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Kristensen, Peter Marcus

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“Peaceful Change” in International Relations: A Conceptual Archaeology

Peter Marcus Kristensen
University of Copenhagen

Abstract

As the so-called liberal international order has come under duress, the problem of “peaceful change” has reappeared on the agenda of International Relations, mainly in a realist guise drawing upon E.H. Carr and Robert Gilpin’s renditions of the problem. Making a conceptual archaeological intervention, this paper recovers long-neglected multidisciplinary debates on “peaceful change” taking place in the tumultuous interwar period. It concurs that peaceful change is an International Relations problem *par excellence*, central to academic debates in the burgeoning interwar discipline, but also a more complex conceptual figure than posterity portrays it. The paper explores the debates between negative and positive conceptions of peaceful change, between political, legal-institutional and communitarian mechanisms of peaceful change, and different policies of peaceful change, particularly its troubled relationship to appeasement. The paper concludes that the interwar debate on peaceful change, while highly embedded in its context, does offer IR an alternative and more aspirational perspective on the problem of power and order transitions.

The “Perennial Problem” of Peaceful Change¹

There is a pervasive sense in International Relations (IR) scholarship that the so-called ‘post-war liberal international order’ is under pressure for change. Both because ‘Western’ powers look increasingly unwilling to maintain it and because ‘non-Western’ rising powers demand greater voice, influence, and status in it. Conventional wisdom, popularized as the millennia-old “Thucydides’ Trap”, is that tectonic power shifts are historically associated with hegemonic wars between the status quo power(s) that installed the prevailing order and rising revisionist power(s) that challenge it (Organski and Kugler, 1980; Allison, 2017) and that major changes of global orders arise from their ashes, codified in peace treaties written by victors (Gilpin, 1981; Holsti, 1991; Ikenberry, 2001). These current anxieties have given new life to the problem of *peaceful change*. Peaceful change “deserves greater attention from IR scholars”, a recent president of the International Studies Association contended, and called “on the IR discipline to think more clearly about strategies for peaceful change” (Paul, 2017:1, 2018:84; special issue of *International Studies Review*). Renewed calls note that the problem of peaceful change has a history and reference realists E.H. Carr and

¹ Earlier, and quite different, versions of this paper benefitted from comments from the IR group meeting and a later revise and resubmit seminar at the University of Copenhagen, a peaceful change workshop in Copenhagen and panels at the ISA conference, Fukuoka University, and EISA conference. I would especially like to thank Ole Wæver who pointed me to the much-neglected interwar literature on peaceful change almost a decade ago and also Adriana Abdenur, Lucian Ashworth, Christian Bueger, B.S. Chimni, Gregory Chin, Jean Marc Coicaud, Jeff Colgan, Michael Cox, Michael Doyle, Kal Holsti, Victoria Hui, Jennifer Mitzen, Cornelia Navari, Norrin Ripsman, Stephen Rock, Felix Rösch, Deepshikha Shahi, Jack Snyder, Casper Sylvest, Maximilian Terhalle, Kazuhiro Tsunoda, Robert Vitalis, Atsuko Watanabe, Anders Wivel and Ayse Zarakol for stimulating comments and discussions on peaceful change. Lastly, I would like to thank the Royal Danish Library for reopening my account despite failing to return two peaceful change books for almost a decade. The usual disclaimer applies.

Robert Gilpin who saw it as “the fundamental problem of international morality and of international politics” to argue that it is a “perennial problem” (Carr, 1939:283; an almost identical phrase in Gilpin, 1981:230; referenced in Paul, 2017:1; Kacowicz and Miller, 2018:302; Wivel, 2018:106).

The revival of peaceful change should be commended, but, I argue in the following, to treat it as a perennial (realist) problem reoccurring at all times and spaces is misleading and ultimately counter-productive for contemporary theorizing. The ambition of the conceptual archaeology offered here is to introduce more *historical context*, *conceptual richness*, and *controversy* to the study of peaceful change. First, concerning *context*, I argue that “peaceful change” is indeed a quintessential IR problem, but one that has a more distinctive conceptual history than the notion of a “perennial problem” suggests. Perennialism downplays the historicity of the concept, missing that it emerged in a particular context: the political, institutional and intellectual context of the interwar period. Recent (realist) interventions tend to ignore the wealth of studies devoted to peaceful change in the interwar period when it was the subject of debates and conferences involving many prominent (and forgotten) scholars. Realists have indeed authored important studies of peaceful change, but by drawing only on select ‘canonical’ thinkers of peaceful change, such as Carr and Gilpin, perennialism fails to situate and interpret them within their own intellectual context. In Carr’s case, this included a contending but now-marginalized non-realist discourse on peaceful change. I argue that only by contextualizing the concept within its original sphere of meanings—mapping the thinkers, debates, institutions and political context in which it emerged—can we start thinking about what “peaceful change” means in the present context, to present challenges, and in present IR debates.

Second, on *conceptual richness*, positing peaceful change as a perennial problem tends to reify the concept over time, ignoring that it may have different meanings at different times. This risks lending itself to partial and presentist readings, e.g. reading realist concerns on contemporary power transitions into the concept of peaceful change, which then becomes synonymous to ‘non-violent power shifts’. My conceptual archaeology, by contrast, demonstrates that “peaceful change” was a distinct conceptual figure in 1930s discourse (Cruttwell, 1937:1). The fact that it often appeared in quotation marks indicates that it denoted more than simply any change occurring without violence (for which “change” suffices). But “peaceful change” also denoted more than non-violent power shifts. It was based on an ontological distinction between changes in the ‘fundamentals’ of world politics (i.e. demographic, economic, industrial, technological, military political, ideological, and other changes) and change in an artificially erected superstructure. The latter consisting, narrowly defined, of the ‘status quo’ distribution of territory, rights, prestige or, more widely defined, the environment of international organizations, rules, laws, and treaties. Change in the fundamental base was seen, by many scholars contributing to the 1930s discourse studied below, as automatic and inevitable: “we are in a world of change”, “change is the law of life” and “most fundamental fact in the universe” (Dulles in Bourquin, 1936:42; Fischer-Williams, 1932a:36, 1931:326; Manning, 1937:171). The international architecture standing upon these constantly changing tectonic plates, however, was seen as inherently more static, usually the result of the recent peace settlement. The *problem* of “peaceful change” arose from growing incongruity between underlying processes of change and a more homeostatic and increasingly anachronistic political structure that slows down, inhibits, or prevents change. The metaphor of a territorial, legal, and institutional status quo that is “frozen” in peace settlements but “refuses to freeze without cracking” is present in several interwar scholars (Moon, 1936:27; Yntema, 1936:45). The problem was how to synchronize the forces of entropy and homeostasis through *peaceful* means as wars and subsequent peace treaties had been the ‘normal’ mechanisms for treaty revision, providing moments that synchronize “the real equilibrium of forces” with the formal, legal equilibrium (Wright, 1936:73–74; also Bourquin, 1936:210). “Peaceful change”, unlike inevitable and automatic changes in the fundamental base, thus refers to agential and institutionalized changes *within* the order (“changes in the distribution of rights and

possessions”) and *of the order* (“changes in the law which govern the acquisition of rights and possessions”) (Dunn, 1937:3). All this, elaborated further below, serves only as an early illustration that peaceful change was a richer conceptual figure than is typically appreciated in contemporary international theory.²

