What is an emancipatory peace?

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Abstract
There has been frequent reference to the concept of an emancipatory peace in the critical academic literature on peace and conflict studies in IR, much of it rather naive. It has developed an ecosystem of its own within debates on peace without drawing on wider disciplinary debates. Terms such as ‘emancipation’ and its relative, ‘social justice’ are widely used in critical theoretical literature and were common parlance in previous ideological eras. It was clear what such terms meant in the context of feudalism, slavery, imperialism, discrimination, a class system, nuclear weapons and racism over the previous two centuries. Now it is less clear in the context of changing peace praxis.

Keywords
Concept of peace, emancipation, IR theory, justice, peacebuilding

‘Immanuel Kant’s dictum, “Have courage to use your reason!” succinctly captures the Enlightenment claim of emancipation through the exercise of reason. In the face of feudality, violence, prejudice, and subservience to authority, the enlightenment intellectuals enunciate ideals of equality, rights, and rationality as a way out of domination towards freedom. Contesting traditionalism, authoritarianism, and the legitimization of social inequalities, the Enlightenment, it is claimed, inspired radical movements like the French and Haitian revolution, while influencing progressive political thought including liberalism and socialism. Enabling a critical reflection on political norm and practices, it has fostered the accountability of institutions, equality before the law, and the transformation of social relations. Emancipatory movements for suffrage, abolition of slavery and civil liberties can all be traced back to the Enlightenment, even as it continues to inspire contemporary social and political movements. The enlightenment idea of individual rights and dignity, it is believed, enables the exercise of political agency and expands individual freedom’. (Dhawan, 2014: 9)
Introduction

There has been frequent reference to the concept of an ‘emancipatory peace’ in the critical academic literature on peace and conflict studies (Booth, 1991; Nunes, 2012; Richmond, 2005). Emancipation has been reclaimed as a concept for security studies fairly recently, in terms of redefining who is security is for and what it is. Yet, the concept has been ignored by mainstream IR more generally although it is recognised in critical and post-structuralist circles that modernity is founded upon the emancipatory frameworks of critique and cosmopolitanism (Devetak, 1995: 35). IR’s blind spot has undermined its understanding of post-war projects of development and self-determination.

In sub-disciplines such as peace and conflict or development studies, there remains a singularly apolitical usage of such terms, which masks a series of problematic understandings of local, state and international, order. They are often separated from the political aspirations of the subjects of peace, security and order, as a consequence. Even micro-politics and the so called ‘local turn’ (MacGinty and Richmond, 2013) or concepts of local ownership risk servicing Eurocentric notions of power, norms and order, deploying instead descriptive, prescriptive and interventionary methodologies (Richmond, 2020). As a result, theory and policy framing tends to draw legitimacy from potential emancipatory projects but often uses this legitimacy in order to camouflage conflict and hegemony, prioritising the beneficiaries of historical power-relations (i.e. the West and its political ontology) rather than its victims. Emancipation risks becoming domination, in other words.

This essay firstly reviews the ways in which the concept of emancipation has been used across disciplines in order to avoid a certain naivete about its usage in the specific setting of peace praxis. This is necessary in order to then begin to develop clearer guidance in following sections for critical scholars seeking to challenge negative forms of peacemaking often associated with national or hegemonic interests rather than everyday and subaltern political claims. This also assists with the goals of the essay’s following section to improve peace praxis (which has hardly been updated since its late twentieth century iterations). The latter has developed an ecosystem of its own rather than drawing more knowledgeably on wider disciplinary debates, methodological and practical advancements. Finally, the essay summarises the implications of the development of emancipatory theory for peacemaking, and also points to tensions over the proscription of violence (Laclau, 2006).

Conceptual background

Terms such as ‘emancipation’ and its relative, ‘social justice’ have been widely used in critical and post-colonial theoretical literature and were perhaps common parlance in previous political eras in the previous two centuries (Marx, 1963). According to Rupert’s reading of Marx,

“‘Political Emancipation’ entails equal status of individual citizens in relation to the state, equality before the law, regardless of religion, property, or other “private” characteristics of individual persons. . . Political Emancipation represents real, historical progress. . .’ (Marx, 1963: 54)
The state has been assumed necessary in order to rescue the individual from a position in a fixed hierarchy (such as under feudalism). Liberal versions have also argued that civil society is also necessary in order to enable the individual to achieve self-determination in relation to, but also given the power of the state. Concepts of autonomy and agency add another layer to the debate on emancipation, in terms of how much the emancipated subject might achieve alone, or requires liberating from oppression perhaps by democratic revolution or liberal intervention. Processes of emancipation have been critically connected to different concepts, including security (Booth, 1991), development, rights, peacebuilding and statebuilding as well as to the broader question of global justice (Arendt, 1993; Berlin and Hardy, 2004; Foucault, 1982; Pieterse, 1992; Rancière, 2009; Sen, 2000). A debate has also begun pertaining to emancipation in relation to the contemporary merger of capitalism and technology (Duffield, 2019: 153–154; Howard, 2015: xix; Monshipouri and Mokhtari, 2016; The Economist, 2018: 290).

One of its greatest problems, after problems of definition and the weaknesses of small-scale, non-state agency, has been a link between political emancipation and violence. Breaking down oppressive power structures, especially on behalf of the political claims of weak or subaltern actors, requires powerful agency. It is unlikely that civil society groups could achieve such agency, but the state has it automatically, and only international actors and coalitions might be able to change the balance between them. Thus, the concept has often been connected to forms of intervention, as well as vanguardism, and social, or even revolutionary resistance. This is well illustrated by the histories of wars related to imperialism, extractive capital, slavery, racism, identity, voting and human rights.

