

Interview - Johan Galtung

Written by E-International Relations

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Johan Galtung is a Norwegian professor and author who is widely regarded as the “Father of Academic Peace Research.” His pioneering and continuing efforts have greatly contributed to inspiring the creation of Peace and Conflict Resolution academic programs in universities throughout the world. In an academic career spanning 40 years, Johan Galtung has been a visiting professor at 30 schools on five different continents. He has written more than 100 books and over 1,000 articles about peace and conflict resolution, ecology, health, global governance, sustainable development, and economic reform. In 1959, he started the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo and directed it for ten years. In 1964, he launched the Journal for Peace Research at the University of Oslo. In 1993, he co-founded TRANSCEND – A Peace and Development Network for Conflict Transformation by Peaceful Means – which has members in more than 50 countries. In 1987, Johan Galtung received the Right Livelihood Award (often referred to as the Alternative Nobel Prize) “for his systematic and multidisciplinary study of the conditions which can lead to peace.”

In this interview, Professor Galtung discusses his career and offers his thoughts on the crisis in Crimea, UN peacekeeping missions, and more.

How has the way you understand the world changed over time, and what (or who) prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking?

How – by expanding, adding new concepts and discourses to understand better the world, not rejecting the old ones. Some examples:

When I started in 1951, my model was medical science with diagnosis, prognosis, and therapy – DPT – not any social science. The capacity to make a valid prognosis and, if unacceptable, come up with a therapy was crucial. I saw no reason why this should be limited to the state system as it was relevant also for the micro level between persons; meso level between social groups; macro level between states, between nations, and between states and nations; and the mega level for regions and civilizations. Ever since, similarity, causality, and differences between the levels have fascinated me.

In 1958, the excellent book by Marie Jahoda on positive concepts of mental health inspired me to make a distinction between negative and positive peace – between absence of violence on the one hand, and cooperation and harmony on the other. Thus I could develop peace studies beyond the Anglo-American focus on security, meaning above all their own security, and a UN Security Council as opposed to a UN Peace and Security Council (but in OSCE there are both security and cooperation, an improvement).

Down the road came cooperation for mutual and equal benefit – in other words, equity – as a road to peace and empathy, understanding others.

In 1965, studying the impact of sanctions on Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe), I was struck by how they used “peace” for their domestic independence, as there was no inter-racial violence, “only” massive exploitation, with half of white life expectancy, etc. So, there was more than intended violence that had to be negated to talk about peace; also the violence built into structures, structural violence. A little later, I added to the concepts of genocide and ecocide the

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concept of sociocide – killing a society – to understand better the nature of colonialism: killing structures, killing cultures.

In 1985, I was amazed by the US inability to learn from the Vietnam disaster about limits to military approaches to politics, and, looking for something deeper than rationality, came up with such deep culture concepts as DMA – the dualism-mancheism-armededdon syndrome of archetypes – deep structure of, for instance, imperialism having been explored earlier. Have a look at my *A Theory of Civilization* (2014).

I am now also working on deep nature, a fascinating topic.

Where do you see the most exciting research/debates happening in the field of contemporary peace studies?

Not as academic debates. The track record is what matters; the most valid prognoses, the best therapies. You find such efforts, with diagnosis in *50 Years: 100 Peace and Conflict Perspectives* (2008); about 30 realized, others waiting. Not that what we do is perfect, but certain others are much worse. Others often rely on threats and money, in need of no good ideas; we have none of that, but some ideas and a method to get at them.

You will find a chapter on prognoses in *A Theory of Peace* – have a look. I have little patience with “experts” not even able to predict the fall of the Soviet Empire starting at its weakest point, the Berlin wall, at least ten years ahead; 9/11 – not the date, but the fact – well ahead of time; the decline and fall of the US empire, say, from the mid-seventies; the 1987 and 2008 economic crises; and so on.

What are the most important/interesting areas of the social sciences that are underdeveloped, underfunded, and understudied at the moment? Where is there the most need and scope for new thinking?

Inter- and, more importantly, trans-disciplinary social sciences, like peace-development-environment, and future studies. I would, of course, recommend DPT; liberation from Weberian Wertfreiheit; putting much work into making the values explicit, communicable, and operational – making the findings available for free, democratic dialogues. Add Daoist epistemology to Western Aristotelian-Cartesian approaches. Have a look at my *50 Years: 25 Intellectual Landscapes Explored* (2008), exactly on this topic.

There is an emerging section of literature, for example Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, which has argued that global violence has declined significantly since the end of World War II and that we now live in a more peaceful time than witnessed before, dubbed “The Long Peace”. Do you subscribe to this view that we live in less violent times than ever before and, if so, what do you feel are the reasons for this development?