Third, my conceptual archaeology aims to retrieve the conceptual *controversies* concerning peaceful change at the time, particularly concerning the *conceptualization, mechanisms* and *policies* of peaceful change. By recovering the wider interwar *debate* on peaceful change, rather than only, say, Carr’s rendition, we can open our conceptual horizon beyond the now-predominant realist take on the concept. This has implications for theorizing peaceful change today. To condense what follows: where Carr and interwar realists *conceptualized* peaceful change negatively as non-violent changes (often driven by power politics and threats of war) that satisfy the dissatisfied enough to avoid war, other contemporaries proposed a positive conceptualization emphasizing just, consensual, and legal changes. Recent studies, however, implicitly or explicitly follow Carr’s conceptualization when they define peaceful change as “non-violent change”, “change by peaceful rather than violent means”, or “change in the status quo without war” (Paul, 2018:182; Wivel, 2018:111; Crawford, 2018:236; Kacowicz and Miller, 2018:301). As to *mechanisms*, studies in Carr and Gilpin’s realist vein view the main mechanism of peaceful change as “statecraft” (Paul, 2017) and “cooperation, negotiations, and bargaining between the parties concerned” (Kacowicz and Miller, 2018:302) whereas many of Carr’s contemporaries, especially international lawyers, advocated for systematic-legal or more communitarian mechanisms. In terms of *policies*, by viewing peaceful change as a problem of accommodating rising powers (Paul, 2016; Larson, 2018), studies drawing on Carr’s realist approach to peaceful change have been critiqued for justifying appeasement (Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman, 2018), a policy other interwar scholars of peaceful change vociferously opposed.

To summarize the argument, IR *can* learn about peaceful change from the debates of the 1930s, but in order to theorize “peaceful change” for IR today, we need to fully understand and appreciate the context in which the concept originally evolved—and that Carr was not the only theorist of peaceful change. The excavation of the long-neglected work of the pioneers of “peaceful change” from diverse theoretical and disciplinary standpoints gives the problem a broader and more multifaceted history, restoring its foundational place in international theory. This serves to enrich the concept, disentangle its realist and non-realist varieties, and elucidate its relationship to appeasement as it reappears on the contemporary theoretical agenda. My hope is that this archaeological inquiry can open the ground for IR to launch further inquiries into peaceful change, knowing that one need not subscribe to realism and/or appeasement to do so.

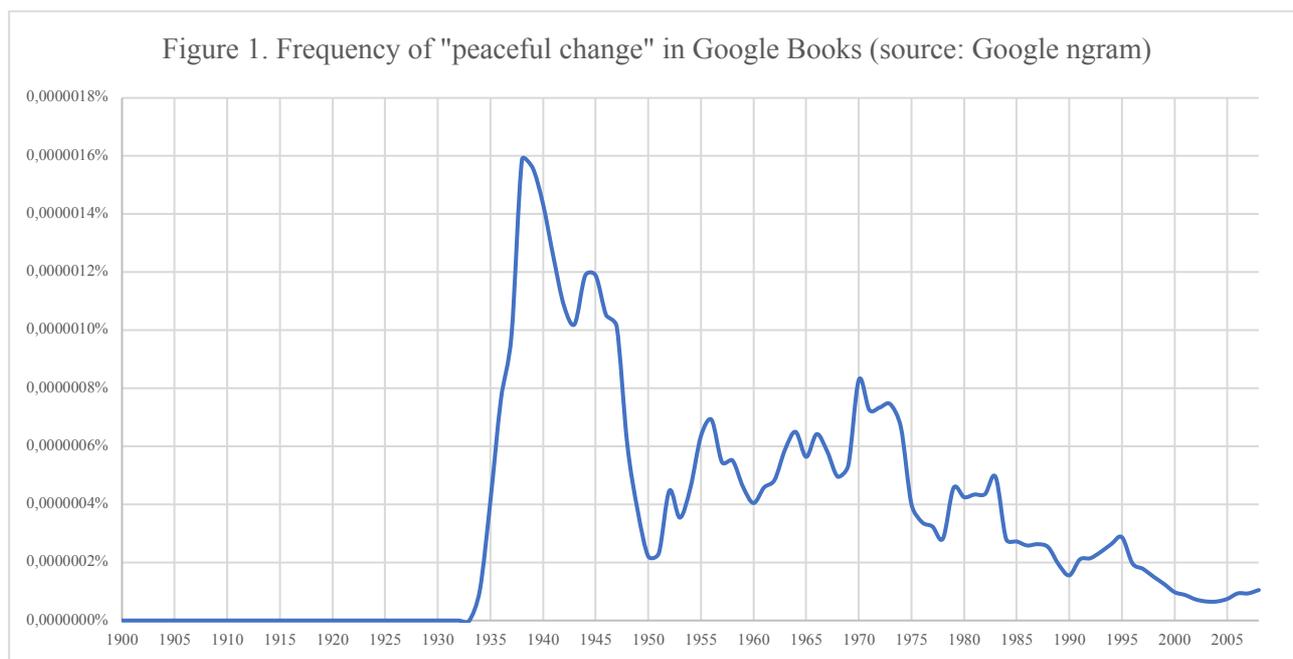
Before turning to the analysis, the following section outlines the contextualist methodology guiding it and the specific international, institutional and intellectual interwar context. The main analysis is then structured into three sections on contending *conceptualizations, mechanisms* and *policies* of peaceful change. A final section discusses the post-war history of peaceful change and its contemporary relevance, stressing contextual differences and potential conceptual, normative, and political pitfalls in the recovery of peaceful change.