Intervention has normally been driven by actors and organisations with their own interests, lacking local knowledge, accountability and sensitivity, which creates new ethical risks, as well as new opportunities for domination. Social resistance may lack leverage without international allies or be relatively ineffective if it forswears violence (insurgent, revolutionary or demonstrative) because it inevitable confronts major power structures at state and international levels. In other words, emancipation, violence and its proscription and intervention are related, just as with peacemaking. Imperialism, statism, internationalism and globalisation have all witnessed these pressures and phenomena, and hegemonic power is adept at creating pressure to abandon social emancipation, especially in an increasingly ‘post-human’ world (Chandler, 2018: 21).

In the past it was clear what emancipation meant as responses to, and in the context of, feudalism, slavery, imperialism, discrimination, patriarchy, a class system, nuclear weapons and racism. Its radical legitimacy was undermined by its connection with revolutionary violence, but it remains conceptually significant because has constantly challenged violence and power structures that support direct, structural and cultural violence (Laclau, 2006). Now, however, it is unclear what an emancipatory peace would mean in the context of war and conflict in contemporary IR. Indeed, since literatures and approaches critiquing capitalism and even imperialism have become sanctioned in mainstream thought (Anievas et al., 2015), debates on the possibility of emancipation have faded from view (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). The concept has been displaced by postcolonial approaches to sovereign autonomy, liberal notions of rights, economic development and liberal governmentality or neoliberal notions of self-help, resilience (Chandler,
In peace and conflict studies, the concept of an emancipatory peace remains only superficially engaged with, often on thin normative grounds (Behr and Shani, 2021; Richmond, 2008). Social forms of legitimacy connected to peace settlements after war have become obscured as a result. Yet, the concept captures elemental dynamics of politics in peace and war, in particular foregrounding the claims, agency, rights and societal interests of the subaltern, traditionally the subject of power-relations (Crenshaw, 1989; Spivak, 1988). It raised the problem of how weak peace processes challenge and reform power relations, and how far peace depends on the proscription of violence, especially if emancipation in its historical perspective might not.

Scholars often refer to emancipation as if it were self-explanatory for both liberals and Marxists, north or south. In historical terms, emancipation has spanned issues of war in the nineteenth century, slavery, property rights, oppressive forms of work as the industrial revolution gathered pace, the expansion of voting rights, the related demand for gender equality, and the related reframing of the state towards an enabling, welfare state. It has also implied decolonisation, as well as ending arms races (Domingues, 2017), though it was less often used in the context of the various wars after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet the concept of peace has lagged behind, merely implying the balance of power and a negative form, which persisted well into the twentieth century.

In practice and in mainstream liberal theory, emancipation, tends to refer to the capacity of individuals to free themselves from slavery or oppressive political systems, and for leadership to shape and improve social, economic and political behaviour to support a subaltern group. It has had religious and ideological overtones and has been associated also with revolutionary action. It may be a vanguardist concept, depending on actors with direct, normative and institutional power, emancipating the weak through ideas or force, from poverty, injustice, war, slavery or discrimination. This has often been in contradiction, however, to the underlying, agonistic, sense that emancipation of the weak has to occur according to subaltern demands and expectations (Fossen, 2008; Sawyer and Novak, 2013).

In vanguardist terms, whether liberal or Marxist, emancipation occurs according to the preferences, norms or ideology of the strong, premised on an Enlightenment ideal of progress. In realist terms it occurs as a side effect and alignment of power and interests (Roy, 2016). In liberal terms it arises through individual action which shapes institutions (Fossen, 2008). In Marxist terms, collective action is revolutionary, aimed against the international political economy (Booth, 1991: 391). In other words, emancipation depends on the powerless confronting some of the most powerful instruments of international relations and well as geopolitical or geo-economic structural conditions: for example, predatory elites and states, extractive and mobile global capital, geography and resource distribution (Booth, 1991: 319, 323). Thus, conceptually many critical scholars equate emancipation with the often-violent history of enlightenment epistemology, whether Marxist or liberal, as well as western hegemony (Spivak, 1988). The terms emancipation and social justice have often been used to conceptually camouflage force and domination rather than expand understandings of rights and equality from a subaltern perspective (Aradau, 2004: 16). Rawls realised this to a degree with his work on justice and inequality (Rawls, 1985), and Richard Cox and Richard Ashley made it explicit in IR (Ashley, 1983; Cox, 1981).
Many of the same debates have also taken place recently around the concept of peace in IR, from the balance of power and diplomacy to mediation, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and humanitarian intervention. This has spanned a recent development in the field from negative to positive, towards hybrid and everyday concept of peace, but these have emerged far later and have been less politically sophisticated than the development of the concept of emancipation. The contemporary context raises the question of how the subaltern would describe emancipation and social justice under contemporary, networked, scalar and increasingly ‘digital’ conditions of war and peace? (Chandler, 2018: 159; Richmond, 2020). This is also related to the problem that contemporary socio-econometric data, from the Human Development Index to the GINI Index, tends to underline the fact that one-third of the world’s population are still extremely insecure in human security as well as geopolitical terms. Many peace processes collapse, frozen conflict and authoritarian outcomes have become the norm (especially since 9/11). This means it is unlikely, that given decades of liberal and neoliberal peace, development and stabilisation projects, that social and local agencies would continue to legitimate existing practices. It points to a need to revise the link between emancipation and peace. The next section turns to the general usage of the concept in order to understand what it means for peacemaking.

Emancipation in theoretical usage

Historical and philosophically informed versions

A philosophical and historical version of an emancipatory peace would aim at the goal of an ever more sophisticated form of the ‘good life’ connected to the ‘greater good’, and the political systems required to realise this for society, the state and the international community (Kant, 1983/2003[1795]). Political philosophy has concerned itself with how this might be achieved at each level of analysis (starting with the city state, empire, the state, the social level and later a more transnational perspective) offering a different set of debates, different core objectives and methods. From the ‘greatest good for the greatest many’ to various forms of utilitarianism, liberalism, idealism and utopianism, the debate has focussed on the interlocking nature of the individual, society, belief, the nature of the state and the possibility and potential of international law and world government, closely connected to social justice claims (Chimni, 2007).

