (B), HIs, polarization, and grievances and conflicting goal formations (C), as shown in figure 3.

[27] See also studies cited in footnote 8.

[28] Thus, Sherif and Sherif's RCT is also complemented, which overlooks the nexus between conflicting goals formation and social identity dynamics. For a detailed critique of RCT, see Tajfel and Turner (1986, 23–4).

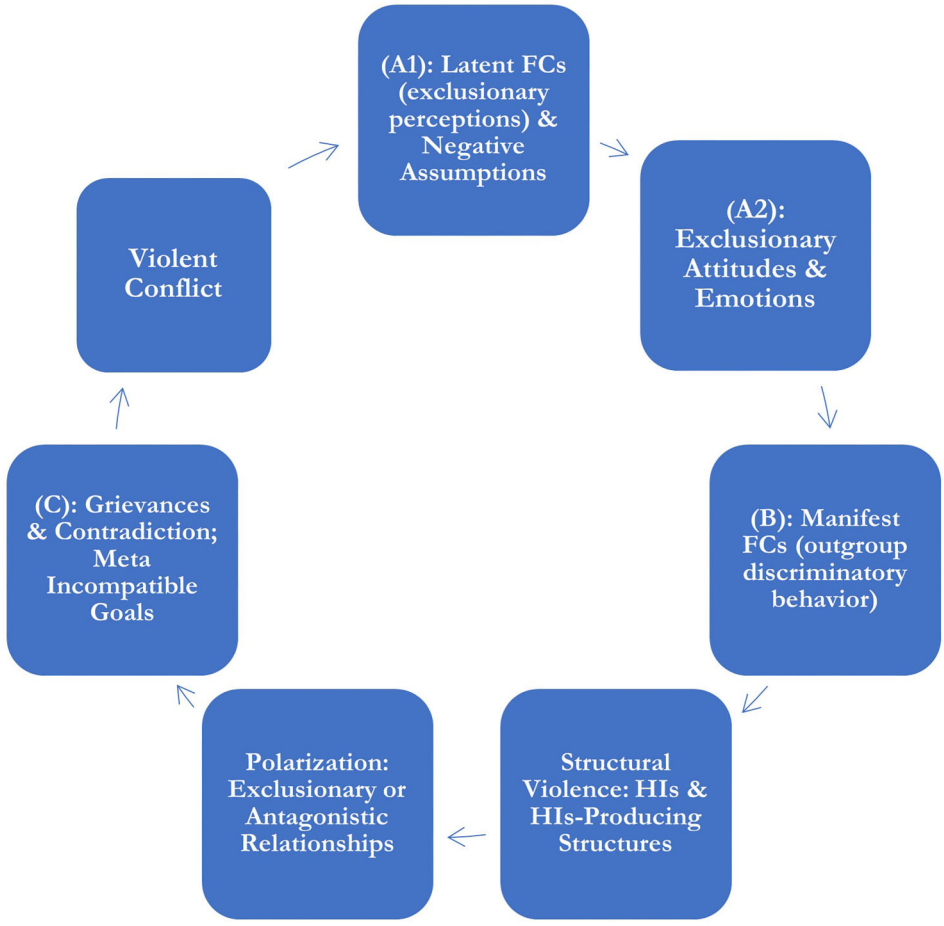

Figure 3 Fundamental conflicts (FCs) integrated in the Galtungian conflict triangle

The deep positive peace framework thus supplements Galtung's structural approach to positive peace(building), which aims at transforming (hierarchical) structures and eliminating structural violence (vertical inequalities) by changing agents' behavior through institutional reform or institution-building and sustained dialogue. In contrast, by adding an agential approach, deep positive peace aims to transform agents' social identity by addressing latent fundamental conflicts to then enable behavioral and structural change. The framework thereby focuses on the role of agency and social identity, and agents' responsibility in generating and sustaining structural violence and inegalitarian structures, which are understudied in Galtung's structure-focused peace and conflict theories, and in other peace(building) conceptualizations and current peacebuilding practice, as elaborated in the next section.

Contrasting Deep Positive Peace and Its Agential Framework with Existing Peace(Building) Conceptualizations and Dialogical Approaches

Responding to shortcomings in UN peacebuilding practice, peace and conflict researchers have proposed various alternative peace(building) concepts and approaches. These include positive peace scholarship (Davenport et al. 2018, Chapter 2), which this article aims to contribute to, and local and relational "turns" that emphasize intergroup relationships and local agency. To further demonstrate the originality of the proposed deep positive peace

conceptualization and its deliberative agential approach, this section discusses how it supplements liberal and alternative peace(building) conceptualizations entailing dialogical approaches. To illustrate how the proposed deliberative agential approach differs from these approaches, it discusses the 2009–2015 Turkish-Kurdish peace process, particularly why its dialogue platforms failed.