Contextualizing “Peaceful Change”

² The ontology of “peaceful change” is clearly more expansive than the most materialist neorealist and power transition theories that view material power shifts between states as the main cause of conflict and the main problem to solve. The problem of “peaceful change”, as originally formulated, implies that some system of rules, norms, and institutions constitutes part of any international order, and indeed can be the cause of conflict when incongruous with changing material constellations.

The notion of perennial problems, of which “Thucydides’ Trap” or “peaceful change” are recent instalments, have been challenged by the “historiographical turn” in international thought, often inspired by “Cambridge School” contextualism (Skinner, 2002; Bell, 2009). Contextualism states that ideas should not be interpreted as part of a timeless and transcendental canon but as always embedded, embodied, and articulated in specific sociohistorical contexts. By interpreting concepts in the historical context of their original articulation—examining the political vocabularies authors used to position themselves within their own political and intellectual context—contextualism provides an antidote to presentist interpretations that bring contemporary ideas and problems into readings of historical texts. Moreover, it avoids the conceptual reification of perennialism, by viewing concepts as contingent and potentially having multiple meanings across historical, spatial, and cultural contexts. What appears to be the same concept recurring over time may in fact be different conceptions deployed differently in different contexts to address different problems. Uttering “peaceful change” may not mean—or do—the same in 2020s debates as in 1970s or 1930s debates (Armitage, 2014:30; Skinner, 1969; for overviews on contextualism in IR, see Ashworth, 2019; Vergerio, 2019).

This paper makes a contextualist intervention by challenging the perennial status of peaceful change and instead retracing the neglected multiplicities of its *interwar* formulations. There is a strong case to be made that “peaceful change” enters the vocabulary of international thought in the late interwar period and that this constitutes its original context of articulation. Figure 1 shows the explosion of the use of the specific phrase “peaceful change” in the late 1930s. Some scholars directly described the debate on peaceful change as a novelty, “a newly developing debate” (Manning, 1937:v) that excited “more widespread interest than at any period in modern history” (Cruttwell, 1938:85). Nominalists might argue that “peaceful change” emerges as a neologism during the interwar period to describe the undescribed. But this is ultimately misleading as the phenomenon, problem, and broader conceptual figure of peaceful change has a wider history, especially in other disciplines, even if the exact phrase “peaceful change” was new. For example, some saw it as a classical dilemma in political-legal theory of how to construct laws capable of keeping social life both peaceful *and* progressive (Mitrany in Bourquin, 1936:209; Carr, 1939:264). Peaceful change never disappeared entirely from the post-1930 IR vocabulary either.



My purpose is to offer a conceptual archaeology of peaceful change by retracing it to its origins, but this is not an argument that peaceful change belongs to and has relevance only in the interwar period. It is important not to succumb to an historical *originalism* that posits the 1930s discourse as the authentic and final word on peaceful change, while viewing subsequent theorizations as a derivative “regression from origins” (Gordon, 2014:38-39). My ambition is to show the pluralism and controversies over peaceful change, the “neglected riches” of its interwar manifestations, not to provide *the* authoritative account (Skinner, 1998:118–119). If we accept that the interwar period is a significant context for the emergence of the concept “peaceful change”, this raises the question of what parts of that context are most relevant. I will concentrate on international, institutional, and intellectual context.

International Context

The interwar concern with *change* was a product of the gradual deterioration of the international climate. Peaceful change, like much 1920s and early 1930s IR, initially revolved around the question of treaty revision, specifically the (un)fairness of the Versailles peace treaty (Bloomfield, 1957:32; Ashworth, 2013:134). Narrowly conceived, peaceful change was to provide an answer to the grievances of “have-nots” concerning disarmament, territorial, and colonial distribution established in the 1919 status quo. Much of the peaceful change discourse therefore consisted of factual data on minorities, colonial trade, raw material resources, population pressures—often assessing the validity of the “Have-nots” need for additional territory, raw materials, and market access. More broadly conceived, peaceful change was to tackle the wider critique that the League and entire post-WWI order had become overly static, conservative and statusquoist; that the Versailles settlement was “too uncompromising, too everlasting” and near the end of its “post-war cycle” (Armstrong, 1935:4,8) and that international law, organization, and order had failed to keep pace with political, economic, social, and technological changes (Wright, 1938:825). The established order looked increasingly fragile, if not crumbling, after the 1935 Abyssinian Crisis. The failure of the League to deter and punish Italy is arguably the most well-known example of how a political dilemma brought about change in international thought, forcing scholars to reevaluate their beliefs in the League, international law, collective security, and how to prevent further violent disruptions of the status quo (Hall and Bevir, 2014:829). Interpreted in context, peaceful change is an interregnum problematique: an attempt to *peacefully* manage a situation where the old order was dying and the new yet to be born.

The stress on *peaceful* change was the result of an international context where war-like changes loomed large. When delegates met at the 1937 peaceful change conference, the equilibrium had been “violently disturbed”—Japan had invaded Manchuria, Italy had occupied Ethiopia, Germany had remilitarized the Rhineland—and Versailles was seen as a “dead letter” (Webster, 1937:4, 11). The imminent risk of world war led scholars to argue that “the outstanding problem of our time” was “how to bring about peaceful change in the international order, and so avert the fall of the sword of Damocles.” (Bentwich, 1938:157). The shadow of WWI provided the contextual backdrop for thinking *peaceful* change. Like all concepts, “peaceful change” has a temporal structure, a “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation” (Koselleck, 1990). Its “space of experience” was informed by the destructiveness of the Great War, which led to the reasoning that war was no longer a viable institution for accommodating demands for change. In the more immediate past, the Kellogg-Briand pact (1928) renouncing war as an instrument of national policy led to the reasoning that if you cannot have war you must have “peaceful methods of settlement” and if change is inevitable you must have “peaceful methods of change” (Fischer-Williams, 1928:420, 1931:337; Forster, 1933:340; Bourquin, 1936:13–15, 43). Part of its wider “space of experience” was the (perceived) historical experience

that major changes of the international status quo, order, and law had emerged through major wars (Feller, 1933:183; Bourquin, 1936:13–15; Keeton, 1938:398) and that although post-war attempts to construct “general settlements of international affairs” are always envisioned as permanent, indefinite, and changeless, they eventually crack, crumble, and become obsolete (Fischer-Williams, 1931:327; Dulles and Mitrany in Bourquin, 1936:42, 264; Cruttwell, 1938:85). Its “horizon of expectation”, in turn, was the possibility of a future where “something” is devised so change comes about peaceably: “if war is to be averted something must be devised to do in the future what war has done in the past.” (Webster, 1937:6). “Peaceful Change” was to replace a punctuated equilibrium model of change where long periods of stasis are suddenly disrupted (through war) to give way to a new order (through peace treaties). The political context clearly informed the concept of “peaceful change”, but is not a necessary or sufficient explanation for its emergence, nor should it exhaust our interpretation.