Look, many of us, like Uppsala peace studies and myself, have been saying this for decades, pointing to the decline in inter-state war. Of course we get less direct violence with ever better means of transportation and communication linking us all with mutual rights and obligations. At the same time, the state system is withering away, yielding to 4-8 regions, TNCs and NGOs and IGOs – except for the biggest ones, Russia, India, China, and the USA; the first three, incidentally, being the RIC in BRICS. The peace studies point is that those rights and obligations are not equal, meaning that direct violence yields to structural violence, like the epidemic shift in disease from contagious diseases to structural diseases like cardio-vascular, tumor, and mental disorders. Pinker is like a disease specialist celebrating the decline of contagious diseases by micro-organisms, ignoring structural and chronic diseases. In addition, he tries to conceal the most violent state of them all, his own, with its deep and not-so-deep culture of chosenness by God and exceptionalism. Uninteresting.

Have a look at my *The Fall of the US Empire – And Then What?* (2009).

What matters is how the regions will relate to each other and the struggle against the violence of the economic

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system – “soft power” killing much more than military power – and the “security” state, even world, by US – and Five Eyes! – surveillance, now in the NSA stage.

A recent internal United Nations study, which based its evaluation on eight of ten UN peacekeeping missions charged with protecting civilians – including those in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Haiti, and the joint UN-African Union mission in Darfur – found that UN peacekeeping missions routinely avoid using force to protect civilians who are under attack, intervening in only 20 percent of cases, despite being authorized to do so by the UN Security Council. The report also suggested that UN peacekeepers should use force more frequently to protect civilians. What are your thoughts on this suggestion that the UN should be using more force to protect civilians?

Send teams with military and police training, nonviolence and mediation training, to protect with hand weapons, and as eye witnesses and escorts, but above all as mediators organizing dialogues, focused on understanding what it is all about and finding viable solutions beyond diplomats far away from reality – 50% women – so numerous that they constitute a carpet of blue caps, and you will get results. Give them heavier arms, and so will the other side; arms are cheap these days. Train them well, also in empathy.

This year marks the twentieth commemoration of the Rwandan genocide, and there has been much reflection on the event and what can be done to avoid genocide occurring again. As someone who has spent a significant amount of your career focusing on such issues, do you feel there are any potentially volatile political situations in the world at the moment that could lead to a repeat of the kind of brutality witnessed in Rwanda twenty years ago?

Wherever we have economically innovative minorities out-competing the economic powers that be – less innovative, but militarily and politically in command – this may happen. This may happen to Chinese minorities and did, in Indonesia. This may happen to Russian minorities in East Ukraine. This may happen in very many places in Africa. This may happen internationally and is already happening, for instance to countries threatening the US dollar monopoly – so far – on “world reserve currency”. BRICS, particularly RC, with SCO and the budding Eurasia Community, are too strong for US-NATO. Solution: dialogue, sharing, egalitarian globalization.

The current geopolitical situation regarding Russia and Ukraine has been described as the worst crisis in Russia’s relations with the West since the end of the Cold War. Recently, Putin ordered troops deployed in regions near Ukraine to return to their home bases. Do you feel that this move will signal a de-escalation of the crisis, and what more can be done to ensure a peaceful resolution to the situation?

Focus more on the USA, please, and the Bush 2004 idea of enrolling Georgia and Ukraine in NATO, going even further in breaking the promises to the Soviet Union/Russia. Look also at the clumsy Georgian invasion of South Ossetia to provoke war in 2008, and above all at Khrushchev’s gift, Crimea, to Ukraine in 1954 under conditions that no longer apply after the fall of the Soviet empire, and you get a more nuanced picture. Ukraine means, at the border, one state; two nations cry for a federal solution: to elect a president from one of the nations will never work. Look for Swiss-type solutions.

Putin took Crimea back under these circumstances and now works for a federation; the step-by-step withdrawal is de-escalation inviting reciprocation from Kiev. But Putin should have given the Tatars the autonomy he wants for the Russians.

You’ve been strongly criticised for stating that Mao Zedong was a ‘liberator’. Considering the 45 million people who are estimated to have died as a result of his Great Leap Forward mandate, how do you justify your praise?

I deserve that critique, having been unaware of that atrocity in 1958-67, and will not hide under the idea that it was, probably, unintended, unlike Stalin’s mass murder of “kulaks” in Ukraine. I stand by the 1949 revolution as liberating. I also hope that equal attention is given to the massive killing every day – 100,000? 125,000? – probably unintended,

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by the world capitalist system, protected by military interventions, through starvation and preventable-curable diseases. But no money is available.

What is the most important advice you could give to young scholars of International Relations, just starting their careers, who want to specialise in peace and conflict resolution studies?

Stop studying international relations, a misnomer for inter-state studies, by using Anglo-American texts, given their track record of colonialism-imperialism and continued warfare. Travel all over, talk with people, ask them what is the best and the worst thing that happened to their nation and state, what are the conflicts, what are the solutions. Study history for creative solutions. Try to understand their deep cultures hidden in the collective subconscious. Pay much attention to culture and nation, less to threats/bribes and states. Be solution-, not victory-, oriented – also in your daily life.

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This interview was conducted by Al McKay. Al is an Editor-at-large of E-IR.