Current international peacebuilding practice, including the UN's, draws on Galtung's original peacebuilding concept, premised on inclusive dialogue and building institutions conducive to peace (Galtung 1976; Paffenholz 2010, 45–6; UN Peacebuilding Office 2010, 45). UN peacebuilding practice (Boutros-Ghali 1992, 15–7, 55) is often referred to as liberal peacebuilding given its pursuit of peace through democratization, liberal state-building or institutional reforms, promotion and protection of human rights, and economic liberalization (Paris 2018, 491, 2010, 337). Given frequent recurrences of intra-state armed conflict, liberal peacebuilding has been criticized, especially for failing to address the root causes of armed conflicts. Studies suggest that liberal institution-building and democratization per se are insufficient for tackling these root causes (Paris 2004, 185–7; Newman 2011; Joshi and Wallensteen 2018), including HIs and grievances (Stewart et al. 2008, 309; Richmond and Franks 2009, 181; Campbell and Peterson 2013, 343, 339), or eliciting lasting peace due to ignoring social identity and inter-group competition (Kalin and Sambanis 2018, 253). To avoid "the destabilization effects" of rapid democratization and economic liberalization, such as in Iraq, Paris (2004, 179, 2010, 343) suggests that liberal institution- or state-building should precede elections and neo-liberal marketization. As is common in the prevailing structural (institutionalist)[29] approaches to peacebuilding, this strategy assumes that liberal institutions can induce behavioral change toward liberal practices and attitudes, and, ultimately, structural change, including liberal socio-cultural deep structures, and peace. Such institutionalist–interactionist[30] approaches specifically presume that agents' persistent interaction with and internalization of liberal norms can, in the long term, transform agents' social identities (Northrup 1989, 80–2; Wendt 1992, 417–8, 1999, 352, 338–46).

The UN's peacebuilding framework also includes dialogical approaches (Turan 2018; UNDP-DPPA 2024, 30–42) to foster peaceful inter-group relationships, attitudes, and practices, inspired by Galtung's and Lederach's conflict transformation or "sustainable reconciliation" models, which entail facilitated dialogue among local actors (Paffenholz 2015, 859). These models typically target outgroup dehumanization through dialogue in post-conflict contexts (Lederach 1997, 29) to enhance mutual understanding (Kriesberg and Dayton 2017, 13, 230) rather than transform social identities (Lederach 2005, 146).[31] More specifically, the personal, relational, structural, and cultural transformation dimensions of Lederach's (1997, 20, 30) conflict transformation model[32] ultimately aim at building "peaceful relationships" and actors' interaction "with the goal of creating new perceptions." While Lederach (2003, 31, 17) emphasizes that identity issues are "at the root of most conflicts" and conflict affects identity and cultural patterns, he rules out direct identity transformation efforts, but rather suggests sustained spaces for identity groups to interact and express identity (narratives), including through dialogue mechanisms or the arts (Lederach 2003, 31–3). This is reflected in current peacebuilding practice, which seeks to advance inter-group understanding through inclusive dialogical platforms without a focus on social identity and/or through funding and incentivizing joint-ventures to encourage cooperation between conflict parties (Vicarini and Mackway-Jones 2025).

Diverging from institutionalist and dialogical approaches, deep positive peace requires direct conscious efforts to transform parties' social identities to create new non-exclusionary perceptions that can facilitate structural transformation and relational change. In divided societies, mere contact or dialogue between groups cannot ensure nationwide comprehensive conflict transformation and reconciliation, or the requisite social change (Tajfel 1982, 29; Northrup 1989, 80). This is because, as studies establish, the positive outcomes of local dialogue processes, which are typically not coupled with requisite political actions, neither extend across wider society (Bercovitch and Jackson 2009, 150; Cuhadar and Dayton 2011, 286–7; Cuhadar and Paffenholz 2020, 658–9) nor move beyond "apolitical" relationship-building (Cuhadar and Dayton 2011, 277). Furthermore, direct dialogue platforms may inadvertently entrench divisions and increase risk to violence (Çelik 2021, 37) by producing "newly formed"

[29] Although the terms structural and institutional(ist) are not the same from an ontological perspective because deep structures are distinct from institutions, given these terms are typically used interchangeably in wider literature, this is also followed in this article, yet only when referred in the context of existing peacebuilding practices and approaches.

[30] Wendt's (1999, 342) interactionist approach posits that "actors can do things even if they do not already have the identities which those practices will eventually create." Similarly, Bargués-Pedreny and Mathieu (2018, 288) emphasize that institution-building entails "transform[ing] the perceptions [and] beliefs. . .."

[31] Such reconciliation models, which overlook "the deepest questions of. . .identity" (Lederach 2005, 146), are also referred as interactive or problem-solving workshops and Track-2 diplomacy, see Kriesberg and Dayton (2017, 231).

[32] Lederach's (1997, 82–3, 2003, 17) personal transformation dimension, which may seem the closest to social identity transformation, only aims at the individual's gestural or emotional change to improve personal well-being, while his structural transformation dimension aims at promoting institutions that address the root causes of conflict and reduce "adversariness." See also Miall (2004, 10).

antagonisms and reproducing antagonistic identities (Aggestam et al. 2015, 1741), as exemplified by the collapsed Turkish-Kurdish peace process discussed below.

The proposed deliberative agential approach neither denies the need for inter-group dialogue and advancing mutual understanding nor the potential of persistent interactions to induce identity change in the long term. Instead, it considers that achieving the intended functions of dialogical and institution-building approaches inherently depends on the groups' willingness for inter-group cooperation and corresponding practices, which actors typically lack initially due to exclusionary social identities and perceptions. Therefore, peacebuilding interventions are needed that direct both state and non-state actors to transform their latent fundamental conflicts, especially given that dialogue alone may entrench inter-group antagonism. This is not to argue that this approach is more likely to succeed or any less vulnerable to the complex factors hindering current peacebuilding approaches' effectiveness. Rather, it underscores the need to focus on neglected social identity dynamics, particularly actors' agency and latent fundamental conflicts. This approach thus aims to supplement existing peacebuilding practice by strengthening the agential dimension of agents–interaction–structure nexus in the social theory of social change to limit structural effects in agents' interactions through social identity transformation, thereby enabling inter-group behavioral/relationship change and ultimately structural change. That is, it approaches peacebuilding from an agential dimension to fill the gap in peace(building) theories and thereby supplement existing approaches based on structural and interactionist dimensions.