Institutional Context

Institutional and disciplinary context also shaped the interwar discourse on peaceful change. Peaceful change emerged as IR was emerging as a discipline and therefore took place in various institutional and multidisciplinary settings, primarily the International Studies Conference (ISC) under the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) of the League of Nations, but also lectures at the Graduate Institute in Geneva, including *The Problems of Peace* series (Fischer-Williams, 1932b), American Society of International Law which devoted its 1936 conference to peaceful change (Moon, 1936; Wright, 1936; Yntema, 1936), Royal Institute of International Affairs (e.g. Toynbee, 1936), lecture series at the LSE (Manning, 1937), publications by Foreign Policy Association (Stone and Eichelberger, 1937), Council on Foreign Relations (Dunn, 1937), Institute of Pacific Relations (Angus, 1937), New Commonwealth Institute (Strupp, 1937), and many other institutions that submitted contributions to the 1937 International Studies Conference. The League-affiliated ISC, however, was the key node. Established in 1928, ISC from 1931 onwards brought together experts from various disciplines in two-year cycles to discuss “concrete problems of international relations” (IIIC, 1932:xiv-xv) such as ‘The State and Economic Life’ (1931-1933), ‘Collective Security’ (1933-1935), ‘Peaceful Change’ (1935-1937) and ‘Economic Policies in Relations to World Peace’ (1937-1939). “Peaceful Change” attracted most participants and publications.

The foundational role of the ISC has been marginalized in IR history (Long, 2006). Yet, this *multidisciplinary* League-affiliated institution played an important sociological role in bringing together academics from different disciplines and countries to discuss international political problems. Participants were not pedigreed ‘IR’ scholars—PhDs in IR employed in departments of IR publishing in IR journals—but historians, lawyers, economists, geographers, or political scientists united by the pressing political problem of peaceful change. The multidisciplinary setup is important for how debates unfolded because disciplinary divides became potential lines of contention (lawyers focusing on the legal framework of peaceful change vs. historians and political scientists studying empirical peaceful changes). Moreover, the ISC constitutes a rich and largely unexplored historical archive. Apart from the staggering 120 memoranda, monographs and edited volumes submitted to the “Peaceful Change” conference, IIIC published an official report containing “an almost complete record of the discussions in both plenary and round-table sessions.” (IIIC, 1938:12). Conference transcripts are interesting sources because they give us insight into the actual dialogical *debates* on peaceful change (Guilhot, 2011).

Intellectual Context

Finally, concepts must be interpreted within the field of thinkers and their position-taking in academic conversations, not as free-floating ideas. Because I structure my analysis around *debates* on the concept, mechanisms, and policies—not particular texts or thinkers—of peaceful change, I focus more on performative moves made in this debate and less on the granular authorial intentions than conventional contextualism (Skinner, 2002). Despite the conceptual focus, my analysis does serve to contextualize Carr’s ‘classical’ take on peaceful change by situating it alongside contemporary scholars he interacted with and positioned himself against in the peaceful change debate—rather than alongside other ‘classical’ works like Thucydides’ and Gilpin’s. Among the more prominent participants in the written or oral discourse on peaceful change, we find scholars of international law, history, classics, political science, sociology, economics, demography, anthropology, and colonial administration, such as Henry Angus, Maurice Bourquin, Alexander Carr-Saunders, Charles Cruttwell, John and Allen Dulles, Frederick Dunn, Hersch Lauterpacht, Lucy Mair, Karl Mannheim, Charles Manning, Paul Mantoux, David Mitrany, Gilbert Murray, Georges Scelle, James Shotwell, Eugene Staley, Arnold Toynbee, Charles Webster, Quincy Wright, and Alfred Zimmern (IIC, 1937:12–15). IR historiographers have produced excellent biographical studies on many of these thinkers and my analysis of the peaceful change debate therefore does not delve into their positions on other issues.

A more important methodological issue concerns the international thought we exclude by looking at the “peaceful change” debate. Most participants in this debate were elite, white, Anglo-American, male thinkers. Conference debates were also shaped by lesser-known scholars, also from beyond the Anglophone world. But most were from Europe and the colonies were not represented, although colonial redistribution was crucial to the discussions. Apart from the Eurocentric character of discussions, the debate venues were also dominated by male thinkers, with exceptions like Lucy Mair, Vera Dean, and “Lady Zimmern” (as she was designated in IIC, 1938:632; Mair, 1937). Indeed, concerns about the limited positionalities of the peaceful change debate go beyond nationality, race, and gender. Participants were broadly located at the center of the international political spectrum, broadly supportive of the League and collective security but open to its reform. There were few “radicals and reactionaries” (Hall, 2015) involved in this debate, barring some vocal delegates from fascist Italy and Nazi Germany who advocated peaceful change but were critical that the League and collective security could provide it (finding some common ground with realists) (Bourquin, 1936). Fascist voices dissipated as their countries left the League, however.

The politically ‘mainstream’ character of the debate is only partly explained by institutional in/exclusions and the ISC’s League-centered nature. Another reason is that the concept of “peaceful change” is inherently reformist—both anti-conservative and anti-revolutionary. This conceptually excludes much reactionary and radical international thought, for example some Marxist, communist and anti-colonial strands. The purpose of reformist “peaceful change” is exactly to resolve the dialectics of stability and change, order and justice, stasis and progress, peace and war, conservatism and revolution. Its conceptual opposite is therefore both ‘no change’ *and* ‘violent change’—rigid conservation of an anachronistic status quo *and* revolutionary change. The two were viewed as dialectic: “If your international constitution is too rigid, you will not avoid change, but you will make your changes revolutionary.” (Fischer-Williams, 1928:420). Peaceful change aims to avoid that rigid preservation of the peace and status quo becomes a cause of violent change; that just demands for changes *in* the system turn into revolutionary changes *of* the system. Some even argued that violent revolutions are made by conservatives, not revolutionaries: “The history of every revolution is a story of blocked channels of change.” (Mitrany in Bourquin, 1936:209). The argument for peaceful change was that the most stable institutions, protected against revolution, are those most flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances. What is needed to sustain peace is not an order that prevents change, but one that makes it as easy and peaceful as possible; “perpetual peace is not perpetual

“rest.”” (Fischer-Williams, 1931:327). Thus, reformist peaceful change is itself quasi-conservative by preferring gradual change through managed reform within the existing order over revolutionary/war-like change. Peaceful change proposes change for the sake of “stability”, not of the particular status quo, “but of the general peace, order and good government of the world.” (Fischer-Williams, 1931:328).