Some argue that this should be achieved via an elite vanguard of enlightened actors – Plato’s Philosopher King or Aristotle’s aristocracy, or even more conservative notions of leaders working ruthlessly for the national interest backed by populist forces (Plato, 1991; Popper, 2002; Reeve, 1988). Others argue that limited or broad democracy is required, even if they affect the process of emancipation (Diamond and Plattner, 2006). Often there is an assumption that social resistance alone cannot achieve an emancipatory peace framework, requiring in addition an array of scientifically based actors and institutions, and transnational networks of empowerment. The subsequent literatures on cosmopolitanism and global justice probably offer the most sophisticated notion of emancipation emerging from the framework of liberalism (Nussbaum, 2015). In addition, these have been some post-liberal and post-colonial refinements (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012; Gray, 1993; Prashad, 2012; Richmond, 2011).
**A realist version**

In contrast to such broad philosophical perspectives, a realist version of emancipation foregrounds geopolitical (and to related geo-economic) power either through the state, the empire or control of the global economy (Wood, 2005). Imperial, state and economic power is what emancipation targets in revolutionary mode, driven by subaltern claims for justice and sustainability over imperialism, nationalism and territoriality (De Sousa Santos, 2002; Lawson, 2007). Basic geopolitical stability, meaning a balance of power between states and empires, is offered by realism as the ethical basis for and the agent of any possible, very limited emancipation. In fact, emancipation is seen as a revolutionary attempt to overthrow order through a realist prism. A realist perspective indicates that a counter-revolutionary approach should restrain social and revolutionary movements in order to preserve older power-structures (Halliday, 1990). Compromise may emerge through the clash of interests between society and state, or between states, producing at best a negative peace, meaning some emancipation from direct violence (but not cultural, structural or environmental violence) (Galtung, 1969).

Later versions of neorealism and offensive realism highlight a concern with economic power and threats but do not extend their treatment of emancipation any further. This is partly because realism tends to assume that upsetting power structures is more dangerous than the balance of power status quo (Waltz, 1979), and that expanding subaltern rights would thus be counter productive. Thus, a realist version would revolve around a victor’s peace where states establish a stable balance of power, and where actors liberate themselves from oppression in order to claim autonomy but without upsetting that balance of power.

The post-1945 world offers a good example, in that the US backed order appeared relatively stable and allowed for human rights to be claimed by subaltern actors. In doing so it maintained US interests and increased subaltern autonomy very slowly in very restrained ways (Mearsheimer, 2001; Michael, 2005). Emancipation was restrained by nationality and territorial boundaries, as previously by the extent of empire, and by systems of inclusion and exclusion, perhaps only slightly mitigated by balancing activity. Imperialism and racial hierarchies transferred to the states-system delineated the stratifications or graduations of emancipation (Getachew, 2019: 18, 24, 40) now reflected in economic and development state hierarchies. Under realism, emancipation rests on an accrual of national power, and the sacrifices this demands, and thus the domination of others in order to extract value and power. Herder and Mazini have already made this intellectual journey, as well as Morgenthau and others in a more critical tone (Lebow, 2003). In modernity it elevates Anglo-Saxon and western interests and naturalises them as the only achievable balance in international order, carrying undertones of multiple exclusions in terms of nationality and race (Anievas et al., 2015). The relationship between emancipation and oppression is very close, and perhaps Schmitt put this paradox in its starkest form (Schmitt, 1996).

**A social version**

Moving to a body of theory that engages with lived experiences, a social version of emancipation foregrounds the social needs of society, making politics and economics
subservient to these and consolidates them in a legal and constitutional framework as close to the population as possible (Laclau, 1996). Drawing on Marx, and in combination with liberal internationalism, it foregrounds economic and class relations as well as culture, gender or identity (Laclau, 2001[1985]). The tools of emancipation are either the state, or a social welfare system, as well as commensurate international systems (Zachary, 2020). The social perspective aims to produce a consensus which is as wide as possible in order to prove that its legitimacy transcends that of elites. Social and international justice is its aim, based upon collective mobilisation, solidarity, rights and the equality of citizens connected inevitably to the state, however. As soon as it is scaled up beyond the state, familiar problems of totalitarianism and imperialism arise. In the past the aim of such a version was to amass centralised bureaucratic power in order to coordinate social peace and oversee equality and progress, either bounded by the state or connected to the ‘international’. Of course, such centralised government also risked authoritarianism and inefficiency, this being the main argument of Hayek against socialist experiments in the twentieth century (Hayek, 1994; Polanyi, 1944).

The aim of a social version of emancipatory peace is to make the common needs of society the fulcrum around which political, economic and cultural activity of states and international actors revolve, to mitigate elite predation and to hold back the developmental or militaristic interests of authoritarians. Thus, social engagements with emancipation are heavily dependent upon a benign elite, a centralised state, non-intervention and only a basic level of equality. A social-democratic and Keynesian version emerged from such debates, post-WWII, partly to balance the conflicting positions of realism, liberalism and Marxism in the peace settlements that followed (Steger, 1997). This also highlighted a range of internal and external tensions (as might be seen with the fate of former Yugoslavia) (Pugh, 2002).

A liberal version

A liberal version of emancipation focussed upon human rights and democracy rather than society, with as little domination as plausible from power, religion and the state (Rawls, 1971). It is aimed at oppressive power, the overweening state and geopolitics through the adoption of liberal norms, law, cooperation and free trade, following the argumentation of early liberals such as Locke and Paine (Locke, 1988; Paine, 2000). It required a democratic system and a rule of law, both of which point to the need for material capacity and legal equality under a republican system (Doyle, 1986). The onus is on normative agreement, universality, and implementation through constitutions and law (Rawls, 1971). Trade, trusteeship and intervention are necessary stimulants (Fukuyama, 1989). The tools of emancipation range from liberal forms of intervention (colonial, humanitarian, peacebuilding, development) to the constitutional reform of the state, the multi-lateral nature of international order and its relationship with human rights.