Responding to the limitations and top-down nature of liberal peacebuilding practice, critical peacebuilding scholars, who make up "the second generation"[33] of the local turn in peacebuilding (Leonardsson and Rudd 2015, 827), have proposed peace conceptualizations focused on local agency (Richmond 2009; Mac Ginty 2010; Mac Ginty and Firchow 2016, 309; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2016), particularly local needs, human rights, and emancipation.[34] Yet, these hybrid peace variants typically aim at "localised *modi vivendi* . . . rather than conflict transformation" (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, 769–70) and focus on transforming agents' attitudes, addressing conflict issues, and promoting local agents' self-determination of everyday peace conditions. To overcome the pitfalls of reproducing the exact conflict-prone structures and attitudes through the local peace formation processes that hybrid peace approaches underscore,[35] Richmond (2013, 389, 383–7) argues for simultaneous "externalised peacebuilding" to facilitate social transformation (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, 770, 2016, 231–3). This approach, however, problematizes "inequalities in power" between primarily international and local actors rather than within the latter. Similarly, de Coning's adaptive peacebuilding conceptualization, part of the pragmatic turn aiming at sustaining peace (Moe and Stepputat 2018), also relies on pre-existing local structures. It presupposes that sustained international efforts can catalyze societal learning about "the costs of exclusion," and endogenous social transformation (de Coning 2016, 167, 2018, 313, 315–6).

Diverging from local peace conceptualizations, deep positive peace focuses on transforming agents' exclusionary social identities rather than simply relying on conflict-prone local agency and power structures. It assumes that violent conflict in a society must be rooted in that very local agency and exclusionary social identity dynamics.[36] Thus, it focuses on tackling latent fundamental conflicts, underlying and reinforcing conflict-prone local agency and structures. Relational peace conceptualizations (Söderström et al. 2021, 486–8) and agonistic peace also seek identity transformation but only to transform antagonistic inter-group relationships or identities without directly focusing on structural transformation (Söderström et al. 2021, 486, 489; Joseph 2018, 429, 432). Agonistic peace(building) entails maintaining difference and pluralism[37] while transforming antagonistic social identities and relationships into agonistic ones by institutionalizing participatory spaces that allow the sustainable contestation of identities and out-group "thick recognition" (Aggestam et al. 2015, 1741; Strömbom 2020, 7–8). Although deep positive peace also considers inter-group agonism or some level of social competition as inevitable drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel 1982, 19–24; Tajfel and Turner 1986, 12–13, 21–2; Reicher 2004, 931–3), it however targets inter-group agonism, specifically as exclusionary social identities and relationships, because these generate structural violence (HIs and out-group domination). As elaborated earlier, by addressing cognitive denial of out-group equality, it aims to facilitate socio-

[33] Paffenholz (2015, 859) claims that Lederach's conflict transformation school, drawing on the works of Galtung, Azar (1988/2002), and Kelman, among others, comprises "the first generation of the local turn."

[34] For the limits of alternative bottom-up approaches, see Chandler (2021).

[35] For local elites' power and resistance to change and limits of hybrid models, see Paffenholz (2015, 866), Bargués-Pedreny and Mathieu (2018, 284), and Aggestam et al. (2015, 1739).

[36] For accounts arguing against "romanticising" the local and critiquing optimistic accounts on local agency, see Paffenholz (2015, 862), McAuliffe (2017, 168, 187–202), and Juncos and Joseph (2020, 295).

[37] Like deep positive peace, agonistic peace also diverges from Davenport's (2018, 164) relational positive peace, which entails plural social identities being replaced with a "shared identity." For accounts opposing shared identity creation, see Tajfel (1982), Mouffe (1999, 751), Hogg (2006, 123–4, Hogg (2017, 574–5), Aggestam et al. (2015, 1740–2), and Strömbom (2020).

cultural transformation toward egalitarian structures. It thus entails deliberative rather than merely participatory agonistic processes[38] to catalyze the construction of non-exclusionary identities, wider social change, and deliberation outcomes geared toward shaping national policies premised on inter-group equality and non-domination.

The relevance of the agential deep positive peace framework is exemplified by the failed 2009–2015 Turkish-Kurdish peace process. Besides state-level political negotiations, it involved Wise People Committees (WPCs), convened across the seven regions of Turkey and chaired by prominent public figures, including academics, artists, and journalists, to start an open-ended dialogue among the Kurdish and Turkish grassroots. While not following them exactly, WPCs were similar in function to dialogue forums adopted in liberal and alternative peace(building) approaches (Çelik 2021, 37). The main objectives were eliciting inter-group understanding and thereby "public support" (Çelik 2021, 33; Rumelili and Çelik 2017, 290) for the peace process between the Turkish state and the insurgent PKK.[39] However, by influencing public discourse across Turkey, they reproduced and entrenched each side's conflicting narratives regarding historical injustices, human rights violations, and the conflict's causes (Çelik 2021, 40), because the process did not include a focus on redressing past injustices and perceived grievances through legislative or political measures—that is, a forward-looking prospect for reconciliation (Çelik 2021, 33). Communal violence erupted in some regions before armed conflict resumed in 2015 after the government announced the end of the peace process (Çelik 2021, 37, 39–40; Rumelili and Çelik 2017, 290; Akgül and Akgül 2023, 11–3).