Conceptualizations of Peaceful Change

Despite the general conceptual contours and common political and institutional context, the concept of peaceful change not uniform, but subject to controversy. This and the following two sections focus on controversies over *conceptualizations*, *mechanisms* and *policies*. Although treated as analytically distinct, there are correspondences between them: proponents of a negative conceptualization often advocated statecraft as mechanism and sometimes appeasement as policy; proponents of a positive conceptualization advocated systematic-legal or communitarian mechanisms and often opposed appeasement. But these correspondences are not clear-cut and individual scholars positioned themselves differently across the three.

Concerning conceptualizations, we find two primary contenders: A minimalist and negative approach defined peaceful change as non-violent changes of the status quo while a comprehensive and positive definition defined it as consensual, legal, and just changes. The two viewed the purpose of peaceful change, respectively, as *avoiding war* and *producing a more just international order*. The former advocated for examining concrete demands for peaceful change, the latter for treating peaceful change as a general and systematic problem. The conceptual dichotomy is not mine, but was prevalent at the conference, noted by the rapporteur (Bourquin, 1936:13–15) and later commentators who likened it to the distinction between negative and positive peace ([Antola, 1984](#)).

Negative Peaceful Change

In the negative definition, sometimes labelled “realist” by proponents, peace is seen as latent war and peaceful change defined as the alternative to change through outright war. To Frederick Dunn (1937:2), the Yale political scientist later claimed by realists, “the term ‘peaceful change’, then, refers simply to the alteration of the status quo by peaceful international procedures rather than by force.” The more well-known advocate of “realism” and Wilson professor of International Politics in Aberystwyth, E.H. Carr (1939:265) also defined the concept negatively: as how, in national politics, to effect “necessary and desirable changes without revolution and, in international politics, how to effect such changes without war”. Although peaceful change was defined as non-violent change, this school contends that *threats of war* actually facilitate peaceful changes. The possibility and threat of war is the *sine qua non* for peaceful change, Dunn (1937:127–8) maintained, because great powers will only seriously consider proposed changes that threaten the peace if not satisfied. “The contingent threat of war”, Oxford historian Charles Cruttwell (1937:1) argued in his historical overview, has “been one of the main considerations which have been decisive in securing a change without war.” “An operation of peaceful change,” Carr (1939:274–5) echoed two years later, “could not be effected save under a threat of war.”

By implication, the relative power of states engaged in a controversy was crucial because only claims by strong states able to provoke world war would receive attention (Angus, 1937b:5; Bourquin, 1938:47). To Henry Angus (1937a:11), head of the political science department at the University of British Columbia, this meant that “For a long time to come peaceful change, like violent change, is likely to benefit the strong at the expense of the weak and to appear to the weak and unsheltered as merely a new formula for justifying spoliation.” In an argumentation later reproduced

by Carr, Angus (1937a:10–11) contended that satisfied states would rarely give up possessions because they mistakenly believe the current distribution of privileges is just and are unable to recognize their own parochialism: “It must be remembered that every ‘satisfied’ nation considers that it is calm and contented because of its honesty and self-reliance, its patience and its courage. It has, in short, the bourgeois temper.”

Charles Manning, then Montague Burton professor at LSE, also primarily advocated a negative, realist concept of peaceful change. To Manning (1937:173-174), changes are never urgent or inevitable, good or bad, *in themselves*: “No one, it seems, has yet come out for peaceful change simply in the interests of change—as some take the car for a run with no specific destination in mind.” Concrete proposals for peaceful change are never disinterested and based solely on reason or justice, but in the interest of those who benefit from peace and wish to avoid “otherwise anticipated warlike change” (satisfied powers). Manning (1937:174) directly criticized scholars who implied that “peaceful change is necessarily change for the better, change in the interests of justice, and change accepted freely” for obscuring the question. At the 1937 conference, Manning criticized colleagues who proposed both *just* and peaceful changes for wishing for more than had been obtained in domestic politics (IIIC, 1938:271). In the ideal international society, Manning (1937:190) argued, “the case for change is understood in terms not of abstract justice—or vested rights—but of realism, compromise, and common sense”. Dunn (1937:127) was also critical that ideals and claims about justice might cloak power politics, as changes justified by reason or morality are often “in the immediate interest of the state having the power advantage. The resulting peace is only a temporary truce while the nation which was forced to acquiesce is gaining strength to challenge the settlement.”

In the negative conceptualization, peaceful change is a way for strong states to avoid war—not to produce a more just world order. The problem of peaceful change was not how to construct a general legal-institutional mechanism for producing a more elastic order, but how to meet the specific claims of challengers to the status quo distribution of rights and duties while preserving peace (cf. Angus, 1937b:3). Maurice Bourquin, professor at the Graduate Institute in Geneva and general rapporteur for the 1937 conference, was a strong voice for such “realism” in the peaceful change debate. He drew a line between those treating peaceful change in abstract terms—constructing “attractive systems” that correspond to “a true ideal”—and “realism” which concentrates on the “concrete forms which the problem assumes” (Bourquin, 1938:22-23, 260). Bourquin and Manning were both sceptical that reason and science could solve the problem of peaceful change and even that a solution could be found at all, unless the fundamental structure of international relations was changed. They maintained that claims for change are not only about ‘real’ socio-economic needs of dissatisfied nations, but also about the political need to become a great power. In such political questions, “reason loses much of its power” and what is required is “more prudence, more tact, more precautions.” (Bourquin, 1938:36–37). Manning criticized “the naïve belief in the compelling power of Reason” to solve the problem of peaceful change and advocated a “realism” that realises the limits of reason, that law, moral and reason are subject to politics, and that diplomacy works in secretive and mysterious ways (Manning 1937:169; Manning in IIIC, 1938:269; also Schrieke, 1937:16; Moresco, 1937:1). Other participants such as Blühdorn, Antonesco, Winiarski, and MacPherson supported the call for “realist peaceful change” that faces the reality of power politics among states and only proposes change that is “immediately applicable” and “practicable without too strict a regard for its ideal desirability”, as opposed to “ideal peaceful change” treating the problem in a “rational”, “academic”, “abstract”, “theoretical” and “idealist” manner (IIIC, 1938:269-271, 548-557, 574).