Liberal emancipation threatened the power of established elites and their victor’s peace in the nineteenth century, and after WWII pointed to a strong welfare state in order to redistribute (Fawcett, 2014). Material rights were thus connected to human rights via state welfare and services. Its post-Cold War cosmopolitan variant pointed to the universality of such rights and the need for an international community of law-abiding states,
and set of governmental institutions (Archibugi et al., 1998). It required ‘norms cascades’ to trickle down from ‘settled’ international actors, who were trustees for any emancipatory framework for peace (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998).

This version was heavily diluted by the emergence of a neoliberal version in the 1980s, which placed economic development within a globalised free market set above human rights and liberal institutions, perhaps expecting that economic development would ultimately lead to the achievement of better rights (Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009; Harvey, 2005). Legal and discursive equality superseded material equality, replacing material rights with more abstract versions based on theoretical potential rather than the material reality. It led to the statebuilding paradigms of the 2000s (Richmond, 2014). This had the effect of reducing the challenge that human rights aimed at conservative forms of political and economic power to a more limited discursive challenge, which inadvertently allowed material inequality to deepen (Brown, 2015). This ultimately undermined donors’ and international organisations’ legitimacy leading to resurgent nationalism (Barber, 2016): the very dynamic it was supposed to end.

Perhaps liberalism’s most concrete version of emancipation draws its inspiration from liberal internationalist and cosmopolitan thinking, requiring the establishment of a common normative world community (probably in federal form), capable of extending solidarity and material improvement around the world along with their related epistemologies. It underlay the theorisation spanning the work of Kant, Marx, Keynes and more recent cosmopolitan thinkers like Rawls, Habermas, Beck, Falk and others such as Kaldor, Held and Linklater (Archibugi, 2008; Archibugi and Held, 1995; Beck, 1999; Carter, 2020; Falk, 1998; Habermas, 2001; Kaldor, 1999; Kant, 1983/2003[1795]; Linklater, 1998). It is commonly thought of in global and state, social democratic terms, as outlined by Held (Held, 1995). It points to the welfare model of a liberal state writ large, through regional and international organisations, in which intervention maintains a wide consensus for peace. Citizens become liberal, share the commons, and a global social contract would be formed between citizens, social democracies and regional or international organisations. The UN system would be the basis for an emerging global federation of sorts, reflecting global social democracy (outside of the Security Council), in which common values could be discerned despite the existence of difference.

The liberal peace framework was soon seen as too selective in its approach to emancipation, partly because its ontological proposals about norms, institutions, states, structures and agency were more indebted to Eurocentrism, sovereignty, statism and capitalism that they often admitted.

A post-colonial version

It is difficult to see emancipation in purely state-centric, imperial or Eurocentric terms, either because of the rise of the emerging powers or the expanding claims from the global south, which have been quick to identify and reject new practices they equate with colonialism (Wallerstein, 1974: Nkrumah, 1965). (Such dynamics were on view in Iraq more recently) (Allawi, 2007; Toby, 2005: 257–8).

A post- and anti-colonial version of emancipation would mean placing the most marginalised actors in international relations claims into a historical context and under the
contemporary deficits in distributive justice. This may relate to justice and reparations for various forms of colonialism, and the need for political self-determination (Getachew, 2019; Smith, 1999). This would require major structural reform of the international system and global governance, far beyond that attempted by the defunct UN Trusteeship Council and or UN General Assembly Treaties on civil, political, minority and indigenous rights. It would mean that former colonial subjects could be compensated for the ills of colonialism and the inequalities brought about by the evolution of global capitalism and related forms of empire. It would require global agreement and global institutions (Gonzalez, 2017) led by subaltern political claims from the global south.

Herein lies a problem that Marx, Trotsky and Lenin were familiar with: how to induce existing powerful actors or moribund institutions to dismantle their power and how to remove them if they would not (cutting off the king’s head, as Foucault famously noted) without using violence (Foucault, 1980: 121)? How might we achieve this ‘reform’ without undermining the legitimacy of the new international order to come? This was a problem that Fanon and other anti-colonial thinkers ‘solved’ through accepting the use of violence to dismount injustice and achieve self-determination, also mirrored by UN conventions in the 1960s (Fanon, 1961; Memmi, 2006; UN General Assembly, 1960). All of these roads led to often violent forms of statehood (state formation, in other words), as well as regional wars, however.

The self-determination and independence movements of the twentieth century (Getachew, 2019: 40), the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement, the debates at the Bandung conference and after, and the 1970s attempt at a New International Economic Order, were all designed to try to reform the international system. It had placed the emerging liberal peace and its close attachment to the western political and economic model (and the alternative model of the USSR), and thus the material well-being of the people of the global north, above those of newly independent countries in the global south (Acharya, 2014a, 2014b). By the 2000s, the BRICS, and in particular the rise of China suggested that global order was evening out somewhat, yet at the same time economic inequality was growing (Piketty, 2014). Post-colonial notions of emancipation indicate that this continues to relate to the injustices that western state power, authoritarian domestic elites, and global capital have propagated (which now includes compliant BRICS), connected to former colonial practices and systems (Davis and Todd, 2017).

Post-liberalism and emancipation

This discussion points in different directions, one of which is towards a post-liberal version of emancipation. It takes the post-colonial, gendered and environmental critiques of liberalism and capitalism, and attempts to understand what emancipation would look like during the transitional phase into a more varied and pluralist international system (Gray, 1993). It attempts to transcend the history of eurocentrism, imagine peace in the context of equality and environmental reform, also relating to identity, gender and class. Post-liberalism offers a form of emancipation mediated by the old hegemony of the liberal west, and alternative claims and actors now emerging. It envisions an agonistic form of mediation and does not determine an outcome – other than a more sophisticated process of emancipation than before (Gray, 1993). This process always uncovers more power
relations and injustices, however, meaning that rights will have to be expanded, in the context of self-determination and development in the Global South, the commons and the Anthropocene (Davis and Todd, 2017; Gonzalez, 2017). This suggests more locally legitimate forms of political authority, from the local to the global scales, is emerging in the transition after liberalism (Ikenberry, 2011). The problem with post-liberal versions of emancipation is that they rest on highly fragmented social mobilisation, whereas structural, governmental and direct power still lies in dominant forms geopolitical, liberal and neoliberal hegemony, which refuse to give up power (Richmond, 2017).