From an agonistic peace(building) perspective, Çelik (2021, 39–40) argues that the process failed because the WPCs' design did not enable sustained and "structured dialogue" through mediation, which could have fostered mutual respect and a shared will for political and institutional reforms based on "liberty and equality." Instead, they impeded a transition from antagonistic into agonistic narratives and relationships because each side's expressions of "radical disagreements" or contentious beliefs[40] regarding the out-group's responsibility for the conflict were not channeled for constructive openings (Çelik 2021, 39). From an ontological security perspective, Rumelili and Çelik (2017, 280, 284–5) argue that the WPCs increased each side's ontological insecurity by re-exposing them to blame and challenges to their in-group narratives, given that ontological security depends on maintaining in-group identity, including narratives and routines (Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020, 240, 244). Hence, they conclude that the process failed because it lacked a mandate to promote new narrative constructions conducive to both parties' ontological security (Rumelili and Çelik 2017, 280). As Rumelili (2015, cited in Rumelili and Çelik 2017, 282) notes, although shared narrative construction can elicit new forms of ontological security, this requires "new constructions of identity and routines."

Against this background, the dialogical aspects of the failed peace process indicate that peace initiatives should include identity transformation, among other political and transitional justice measures, to catalyze the transformation of conflict-prone narratives, which are essentially "identity-related beliefs" (Somer 2005, cited in Rumelili and Çelik 2017, 284–5), without provoking identity threats, ontological insecurity, and violence. By aiming at transforming latent fundamental conflicts and resulting structural violence, the agential deep positive peace approach fills this gap —also prevalent in liberal and alternative peace(building) models. It presupposes that inter-group radical disagreements or conflicting narratives result from exclusionary identity perceptions and rejection of equal co-existence. Hence, their resolution requires ideational and social identity transformation. This is crucial for achieving sustainable positive peace because, as elaborated earlier, agents' exclusionary identity perceptions and beliefs provoke exclusionary collective practices and relationships, which subsequently generate social-cultural norms that legitimize domination, HIs, and HI-producing structures.[41] As figure 4 shows, adding an agential approach would enable the required behavioral–relational and structural changes to embed deep positive peace in deep structures. This is required by the social theory's agents–interaction–structure nexus, wherein agents and structures are mutually emergent and mutually reinforcing through agents' social interactions (Wendt 1992, 413). Thus, agential and structural dimensions both require attention to ensure a comprehensive and ontologically informed peacebuilding framework. Similarly, from

[38] Deliberation typically aims to influence decision-making and policy-making, whereas dialogue aims to improve relationships, see Walsh (2007) and Turan (2015, 123–8). Cf. Mouffe (1999) and Strömbom et al. (2022, 690), who argue that agonism excludes deliberative processes premised on consensus.

[39] As such, WPCs exhibit Track-2, middle-level, or interactive workshops suggested in conflict transformation models.

[40] For a detailed account of inter-group radical disagreements, see Ramsbotham (2010, 44–5).

[41] As discussed earlier in text accompanying footnote 18, this is not to ignore the conditioning yet non-determinative effects of deep structures, including culture. As Archer (1995, 193, 198, 253–4) shows, there are independent (causal) effects of agents and socio-cultural structures on each other. Yet, culture, as the ideational aspect of social structures, consisting of collective beliefs and internalized norms (Wendt 1999, 185–90), is inherently related to agents' social identity (Tajfel 1982, 22; Reicher 2004, 937; Wendt 1999, 338; Hogg 2006), which shapes collective practices by defining in-group norms, beliefs, and goals, and is dependent on social interactions of agents (Archer 1995, 195–6; Crossley 2022). See also studies and discussion in footnote 8. Cf. Çelik (2021, 28–9) argues that beliefs expressed as radical disagreements shape parties' collective practices and constitute factors protracting conflicts.

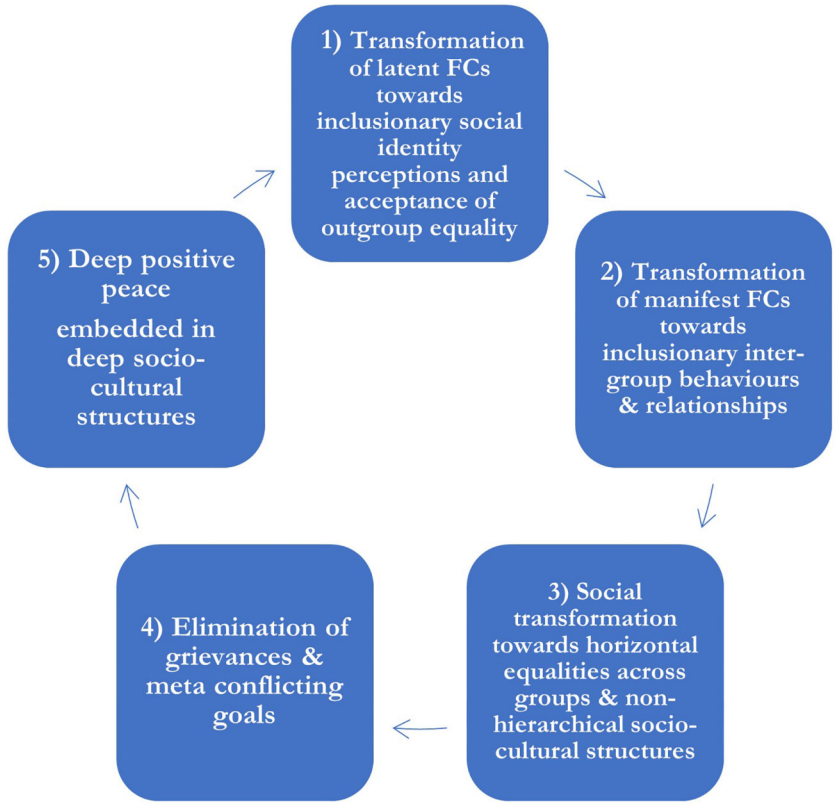

Figure 4 The nexus between latent fundamental conflicts transformation and deep positive peace

a critical realist perspective, Joseph and Kurki (2018, 88, 92) argue that relationships and practice (interaction dimension) are not independent of the underlying deeper social ontology, namely agents and structures. As mentioned earlier, one caveat is that the complexity of factors hindering both current and alternative peacebuilding approaches would also apply to deep positive peace.