To summarize, negative peaceful change is defined as non-violent changes of the status quo to avoid war among the great powers, albeit often preceded by threats of great power war. Peaceful change is the attempt to satisfy the unsatisfied by statecraft and the redistribution of privileges, often territory. This concept is hard to distinguish from appeasement. But, as discussed below, to many

interwar scholars, even some subscribing to negative peaceful change, appeasement as it materialized in the Munich Agreement did not qualify as peaceful change as it was too late, too short-sighted, conducted from a position of weakness, based exclusively on force, whetted the appetite for more, and did not even accomplish the purpose of avoiding war, not to speak of producing a more just order.

Positive Peaceful Change

A second school objected against the negative and power politics-based definition and stressed that peaceful change must be based on consent, justice, and systematic procedures. In the positive conceptualization, peaceful change should do more than avoid war. As Quincy Wright, the Chicago political scientist and international lawyer, formulated it, “peaceful change means changes in the *status quo* necessary for justice”, not simply change to “buy off Powers that are threatening war.” (Wright in IIC, 1938:477). Charles Webster (1937:5), the historian who formerly held the Wilson chair and now Stevenson chair at LSE, outlined such a broader typology of peaceful change: (1) to avoid war, (2) to produce or remedy justice, (3) to produce a world order better adapted to the material and mental processes. This was modelled on the domestic analogy where peaceful changes can be means to (1) appease the poor, (2) remedy injustice or (3) create a better planned community. The first equivalent to negative peaceful change, the latter two to positive peaceful changes.

The temporal horizon differs here. Rather than simply avoiding war in the immediate future, the positive conceptualization contains a promise of long-term progress: that peaceful change could make the League and the territorial order more flexible so as to prolong its life for the foreseeable future, if not overcome the problem of war entirely. In this more ambitious conceptualization, the challenge of peaceful change is to increase the political *elasticity* of the international (legal) order, making it able to transform itself, not simply to defuse the present political grievances of ‘have-nots’, (Dulles, 1936:25). Peaceful change should create a more elastic, and thus more legitimate and just, world order. Its goal is to ensure a “living justice” that satisfies changing needs and conceptions of justice over time (Forster, 1933:342). By implication, proposed changes, if they are to produce a lasting peace, must be just and not based purely upon power considerations or immediate threats of war. Peaceful change cannot aim only to maintain peace—in which case changes will only be made at the advantage of strong states—but also to produce a just peace (IIC, 1938:268).

Apart from justice, other advocates of positive peaceful change added *consensual* and *legal* peaceful change. Arnold Toynbee (1937:28), the historian of civilizations and editor of Chatham House’s Survey of International Affairs, proposed that by peaceful change “we mean something more than merely change which takes place without war. We probably mean peaceful *and* voluntary change” (also Angus, 1937:6–7). By including consent, he disregarded cases where threats of force resulted in *fait accomplis*, e.g. the re-occupation of the Rhineland, as peaceful changes. Others, mainly international lawyers, further stressed that peaceful changes must be *legal*. In the definition of John Fischer-Williams (1928:420), an international lawyer and British League delegate who was one of the earliest students of peaceful change, what is needed is both “non-violent and legal modification of rights.” He envisioned peaceful change as a legal “safety-valve” that, like legislation in domestic politics, avoids revolutionary explosions by renegotiating and synchronizing the order to new circumstances (Fischer-Williams, 1931:329). Quincy Wright (1939:13) also proposed a definition of peaceful change “as a change in law or rights through procedures other than war which are in accord with the international obligations of the parties concerned, or which the law recognizes as competent in emergencies to override normal rights and obligations in the interest of a higher justice or of the welfare of the community of nations as a whole.”

A positive, legal definition of peaceful change is also found in Hersch Lauterpacht, perhaps the most prominent international lawyer, who was critical of peaceful change as a procedure to avoid

war. Lauterpacht (1937b:141) treated peaceful change as an institution of international law, defined as “the acceptance by States of a legal duty to acquiesce in changes in the law decreed by a competent international organ.”. The ability to produce peaceful changes is paramount to legal systems, a system without it “bears in itself the germs of its own destruction. It is in itself an incentive to violence.” (Lauterpacht, 1937a:4). Without a legal mechanism for peaceful change, international law risks perpetuating an “obnoxious status quo” that eventually leads to the conclusion that a just war is better than an unjust peace (Lauterpacht, 1937a:6). A system without provisions for peaceful change not only risks war-like change, but serves as an excuse for noncompliance with all international law (Forster, 1933:342) as war or the threat thereof is the only way to improve one’s rights and a party can effectively only change treaties by breaking them (Mitrany in Bourquin, 1936:212). In legal terms, peaceful change had to overcome the tension between *pacta sunt servanda* (treaties are binding and must be kept) and *rebus sic stantibus* (if there has been a fundamental change of circumstances, parties may withdraw from or terminate treaties). The legal peaceful change argument, in short, is that the sanctity of treaties depends on the ability to update them to changed circumstances, but also that they are *updated in accordance with existing international law*.

Many proponents of positive peaceful change—as consensual, just, legal, and systematic change—opposed the call for “realist peaceful change” looking only at the concrete manifestations of peaceful change, especially demands for redistributive change of territory. In Lauterpacht’s (1937a:1–3, 1937b:135–140) conceptualization, pragmatic political solutions to particular problems—German colonies, Manchuria, Abyssinia—do not fall under the topic peaceful change, only fundamental considerations about the legal system do. He opposed the “pragmatic method of leaving the fundamental issues alone and of trying to solve each difficulty as it arises. Such pragmatism would be deceptive. For we may find that in the absence of legally effective institutions of peaceful change we are not solving these particular problems but are compelled to accept solutions under the impact of force or—what is the same—of the desire to avert war.” (Lauterpacht, 1937b:140). At the 1937 conference, scholars such as Van Kan, Hauser, Richardson, Lord Lytton, de la Harpe, Mantoux, and Scelle argued that the “realism” of looking at concrete and practicable peaceful changes would stifle any progress. They stressed instead that systematic procedures rather than particular instances of territorial change were necessary to produce lasting peaceful change, that justice and ideals remains important driving forces, and that scholars should in fact judge the moral value of revisionist claims (IIC, 1938:261-268; 572-574).