**Post-structural contributions**

Connolly has characterised an entangled humanism, which provides a new perspective on the planetary condition (Connolly, 2017: 4). He refers to Foucault’s ‘technology of the self’ (Foucault, 1982/1988: 16–49) and more recent engagements with ‘micropolitics’ (Barry et al., 1996) to point to the intersection that is emerging between post-colonial ecology, similar critical understandings emerging from the ‘old capitalist centres’, and the earth sciences. This represents an attempt to reposition politics (Connolly, 2017: 12) moving beyond the older exemplars of social democracy and liberal international architecture as being the basis for emancipation. This pushes towards a new planetary understanding of the ‘good life’ produced by entangled humanism in its Anthropocenic context (Connolly, 2017: 13).

Thus, expanded rights need to pinpoint the workings of power within the redefined cosmology his work offers, and to proceed from there: the point is to identify inequalities and mitigate them without succumbing to sovereign claims and anthropocentrism (Foucault, 1981). Both abstract and material equality are required: politics, economics, law and institutions thus redistribute resources in order to achieve a sustainable, relational, networked and mobile political and global order. This is based upon relative equality, global justice, and a sustainable ecological situation, which is apparent throughout each scale of analysis – local, state and international (Sjoberg, 2008). The objective is thus to connect peace praxis to political, transversal and transnational networks, multiple dimensions and agencies and creative forms of resistance (Bleiker, 2000).

**Global justice and the Anthropocene**

A global justice version of emancipatory peace attempts to mediate liberal, post-colonial and post-structural approaches. It follows closely on from such logic, proposing both a historical and distributive dimension to restitution and justice in post-conflict transitions (Dhawan, 2014: 70). It rests on the idea that individuals and communities require and can attain justice and emancipation in relation to historical, political, economic and social wrongs and contemporary inequalities (Pogge, 2001). This also requires the assistance of both civil society and international organisations, and in particular domestic law and constitutional refinements, as well as international legal organisations, which act as a normative check and balance on the state or hegemony (Sen, 2009). As the debates have developed, they have begun to encompass custom and memory, as well as questions associated to the commons, trauma, reparations, reconciliation, sustainability and expanded
rights, in a philosophical, historical and legal tradition. They point to the building up and further strengthening of transnational, global, international and state architecture. What is crucial, however, is the opening up of issues relating to inequality and historical violence across time and space and in the context of the unsustainability associated with the Anthropocene (Gonzalez, 2017).

The placing of any act of violence into its broader context is important in terms of developing a sustainable approach, but it also creates unmanageable strains in terms of the sheer scale of its critical enterprise. Hence its distillation into a range of international legal processes, often couched within the relatively limited framework of the international defence of basic human rights and national authority (Miller, 2008; Young, 2006). That the Anthropocene itself may be indicative of the inequality and injustice of industrial modernity has rarely been considered in mainstream literatures, except perhaps in revolutionary debates centred on whether violence may be used to achieve emancipation (Hewlett, 2016: 2). In the current era, the non-human world has re-entered the equation and the concept of the commons has made clear that environmental degradation is a factor in political oppression.

Recent work on the Anthropocene as well as on ‘new materialism’ (Connolly, 2013) provides a deepened understanding of what contemporary emancipatory peace involves. Colonialism, industrialisation, the Cold War and the concentration of global capital have all had their impact also continue to connect old and new structures of power, pointing to the shared and finite nature of resources. The Anthropocene itself is the product of unjust power structures (Gonzalez, 2017). This aspect relates to how political systems treat the environment, but also accentuates questions of fairness in the use of resources across generations. Justice, emancipation, politics, society and economy thus have to be reconfigured for a complex world of sharing and intensifying environmental fragility. Thus, a key issue for contemporary emancipation relates to a broad range of relational dynamics, across generations, time, space and networks. It points to a framework of sustainability as part of any emancipatory praxis.

**Implications for an emancipatory peace**

To draw together the different strands in the evolution of the relationship between peace and emancipatory critiques, a number of arguments remain pertinent. In the colonial era, emancipation was clearly aimed at self-determination, as Fanon argued, and the question was which methods were permissible, and whether violence could be applied against imperialism. In the Cold War era, emancipation was aimed at achieving human rights and democracy against communism or authoritarianism. It was also often concerned about matters of disarmament and development. Or it was aimed against US or northern domination and capitalism, and there was much discussion about forms of resistance available to oppressed societies (non-violent in particular) (Roberts and Garton Ash, 2009). This was all to be contained within the dominant political vehicle of the state, softened by global governance and the liberal international architecture, with its focus on free trade and human rights. A lot of the academic literature using the term during the early post-Cold War focussed on inequality, questions of gender and race, and on self-determination. It was still concerned about global and social solidarity, and how this might be built into an international system, such as via modifications to the UN system.
The idea of a peace agreement, peace processes and ways of making peace thus began to align with the problem of emancipation in the emergent state, and in the regional and international architecture. The concept of peace reflected similar issues: how far could emancipatory peace be developed in the context of existing power-relations at the geopolitical level and in the state, as well as socio-political stratifications within the state, without requiring force or violence (revolution or intervention) to push it through? Through these mechanisms and processes peace began to be connected to Marxist, critical, cosmopolitan, feminist and post-colonial discussions about progress, liberation, self-determination, identity, the expansion of subaltern rights, and the commons in the Anthropocene. This implied identifying and navigating around blockages erected by power in order to produce further innovations: emancipatory peace is a moving target driven by the continuous uncovering of violence, and an innovation in one peace process would require innovations in others (this has rarely been the case so far).