Operationalization of Deep Positive Peace through Its Deliberative Agential Approach

The preceding analysis revealed a gap in that existing peace(building) conceptualizations and practice give insufficient weight to social identity, agency, and social identity transformation. I therefore argued that this theoretical gap warrants filling, in both the conceptualization and practice of peace(building), because the social theory's agents–interaction–structure nexus demands attention to both the agential and structural dimensions in order for social transformation and peace to take root in both dimensions. Having shown that agential dimension is overlooked in current research and practice of peace(building), deep positive peace conceptualization fills this gap theoretically.

This section discusses how the deliberative agential approach *may* be operationalized in practice to help transform latent fundamental conflicts by providing a general framework, including the deliberative agential platforms' operational criteria, objectives, and participants. However, due to space limitations and the article's focus on identifying theoretical gaps in Galtungian and other positive peace(building) conceptualizations, this discussion will be brief, leaving more comprehensive consideration to future practice-focused research.[42] There is also a caveat:

[42] For a more comprehensive account of a deliberative approach to positive peace entailing also semi-formal (Track 1.5) platforms and how it may be integrated within UN peacebuilding architecture as a means to systematic conflict prevention, see Turan (2015, 108–109, 190–205). While building on this earlier work, this article expands the then proposed deliberative approach, which primarily aimed at addressing exclusionary and antagonistic inter-group *relationships* and *structures* (Turan 2015, 198–203), by focusing on transforming exclusionary identities and outgroup perceptions (*latent* fundamental conflicts) and emphasizing the agential aspects of conflict-prone relationships and structures.

the following is not to argue that the deliberative agential approach will be certainly or immediately accepted by all conflicting parties and operationalized through the UN or exactly as envisaged here. Rather, this section aims to show the implications of the preceding analysis and how the operationalization of deep positive peace *might* look like were it to be adopted by the UN and respective states and conflicting parties upon countering the same, or more, obstacles that existing peacebuilding interventions face.

The existence of HIs or conflictual or non-harmonious inter-group relations typically indicates latent fundamental conflicts. Therefore, deep positive peace and its deliberative agential approach would be applicable in societies where political, socio-economic, or cultural status HIs exist across salient groups, such as between Sinhala and Tamils in Sri Lanka, non-indigenous and indigenous people in Guatemala, or Kurds and Turks in Turkey.[43] Furthermore, as discussed earlier, because its goal of addressing fundamental conflicts is to eliminate HIs as a form of structural violence, which Galtung theorized as necessary for preventing armed conflict within societies, the agential approach would also be relevant for preventing non-state actors' violence seemingly driven by economic gain or greed. Overall, the framework would apply to both greed- and identity-based conflicts because both are similarly driven by grievances due to exclusion, relative inequalities, or a lack of a liberal culture. Hence, their remedies also overlap, including fostering a liberal egalitarian culture and institutions that secure equal enjoyment of human rights, development, and dignity.[44] It can thus be operationalized in unequal or divided societies through UN frameworks aimed at "sustaining peace" and equal (human) development, including in pre-conflict contexts.

The deliberative agential approach's primary aim is to make deliberators and the wider society aware that both perceived and actual structural violence or HIs, and armed conflict can be traced back to collective latent fundamental conflicts. Premised on Reicher's social identity theory of identity transformation, it involves international actors supported by local mediators[45] acting as "identity entrepreneurs" (Tajfel and Turner 1986, 14–5; Lewin, cited in Northrup 1989, 66; Reicher 2004, 935), using deliberative agential platforms to promote an alternative egalitarian and peaceful "future" (Lederach 1997, 31; Reicher 2004, 938) and inclusive identity construction. Notably, diverging from mere contact or dialogue initiatives, the mediator's role includes stimulating the reciprocal removal of out-group exclusionary perceptions. This entails directing deliberators to reframe the parameters of inter-group competition and comparison in inclusionary terms, given that positive in-group differentiation may also be pursued through positive or prosocial behavior to prove that the in-group is more helpful than the out-group (Reicher 2004, 930). This particularly could apply to fostering equal coexistence, solidarity, non-domination, or abandoning out-group negative stereotyping. Identity transformation is also a realistic objective from the perspective of constructivist accounts, which posit that social change, including identity change, can indeed be catalyzed through introducing "new ideas," despite the conditioning effects of culture and social norms (Wendt 1999, 188, 338-42, 344, 347; Archer 2003, 8, 132–4). Mainstreaming the idea of deep positive peace as the absence of latent fundamental conflicts may also have this effect, leading to transforming agents' collective view of out-group exclusion and, ultimately, exclusionary social identities.[46]

The proposed agential framework also entails mediators to act as "norm entrepreneurs" to promote "standards of behavior" (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 896), including standards and ideas toward inter-group horizontal equality and non-discrimination, deep positive peace, and inclusive social identity perceptions. Primarily, deep positive peace and its agential approach are premised on and require mainstreaming actors' "forward-looking responsibility" (Sikkink 2020, 3, 39–41; McKeown 2021) to address latent fundamental conflicts and the resulting HIs. It is essential to base deliberative agential efforts on forward-looking responsibility to avoid the need to attribute personal guilt or harm.[47] This is to underscore that all current actors are morally responsible for enabling social change by striving for the out-group's horizontal multidimensional equality and inclusionary identity construction.[48] The agential approach thus seeks to make actors aware that all actors possess agency (or the capacity to prioritize their personal identity) and responsibility

[43] For HIs-based conflicts, see Stewart (2008, 15, 321–2) and Langer et al. (2012).