Mechanisms of Peaceful Change

While there was “unanimity” on the need to replace violent with peaceful methods, the general rapporteur noted disagreement on its procedures. One “school” held that peaceful change must be solved through statecraft, “political constructions” and “direct negotiations”, implemented in the existing self-help system where each state provides its own security. Another school stressed that peaceful changes should be implemented by legal “imperative procedures” and in a collective security system if they are to produce a lasting peace that guarantees the established order, the application of existing international law, and that modifications are just, consensual, and not implemented at the expense of weak states. A third position, “between” the two, stressed mechanisms like persuasion, reason, information and community-building (Bourquin, 1936:13–15, IIC, 1938:52–54).

Statecraft

To proponents of negative peaceful change, the primary procedure was statecraft: Direct diplomatic negotiations among states, primarily great powers, as opposed to legal procedures. A key part of the

argument challenged the validity of analogies to domestic peaceful change through legislation. Manning (1937:177–180) directly opposed the “domestic analogy” that international institutions could be endowed with the power to deprive states of rights against their will. Unlike domestic politics, Brierly noted, there is no international legislature to solve the problem of peaceful change, only “fragile dams of legal formulas”, and peaceful change thus becomes a “problem of statesmanship” (Brierly in Geneva Institute of International Relations, 1930:297). In Hamilton Fish Armstrong’s (1935:7-9) “power politics” perspective, the League and Article 19 contained the embryo of peaceful change, but lacked an enforcement mechanism.³ Only stronger states, not the League, could solve the problem of German, Italian, and Japanese expansionism. It would be futile to design abstract legal formula for peaceful change because such once-and-for-all solutions would necessarily fail to predict the future conditions and demands for change. Only political procedures provide that flexibility.

Directly calling for “realism”, proponents of this view, led by Manning, encouraged colleagues to “guard against illusions” and “ideally perfect procedures” such as authoritative peaceful change enforced by a “super-State”. The faith in international law and organization, analogies to change in the domestic sphere, and especially Lauterpacht’s radical proposal for peaceful change through a “super-state” represented the kind of legal blueprints that realists like Manning rebelled against. He opposed the “all or nothing” definition of peaceful change as an overriding international legislature and ridiculed Lauterpacht who went “all out for the World State; and, upon my words, for one moment I really began to think he was going to get it!” Manning was sceptical of this technocratic-rationalist notion, that if only the correct legal procedure of peaceful change was established, a solution would automatically follow: “You put in your penny, you turn the handle, and out comes your settlement!”. Peaceful change would not come about through judgment or legislation, but a “*construction politique*.” (Manning, 1937:175–177; Manning in IIC, 1938:550-557).

Dunn (1937:125) made similar critiques of instrumentalist approaches to peaceful change: “The widespread notion that by the mere calling of conferences, the establishment of international commissions of inquiry or the devising of new techniques of negotiation it will be possible to find acceptable solutions for all demands for change is largely the product of wishful thinking”. The solution, rather, was “unofficial and informal” procedures among states conducted without the publicity of League discussions (Dunn, 1937:149). John Condliffe (1938:5–8), who also defined peaceful change as the “ways and means of satisfying urgent present needs without recourse to war”, believed states should be the primary movers in solving it: “It follows that international machinery is regarded not as the starting point of a possible future unitary organisation for the world as a whole, but as a means of facilitating cooperation between independent nation-states.” Manning (1937:172) praised Condliffe’s statism, stating that “It is an aid to clear thinking, and a check to undue optimism, that, in viewing any problem in the field of international policy, we remember how, for anything to be accomplished in the matter, it must be done by the Governments of the existing sovereign States.”

E.H. Carr similarly characterized peaceful change through a world legislature or court as “utopian” and advocated for a great power bargaining mechanism attuned to the conflicts of interest between Haves and Have-nots. It is worth recalling, however, that Carr (1939:222) advocated for a synthetic realist-utopianist mechanism of peaceful change that could compromise between the utopian “common feeling of what is just and reasonable” and the realist “mechanism of adjustment to a changed equilibrium of power”—but his concern with justice emphasized the injustice done to *Have-nots*, leading him to support appeasement.

³Article 19 stated “The Assembly may from time to time advise the reconsideration by Members of the League of treaties which have become inapplicable and the consideration of international conditions whose continuance might endanger the peace of the world.”

Legal Machinery

A contending view, drawing on the positive concept of peaceful change, held that mechanisms must be legal, institutional, systematic, and collective rather than political, ad hoc, and statist. As Toynbee (1937:37–38; 1936:27) put it, “artificial channels” of peaceful change should moderate, if not substitute, old-fashioned “ad hoc” state-centric modes of international organization: “we must take thought and create institutions, create collective security which—permanently in operation—will effect peacefully those changes which, if they do not take place peacefully, will presently take place through a new series of explosions.”

Others directly defined peaceful change as a “legal machinery” or “legal system” enforced within the established legal frameworks of the League (Supan, 1937:1; Von Verdross, 1937:1; Strupp, 1937). Here the domestic analogy was invoked as exemplar: Like “police and court systems and legislative assemblies have lessened the power of the strong arm in private disputes”, similar legal procedures should be developed by the international community “if peaceful change is to be substituted for violence.” (Staley, 1937:8–9). While legal provisions for peaceful change existed in Article 19 of the Covenant, there were extensive discussions of whether it made adequate provision for peaceful territorial change or needed reform, whether international law was a hindrance or aid to peaceful change, and particularly whether it extended beyond the ability to devise rules for revising the status quo to ‘rules for revising rules’ (constitutional peaceful change) (Gathorne-Hardy, 1935; Wright, 1936; Yntema, 1936). As a modest proposal for League reform, Quincy Wright suggested the establishment of less-than-unanimity decisions in the League Assembly, an advisory commission, and a court of justice limiting its powers as a way of institutionalizing peaceful change (IIC, 1938:533). Lauterpacht (1937b:141–142, 1937a:11) went further. To him the only solution would be an “international legislature”, a “super-state” with the “constitutional means of effecting peaceful change without the consent of the State”. The argument was, Lauterpacht (1937a:45–48) acknowledged, “profoundly radical” and “seemingly revolutionary” but he firmly believed that “the science of international law and relations, instead of joining the superficially realistic condemnation of ‘schemes of dreamers’, may legitimately contribute its share towards working out a proper system of [international legislation]”. He even doubted whether the “apparently realistic and logical approach can justly claim to be scientific.”