The delegation of emancipation to the state and markets within recent UN doctrinal development pointed to a need for new understandings, starting from the premise that a peace settlement required structural change to deal with the causal factors of war, such as domination, inequality, territorialism and nationalism and concurrent breakdowns of constitutional and regional political systems (as the Non-Aligned movement, and later global civil society often argued). Anchoring emancipation to the state required an alliance between subaltern and international sets of actors, which was needed to achieve progress because the state was paradoxically both the obstacle (as it was a product of state formation and counter-revolution) and provider of emancipation (because it provided security, rights and representation). One solution was to move emancipation away from sovereignty, towards regional or world governance, but this made politics distant from the subaltern’s perspective and political claims. From a subaltern perspective peace may be attached to self-determination and expanded rights, but the state is more often not an unambiguous vehicle for, or a blockage against, these goals.

A more advanced notion of global justice in particular may not use the proxy of the international community or the state as the main framework for understanding emancipation. Instead it also engages with social agency and power from below, its growing transversal and transnational relationalities and epistemic networks. It is also increasingly connected with critiques of the Anthropocene (Dalby, 2013: Oswald and Brauch, 2021), also drawing as it must on the work of post- and anti-colonial thinkers (Chabal, 1983; Gibson, 2003). This points to the need to reconcile for self-determination and autonomy for subjects that relieves them from past injustice, oppression or deprivation, with the conservative requirement for a balanced, stratified state and international structure, plus the need for a progressive, interventionary vanguard with the power, skills and resources, to dismantle and replace the power structures of domination. The problem of peaceful progress and resistance versus violent revolution, lurks behind this need.

Indeed, the contemporary relationship of peace with emancipation could either follow a hegemonic or a subaltern script, neither of which necessarily excludes violence, broadly defined. It could follow the hegemonic scripts related to the interests and norms of the US, EU or China perhaps (Ginsburg, 2010). Or it could follow a post-colonial, post-liberal script, following the path of General Assembly Conventions in the 1960s, the Non-Aligned and NEIO in the 1970s (United Nations, 2018b). This overlaps with the
expansion of rights starting with the Helsinki Accords in the mid 1970s (CSCE, 1975), and in the 1990s, the Agendas for Peace, Democatisaiton and Development (United Nations, 1992), and the High Level Panel Reports and R2P in the 2000s (United Nations, 2001), UNSC 1325 and Women Peace and Security (United Nations, 2000), as well as debates about sustainability in the 2010s, such as the ‘Sustaining Peace’ agenda (United Nations, 2018b).

These scripts were rarely identical, though in the 1990s era of human rights and democracy there began to be some convergence (Nelson, 1978) (these may not have gone far enough for social actors and may have gone too far for many existing elites). For this reason, emancipation’s connection with peace seems to have taken the current path of either critical (but mainly discursive) notions of sustainability (requiring historical, distributive, gender and environmental justice) or neoliberal concepts of resilience in practice (based upon self-help and subsistence) in the most recent phase.

After the end of the cold war, emancipatory peace was initially aimed at democratization, human rights and development within the state, balanced with autonomy and self-determination (United Nations, 1992). As liberal peace shifted into neoliberal peace with the onset of the 2000s, emancipation was increasingly linked implicitly with unregulated capitalism by the US (as in Iraq and Afghanistan) rather than human rights as the UN preferred. The former was supported by Western interventionism, neoliberal globalization and new technologies, including for communication, surveillance, and transport (Buzan and Lawson, 2015). Subaltern responses continued to equate emancipation with more complex stances against western interventionism, supporting national self-determination and elements that dismantled oppressive regimes. They also tended to reject elements that undermined subaltern political aspirations, including capitalism, environmental degradation and unequal resource distribution (Getachew, 2019).

By the 2000s, with the resurgence of neoliberal attempts to engage in global stabilization (though development, peacebuilding, statebuilding, humanitarianism and new forms of global governance), a revised post-colonial context emerged with questions arising about the unbalanced global economy, western and US-led intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the lack of involvement in Syria (Mishraj, 2012). It also merged questions of decolonisation aimed at colonial and neo-colonial frameworks with debates about social and global justice, including problems of historical and distributive injustice, as well as ecological sustainability (Dryzek and Pickering, 2019: 67).

This has reframed how emancipation is understood, indicating the need to more fully implement science-led understandings (e.g. in UN doctrine leading up to ‘Sustainable Peace’ and ‘Pathways to Peace’ approaches) (United Nations, 2018b: para 6; United Nations and World Bank, 2018). It points to the need to deal with the blockages caused by public reason (eg. populism) and, power-seeking (by elites at state and international levels) related to territorial sovereignty and international hierarchy, which drive the reluctance to engage with historical and distributive (global) justice questions, or sustainability in practice terms within the states-system format.

In critical praxis emancipatory peace was now generally assumed as being based on meeting expanding rights (Moyn, 2018: 68), needs, and respecting identity, for subaltern subjects, all in an empathetic way (Harbou, 2013). In particular, it now foregrounds political claims from the global south (Acharya, 2016), conflict-affected, and
developmental societies (historically as well as in the contemporary global political economy). Equality, historical and distributive justice, within the state, and across the globe became an often-unspoken assumption in global civil society, connecting peace with conceptions of global justice that were increasingly post-colonial rather than liberal) (Kohn, 2013: 190; Dallmayr, 2003; Fraser, 2010; Nagel, 2005; Nussbaum, 2000; Pogge, 2008). The prospect of a wide-ranging peace dividend (Richmond, 2009) highlights sustainability across generations, spaces and modes of life, pointing also to the newer concept of ‘planetary justice’ (Dryzek and Pickering, 2019: 67). It assumes individuals have a range of rights, duties, responsibilities and agencies by virtue of their existence, which they can achieve either through their own agency or through governmental or external assistance. They are able to mobilise for self-emancipation, or are emancipated by intervening agencies, a modus operandi for oppressed communities in conflicts all over the world, whether in colonial, imperial, authoritarian or stratified forms. Contemporary notions of sustainable peace echo twentieth century debates about ‘positive freedoms’ (Berlin, 1969) and human rights, ‘freedom from fear, freedom from want’ (Roosevelt, 1941).