[44] See discussion in text accompanying footnote 10.

[45] For insider/local mediators' significance in peacebuilding and development practice, see UN UNDP (2018).

[46] This is premised on Archer's (1995, 264) argument that identity groups are not fixed and may re-group, and Wendt's (1992, 417) and Kelman's (2004, 111, 121) studies on construction of new collective identities.

[47] Galtung's (1969, 171–2) structural approach assumes that structural violence cannot be linked to a specific person's guilt and harm.

[48] This can be also derived from "the fundamental moral equality of all human beings" and the core principle of human dignity under IHRL (Fagan 2024, 229–30). As Wendt (1999, 316-7, 338, 340) argues, social change requires collective identity formation or a change in agents' old collective identities, which are always 'in the social process' of evolution and change. Differing from Wendt's interactionist approach (see supra footnote 30 and text accompanying it), this article's agential approach entails conscious efforts for new social identity construction and transforming latent fundamental conflicts.

for (in)actions. Mediators are also to direct actors to use their agency and act according to their moral responsibility for replacing existing exclusionary social norms, given that actors are capable of doing so despite being influenced by their own social identities and existing structures (Archer 1995, 293, 279; Joseph 2008, 116, 120–25). Deep positive peace thus focuses on redressing the current effects of past injustices and inegalitarian structures, moving beyond the inadvertent backward-looking function of dialogue initiatives, which, as exemplified by WPCs, risk reproducing antagonistic narratives regarding past injustices and violence.

As contact and dialogue initiatives per se cannot typically prompt reconciliation and social transformation needed for tackling structural violence in divided societies,[49] the agential platforms are suggested here as deliberative. Existing dialogical platforms can be used to operationalize the deliberative agential approach or provide a stepping stone for convening separate deliberative platforms. Yet, unlike current peacebuilding practice, which contains middle-level informal (Track-2) and/or grassroots (Track-3) dialogue involving only non-governmental actors, deliberative agential processes entail semi-formal (Track-1.5) deliberations that also include governmental actors (Turan 2015, 205–6). Unlike informal apolitical dialogue initiatives, such semi-formal engagement is found more likely to produce generalizable outcomes by enabling accepted ideational changes to trickle down to the grassroots for changes to take root and trickle up to inform national policies (Cuhadar and Paffenholz 2020). Track-1.5 deliberative platforms may convene for longer periods or repeated multiple times[50] to allow the deliberators to focus on ways to reframe inter-group competition positively, transform exclusionary social identities, and produce action plans, including to instigate public discussions, grassroots dialogue initiatives, and official policymaking, to promote HI-reduction and inter-group reconciliation. The addition of a semi-formal deliberation layer for identity construction and catalyzing inter-group behavioral change across the wider society would be necessary for fostering public acceptance and support for deep positive peacebuilding and social (structural) transformation, and bottom-up pressure to safeguard requisite political will and actions.

For example, the pursuit of deep positive peace would require the WPCs of the Turkish-Kurdish peace processes to include local mediators to facilitate structured dialogue by acting as identity and norm entrepreneurs. UN officials, such as resident coordinators or Peace and Development Advisors,[51] could also act as observers, facilitators, or mediators. These mediators would direct participants to cooperate and deliberate on ways to eliminate their exclusionary perceptions vis-à-vis the out-group. This would include stimulating participants to reframe inter-group differences, competition, and antagonism rather than merely expressing these as conflicting narratives. Hence mediators would thus also direct participants to pursue positive distinctiveness by fostering equal co-existence and inclusionary out-group perceptions rather than out-group discrimination and exclusion.[52]

In addition to WPCs, the pursuit of deep positive peace would require convening semi-formal inclusive deliberative agential platforms across the country to allow local deliberators to determine agreeable outcomes, including articulation of inclusionary social norms, and shape nation-wide policies. These platforms are expected to particularly affect policies that would enable and safeguard equal co-existence and enjoyment of human rights, and HI-reduction measures to address perceived injustices given the deliberative platforms' requirements of mutually agreeable outcomes. Such platforms are essential to reduce public mistrust in peace processes run by political elites, who may (it is believed) make political bargains that disregard the people's will and concerns.[53] In deliberative platforms, participants would be steered to adopt forward-looking moral responsibility and strive to eliminate negative out-group stereotyping and latent fundamental conflicts. This is essential if the respective parties are to construct new inclusionary social identity visions, that is, to shift collective belief and ideational systems to include peaceful, equal co-existence with the out-group. As such, just as the UN's existing dialogue initiatives incentivize inter-group projects and programs aimed at advancing inter-group understanding and cooperation, these semi-formal deliberative platforms would foster cooperation; however, they would do so by directing deliberators to work toward determining the conditions for peaceful co-existence and thereby ideational change and new narrative and social identity construction.

[49] For the ineffectiveness and possible inadvertent effects of contact/dialogue processes in Northern Ireland, see Ferguson and McKeown (2016, 221–2).

[50] This is premised on Lederach's (2003, 31) argument for sustained inter-group interaction to enable emergence of new perceptions and tackling identity issues.

[51] Peace and Development Advisors are part of the UN Secretary-General's conflict prevention agenda, pursued jointly by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), see https://dppa.un.org/en/dppa-48. For resident coordinators' role in sustainable development and protection of human rights, see https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/leadership/the-resident-coordinator. Date accessed 6 March 2026.