An emancipatory tactic has been to use Eurocentric claims against themselves, to highlight structural and strategic hypocrisy to bring about change. This development carries with it a strong, yet often implausible, sense that both direct and structural violence will be dealt with through solidarity and networked agency, and that subaltern voices will determine strategy, which will ultimately be progressive in terms of social (and even global) justice. There is a strong idealist strand in this type of thinking which connects with a number of other debates: post-structuralism, post-colonialism and anti-colonialism. However, it has not so far resolved their many contradictions, nor been able to push back conservative applications of power and interest. Realists assumed that basic security is the first step, but to develop further is unlikely and fraught with difficulty because security rests upon power, making emancipation a utopian goal. Marxist, liberal and critical thinking indicated however, that the Arendtian axiom of the expansion of rights is a stronger logic for emancipation (Arendt, 1951; DeGooyer et al., 2018: 4; Moyn, 2018: 68), meaning they have expanded from security, representation and development to justice and sustainability, albeit agonistically. This points more to hybrid arrangements for emancipatory peace.

Thus, the concept of emancipatory peace assumes progress beyond the negative peace entailed in a diplomatic peace agreement, at least partly determined by power (as with the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel in the late 1970s (Princen, 1991), towards a positive peace (perhaps as might be seen in the post-settlement Northern Ireland environment) (Cox et al., 2006), and further to more hybrid forms of peace (Richmond, 2011), opening up issues of global justice and sustainability. Thus, it became rapidly overloaded. Without a local scale, and social positionality, able to identify oppressive forms and sources of power and inform interventionary praxis, legitimate authority for both the state and the peace is soon lost. Without the capacity for international actors to support peace through the enablement of subaltern agency and the reform of governance in line with political claims made transversally, emancipation cannot be achieved.

Identifying structures of power thus opens up the emancipatory process of reconfiguring power relations. This requires an international-intersectional perspective on subaltern political claims in order to establish a peace praxis that is driven by evening out a
wide range of inequalities – race, class, gender, on a local to global, transversal scale. So far, the main theories of peace and conflict studies or IR have not addressed peace at this level of complexity or scale: victor’s, liberal, conflict management, resolution or transformation versions of peace have tended to be limited to social, state, or international-level interactions. This has meant the complex transmission of conflict across local to global scale networks is not addressed (as Kant predicted) (Archibugi, 1992; Kant, 1983/2003[1795]). These complex interactions would need to be finely arranged in order to lead to a sustainable balance across difference (United Nations, 2018b; United Nations, 2015). Ultimately, this points to a continual expansion of rights, from domestic and localised matters of insecurity, to the state and its constitutional framework and international governance as in the liberal peace, to longer term intergenerational issues of justice and sustainability. There has been a convergence over time in the various critical literatures on these matters across disciplines.

**Conclusion**

‘...a breakthrough can become a trap, if it is used uncritically, repetitively, limitlessly.’ (Said, 1983: 239)

For an emancipatory peace the following dimensions – with all of their contradictions and limitations as they have built up over each other in layers – need to be considered. For realists, it requires a stable, all-consuming balance of power between nation-states. For Marxists, a resolution of class conflict. This requires a dismantling of the structure of national and global political economy, which is designed by the powerful to otherwise preserve the vestiges of hegemony. For liberals it requires human rights, a social contract and free trade to check and balance the powers that exist in society, state and markets, recognising that rights, trade and property within an enabling state and economy are the main determinants of emancipation.

For constructivists, emancipation relates to how the interplay of identity leads to the formation of institutions designed to deal with political claims against oppressive or unjust forms of power, following a similar line to liberal thought. Along with critical theorists, liberal and constructivist thought also points to how an international architecture of institutions, law, economic, political and military tools may be used to respond to such claims if they undermine the notion of a cosmopolitan world community. This is why liberal notions of emancipation ultimately become top-down constructions (spanning world government, international institutions or global governance). For critical theorists it aims at the creation of a cosmopolitan global community based upon functional or ideationally constructed common goals, or alternatively, the global mediation of difference across time and space into a more egalitarian material framework of politics (Devetak, 1995).

For post-colonialism, emancipation means removing direct and hidden forms of external domination related to historical practices of colonialism, and gaining autonomy (Roberts, 2017). For post-structuralists, emancipation refers to the removal of boundaries and binaries that prevents the individual from determining their own selves at any moment, freely and within and ethos of equalitarianism and perhaps cosmopolitanism
For post-structuralists and feminists, emancipation further requires an understanding of the subtle and deep shifts in power relations that perpetuate inequality and injustice, and many radical movements point to historical, distributive and environmental forms of justice as essential components of emancipatory thought. Feminism adds an empathetic element to this understanding (Sylvester, 2002). This points to a far more relational framework, between people and communities, but also between issues, generations and environments, highlighting for example social and technological linkages with the environment, as well as the economy with social equality (Qin, 2016). For environmentalists emancipation means action to make resource use sustainable (Dryzek and Pickering, 2019).

Trying to unravel such a conceptual array and seek a convergence, perhaps, points to a redefined understanding of politics and international relations. Instead of relying on the thin normativity (Behr and Shani, 2021) of past consensus, which often has remained unimplemented (and indeed may have inadvertently provided a platform for multiple counterforces in many contemporary, stalemated and frozen peace processes), the alternative for emancipatory thought is to equate peace with a thicker, more complex, understanding of global sustainability and global justice, rather than domination, victory or trusteeship. This reconfigures the main elements of politics as being an eternal struggle against blockages to justice and sustainability in the unpredictable context of the Anthropocene: the prevalence of blockages suggests a convergence is not possible in practice.

Critical positions, drawing on Marx, liberalism and post-colonialism, would see emancipation as being understood in Balibarian terms, more or less, starting from a subaltern positionality in order to represent and balance rights, material equality, environmental sustainability, identity, culture, norms, through social and transversal consensus, law, institutions, the state, regional and international institutions (e.g. ‘equa-liberty’) (Balibar, 2014). This has implications for deep, structural reform, basically confirming the positions of the global justice literatures, if not extending them (Della Porta et al., 2007). This would require peace praxes that enables a continual push against blockages, such as borders, centralised power, injustice and inequality, organised around a multilateral, transnational, multi-vertical and scalar umbrella, itself built on the existing international order. It points to hybrid peace: pluriversal heterotopias emerging from critical agency and civil societies, but inevitably built on the geopolitical, authoritarian and liberal platforms they seek to displace (Foucault, 1967/1984).

There are clearly contradictions in these possible interpretations. The dismantling of existing power structures through peace settlements favouring global/ planetary justice represents the epistemological and methodological aims of an emancipatory peace from a critical perspective, whereas from a liberal or neoliberal perspective peace requires the maintenance and expansion of core, elite structures that are necessary to produce a trickle down or norm cascade (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Sunstein, 1996). The liberal view may be justified on the grounds of what is possible and expedient in the short to medium term, whereas the critical approach is justified on the grounds of longer-term understandings of the conditions of a sustainable peace.

Glacially slow, and contested at every turn, this evolution is now becoming an empirical and intellectual schematic, compromising a fluctuating alliance between discursive
and structural power. This is probably why narratives about emancipation in history tend to foreground subaltern political claims but favour the interpretation of elites (e.g. ‘Whig history’, religion, nobility, the state and empire, capital and security actors). Yet subaltern actors were probably most dominant in the discursive and material struggle and resistance necessary to produce reform. In the end, this offers the tantalising possibility that emancipation can only be spoken by the local or networked subaltern, despite their positionality and weakness (and actually because of it). As soon as it is spoken it is often erased. Thus powerful elites may ignore emancipatory speech relatively easily, as it is normally aimed only weakly against them, or they may co-opt it because it is deemed to carry popular legitimacy especially after a structural failure such as a major war. Defining and acting upon emancipatory discourse requires an implausible alignment of the subaltern and power, neither of which are static.

A discursive mode of engagement with this problem is to offer an intellectual engagement at least. First, subaltern positionalities identify the problems, power-relations and structures, often connecting resistance with the everyday and the international. Next local knowledge offers an alternative perspective about what might be done about them within a cosmopolitan framework. Furthermore, micro-solidarities and transversal, scalar networks have created new ways of achieving such goals in an age of increased social mobilisation and capacities at the social and transnational levels. In addition, the logic of the commons tends to focus on inclusiveness, sustainability and justice, across time and space (Reid and Taylor, 2010).

Yet, if such claims were socialised, environmentalised, empathised, pluralised and equalised in an inter-generational perspective (Shahen et al., 2021) it would become possible to refresh the concept of emancipation for general contemporary use in the global setting of order maintenance that peace praxis contributes to. However, the advent of digital governmentality as part of a broader digital shift in IR (Taylor, 2015) means that emancipation has taken on a new contradiction. This is between the liberatory aspects of new technologies, networks, communications, transport, mobility and knowledge (Lipschutz, 2005) and the capacity of such technologies to be used to rescue those older power structures associated with nationalism, geopolitics or geo-economics (or ‘surveillance capitalism’) (Zuboff, 2019: 9). Digital governmentality is closely aligned to colonial and industrial stratifications of peace, as well as to those adopted under liberalism and globalisation within the Anthropocene.

Emancipation is connected to the identification of systems of domination by those they oppress, and their dismantling and replacing either by their revolutionary subjects or by external intervention. Peace praxis performs this role in the international and state-system, and in communal relations. This requires two positionalities working in tandem: the subaltern and the vanguard, configuring power relations between intervenors, power-structures and the subaltern, which must inevitably be based upon trust and communication in difficult circumstances. Disputants must agree for this process be consolidated in any peace agreement or new constitutional order. More problematically, opponents who benefit from existing power relations and stand to lose from a peace agreement must also agree, meaning that counter-peace dynamics are also part of this very opaque picture.

In past iterations, the concept of emancipation has reflected scientific and philosophical advances of the era, which have been translated into state and international law
and politics as well as being used for contradictory ideological programmes deploying violence. It has, however, also been instrumental in debates about identifying and mobilising networks of actors across scales against direct and structural violence and has foregrounded a potential political alignment between subaltern scripts from the bottom-up and the top-down design of peace (in state and international form). It is this guise that it has been useful in peace and conflict studies. Further intellectual momentum points to the potential relationship between emancipatory peace and global justice. This trajectory follows the same scientific research agendas and policy translations that led to the UN’s recent Sustaining Peace agendas (United Nations, 2018a).

This new emancipatory agenda reflects the build up complex historical, distributive, identity gender and environmental concerns that need to be reflected in any system that re-establishes security, peace and political order after war. Scientific and disciplinary contributions thus tend to imply a connection of peace with global justice, recently modified to include digital, post-colonial, environmentalist and gendered renderings of this alliance of concepts. The usage of the concept of emancipatory peace in research on peace, war and conflict reflects the confluence of a political ethics of peace, subaltern views of violence and ways out of it in the context of relationality and broader sustainability, as well as the age-old the problem of dealing with oppressive power-relations.

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Notes
1. Howard argues that Pax technica represents a new empire drawing on a technical rationality that emerges from networked devices, networked power and networked society. It undermines the states-system and democracy, as well as the concept of the state as a self-determining unit, as such concepts are transcended by a range of networks.
2. See UNDP Human Development Indexes.

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