[52] This builds on Lederach's (1997, 82–4) argument that external "intervenors" may induce and steer the direction of conflict transformation.

[53] Akgül and Akgül (2023, 12–3) argue that public fear of separatism due to possible political bargaining and the lack of transparency regarding the objectives of the process hindered public support for the peace process in Turkey.

Three additional criteria can be suggested for operationalizing the deliberative agential approach, besides those that trigger existing structural and dialogical approaches to peacebuilding: (1) active, past, or imminent armed conflict or organized violence; (2) HIs, unequal human development, polarization or fragmentation, perceived grievances, or domination across groups on any distinguishing grounds; or (3) non-harmonious or conflict-prone relations requiring reconciliation efforts across groups, regions, or society at large. Existing peacebuilding and development architectures may also monitor these factors, although future empirical research is needed to provide variables and corresponding global indices. The deliberative agential process requires the identification of relevant groups, whose members can act as deliberators. Therefore, additional operational considerations, discussed below, would be needed in the absence of salient identity groups for the platforms to fulfill the aforementioned objectives. If, however, there are neither salient groups nor latent fundamental conflicts, then the deliberative agential approach would, through inclusive deliberative platforms, fulfill a second function of tackling HIs (structural violence), polarization, and exclusion.

When latent fundamental conflicts or identity groups are not palpable, the affected group categories can be deduced by identifying differences in human development (e.g., relating to the enjoyment of socio-economic, cultural, and political human rights, needs, and capabilities) with the standards of society's most privileged segment(s).[54] Refugee or migrant status and socio-economic class may also be considered as the markers of groups of concern in addition to existing protected characteristics against discrimination under international human rights law (IHRL), including nationality, race, ethnicity, and religion, among any other status. Thus, even without salient identity groups or fundamental conflicts, the deliberative agential approach could aim at addressing multidimensional HIs. Deliberation between identity group representatives and the government would be key to fostering an egalitarian society and preventing the emergence of polarization and antagonistic salient identity groups or conditions for one-sided, non-state, or identity-based armed conflicts. Given the controversial nature of HI-reduction because dominant groups fear losing their privileges (Stewart et al. 2008, 322–3), inclusive deliberative platforms could play a key role in facilitating the instigation of HIs-reduction strategies and policies,[55] and their acceptance and internalization across wider society. Nevertheless, regarding the most marginalized or excluded groups, such as Roma people or refugees, latent fundamental conflicts may be assumed to exist for convening aforementioned semi-formal deliberative platforms to tackle latent fundamental conflicts alongside perceived grievances and identity threat perceptions.

In short, deep positive peace and its deliberative agential approach requires making actors aware that they have agency and moral responsibility for their (in)actions, and that their practices in aggregate shape structures, that is, (re)produce or transform existing conflict-prone hierarchical structures. The deliberative agential processes and mediators have three main aims: (a) inducing local mediators and deliberators to adopt the aforementioned moral responsibilities and objectives, and mainstreaming forward-looking responsibility for social transformation; (b) facilitating mutually agreed formulations for reframing exclusionary identity perceptions, inclusionary identity construction, and social transformation strategies premised on inter-group horizontal equality and non-domination; and (c) encouraging deliberators themselves to also become identity and norm entrepreneurs to disseminate these outcomes to the wider society. As such, the deliberative agential approach can be operationalized through the existing platforms and programs of the UN peacebuilding, human rights, and development architectures by adding these deliberative agential processes. As figure 5 shows, the agential approach would facilitate realization of the objectives of existing peacebuilding and conflict transformation approaches by adding the missing agents dimension of the agents–interaction–structures nexus, that is, by anchoring positive peace in both agents and structures through social identity transformation.

Conclusions

Building on the consensus that HIs among identity groups drive intra-state armed conflict, this article proposed a novel deep positive peace concept that refers to the absence of deep-rooted drivers of HIs. It considers latent fundamental conflicts, that is, exclusionary social identity perceptions, as the deep-rooted drivers of HIs. This is premised on realist social theory and social identity theory, which maintain that social identity informs the collective beliefs and perceptions that in turn shape practices, such as out-group discrimination that generate HIs. As a process, deep positive peace involves transforming latent fundamental conflicts and stimulating inclusionary social identity construction to catalyze broader social transformations so as to anchor positive peace in deep socio-cultural structures.

[54] For a detailed elaboration on how relevant HIs and affected groups may be identified, see Turan (2023, 18–9).

[55] Sustainable Development Goals 10.2, 10.3, and 16.7 emphasize horizontal equality, social cohesion, and inclusion. See United Nations. n.d. 'Sustainable Development Goals.' Date accessed 2 March 2026. https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda.

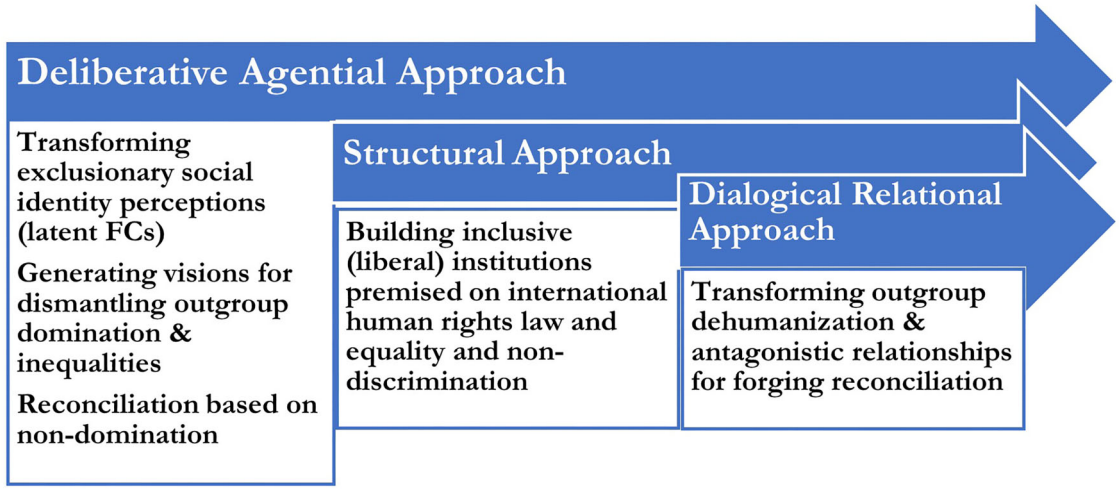

Figure 5 Deliberative agential approach as a catalyst and supplement to structural and dialogical approaches to peacebuilding and conflict transformation

Having established that current peace conceptualizations (Galtung's positive peace and conflict theorizations, liberal, and alternative hybrid and relational peace) overlook agents' influence on deep structures, I argued that deep positive peace can fill this gap by incorporating agency and social identity dynamics perspectives. As figure 3 shows, the latent fundamental conflicts concept supplements the Galtungian conflict triangle by adding a separate exclusionary perceptions and assumptions layer as the deep-rooted driver of negative attitudes, discriminatory behavior, incompatible goals, and violent conflict. Instead of merely linking violent conflict to conflicting goals, as in Galtung's and other conflict and peace theories, deep positive peace assumes that it is exclusionary social identity perceptions that provoke goal, interest, or value incompatibilities, antagonistic inter-group behavior and relationships, and hierarchical structures. Thus, whereas dialogical–relational (interactionist) and institutionalist (structural) approaches prevalent in current peacebuilding practice and research aim at inducing behavioral change, deep positive peace aims at transforming collective behaviors and socio-cultural structures by transforming exclusionary social identities and perceptions. As such, deep positive peace also aims to address structural violence, but in the form of HIs, regarding as actors' socio-political constructs rather than purely unintended, thereby diverging from Galtung's conceptualization.

The deep positive peace framework would not undermine Galtung's structural violence conceptualization premised on systemic vertical inequality among individuals; indeed, it would rather facilitate the fulfillment of its objectives, for three reasons. First, it is proposed as a supplement rather than an alternative to Galtung's positive peace theorization and structural approach. Second, the focus on tackling HIs among groups would, by extension, help eliminate vertical inequalities among individuals, who are members of particular disadvantaged groups. Lastly, structural and agential approaches would be mutually reinforcing when it comes to eliminating structural violence and promoting social transformation toward vertical and horizontal equalities among actors. Given Galtung's arguments on the structural–direct violence nexus, and studies showing that greed- and grievance-driven conflicts share similar drivers and remedies, deep positive peace and its agential approach appear particularly relevant for preventing direct violence within states.

Furthermore, as this article shows, the deep positive peace framework also supplements Galtung's and Lederach's dialogical conflict transformation models as well as Kelman's and Bar-Tal's post-conflict reconciliation models by entailing deliberative processes to transform exclusionary social identities. It aims at comprehensive intergroup reconciliation as a preventive measure by targeting latent fundamental conflicts as the deep-rooted drivers of HIs rather than merely addressing dehumanization in post-conflict contexts. Its ultimate objective is to eliminate out-group subordination rather than achieve mere outgroup recognition as a non-enemy, as is prevalent in existing reconciliation and conflict transformation models. Furthermore, drawing on studies that have argued that the Turkish-Kurdish peace process failed because it provoked ontological insecurity and violence by reproducing conflicting narratives at the dialogical platforms (WPCs),

thereby demonstrating that dialogue alone is insufficient for conflict transformation and reconciliation in divided societies, this article argued for a deliberative agential approach and inclusionary identity construction.

Lastly, this article provides criteria for prompting the deliberative agential approach, involving local and international mediators and semi-formal deliberators, who are also to function as identity and norm entrepreneurs, premised on the forward-looking responsibility of actors. This is to suggest a general framework that addresses the missing agential dimension in existing institutionalist–interactionist conceptualizations of and approaches to peace(building). It specifies that the primary objective of deliberative agential processes is to transform latent fundamental conflicts. However, where these do not exist, these processes can supplement existing structural approaches by prompting inclusive deliberative decision-making to tackle HIs aimed at fostering grassroots acceptance and internalization of the adopted HI-reduction policies. The article also emphasizes that these deliberative processes can be operationalized within the current international peacebuilding and development architecture and through existing mechanisms to convene separate deliberative agential platforms.

By offering a novel deep positive peace conceptualization that incorporates agency and social identity dynamics, this article makes an original contribution to Galtung's positive peace and structural violence theorizations, and thus to the study of intra-state peace and conflict transformation generally. It also adds to the few studies taking an ontological approach to research into peace and conflict transformation by uniquely applying agents-focused perspectives in social identity theory and realist social theory to develop the concept of fundamental conflicts. Thus, the article's analysis can inspire further theoretical and policy-oriented debates on positive peace(building) and studies that similarly draw on social constructivist and ontological approaches. Further research is also necessary to examine how deep positive peace and its deliberative agential approach can be integrated into empirical studies, including a more detailed account of operationalizing its deliberative agential approach. This article thus provides an original analytical framework that fills the gaps in existing peace(building) and conflict transformation research and models.

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