A less radical argument was that only a *collective security mechanism* that both facilitates change and restrains power can provide a lasting solution to the problem (Toynbee, 1937:36). It critiqued that peaceful change enforced by individual states as diplomatic manoeuvres for satisfying dissatisfied states within a security system dominated by self-help and power politics would be potentially violent, unjust, and “made only to advantage of strong States” (IIC, 1938:268). Without a collective, international restraint on power, “peace can be preserved only by ‘giving the lion’s share to the lion.’” (Staley, 1937:8–9). Only a collective security system can facilitate systematic and just procedures of peaceful change: “you cannot have peaceful change without collective security, and equally you cannot have collective security without some organised system of peaceful change.” (Lord Lytton in IIC, 1938:261). Collective security is a precondition for “imperative measures” for peaceful change, Quincy Wright contended, because as long as their security depends on their relative military power, states will consider any change in terms of how it affects their relative power and will not yield rights in the name of justice (IIC, 1938:532). Several scholars at the conference also argued that an association of force adequate to maintain peace (collective security) and devoted to the pursuit of justice is a necessary condition for peaceful change (IIC, 1938:266–267; also Moon 1936:31–32).

Communitarian Mechanisms

A less legal-institutional mechanism emphasized persuasion, reason, and community-building. The argument was that the causes for conflict were, at least partly, psychological, symbolic, and based on misinformation. Their solution, therefore, was more reason, information, and “psychological détente” of the dissatisfied (Mitrany in Bourquin, 1936:263). The problem of peaceful change demands a removal of the “assumption of violence” (Staley, 1937:36). It requires a psychological change, unthinking violent change, rather than a redistribution of territory or a legal machinery. Peaceful change will come from “good feeling”, not litigation (Zimmern in Bourquin, 1936:277).

Some envisioned a prominent role for scholars in this mechanism. Since ‘pragmatic’ politicians have failed to solve the conflict, scholars may “endeavour to contribute something to the solution” (Webster, 1937:5, 9). Scholarly reason and information might soften the demands of “Have-nots” and also help “Haves” realize their privileged position. Memoranda from the Institute of Pacific Relations discussed whether research can help, not only design better legal institutions for peaceful change, but also *educate public opinion*: “that informed discussion will facilitate the peaceful adjustment of apparently conflicting interests” and that “If we have any function at all it is to see that when national attitudes crystallise into national policy it is on the basis of knowledge rather than of ignorance.” The popularization of expert knowledge might introduce the mass to the outlook of well-informed circles, “remote as this possibility may appear to the hard-boiled realist” (quoted in Angus, 1937b:179–184, 193). Others went further, arguing that “to change international psychology” scholars must “be apostles for peaceful change” who can convince public opinion and governments that procedures of peaceful change are possible (Von Verdross in IIIC, 1938:264).

Here the possibility of substituting peaceful change for conflict “depends on how rapidly a sense of world-wide social cohesion, world citizenship, and world loyalty can be developed, and that present trends are not too encouraging.” (Staley, 1937:210). But even advocates of negative peaceful change, like Dunn (1937:129), deemed it possible “eventually” to appeal to other motives than the desire to avoid war and “to build up a general community interest” and “a realisation that community welfare depends on the satisfaction of the needs of individual members.” The communitarian argument resonated with David Mitrany, then professor at the Institute of Advanced Studies, later famous for his functionalist theory. Mitrany consistently argued that peaceful change focused excessively on things that divide—redistributing territory and frontiers—rather than things that unite and bind. The proper mechanism of peaceful change in Mitrany’s view was not, as peaceful change realists advocated, to peacefully redraw borders so as to satisfy grievances. Peaceful territorial change often makes little difference, and not always for the better, because they solve one problem and create others, and are essentially a concession to nationalism, not internationalism. Also opposed to formal-legal mechanisms, however, peaceful change in Mitrany’s proto-functionalist argument implied that orders must be more pragmatic, elastic, and organic rather than formal, fixed, and final. Functional, progressive, and constructive peaceful changes are those that remove the need for changes of frontiers, indeed cause frontiers to be forgotten, and instead satisfy needs by promoting functional cooperation, human intercourse and integration, and “an understanding state of mind” (Mitrany, 1935:832–834, 1936:213, 1943:26; Mitrany in Bourquin, 1936:265).

Policies of Peaceful Change

As the crisis deepened throughout the 1930s, “peaceful change” was not abandoned but the discourse gradually shifted. Already at the 1937 conference, the tide was turning from positive to negative peaceful change, from legal to political mechanisms, from theoretical and abstract considerations to the pressing political challenges and actual changes demanded. By late 1938, “as peaceful change came to be understood as requiring territorial transfers to Germany” in order to maintain peace—i.e. negative peaceful change—it became increasingly “difficult to distinguish from appeasement as

practiced by Chamberlain” (Ceadel, 2000:359). Despite the growing conflation, the two concepts and corollary policies were originally distinct. Peaceful change can *theoretically* be a more positive concept aiming for more than peace at any cost and can work through other mechanisms than appeasement. Many scholars of peaceful change actually opposed appeasement as an ineffective, illegal, and unjust policy (Dunn, 1937:4–8; Manning, 1937:184; Robbins, 1937:58–59; Staley, 1937:36, 61; Webster, 1937:8–10), but views also diverged on whether appeasement qualifies as peaceful change.

Appeasement as Peaceful Change

The very problem of peaceful change acknowledged that not only aggressive “have-nots” threatening the peace, but also powerful “haves” protecting a status quo that contains some injustices and unwilling to yield their rights as “stubborn and uncompromising opponent of any and every change” were part of the problem (Fischer-Williams, 1928:412, 1931:326; Forster in Geneva Institute of International Relations, 1930:243; Armstrong, 1935:6; Moon, 1936:27).⁴ The victorious European status quo powers were criticized for coupling the League and the collective security system to the vindictive Versailles peace treaty, effectively using it as an instrument to punish the vanquished and maintain a beneficial status quo, eventually contributing to its failure (Dulles, 1936:14; 1939a:120; 1939b:81–82). The flagrant treaty violations and challenges to the international order by Germany, Italy, and Japan were explained in part by the absence of a mechanism for peaceful change (Keeton, 1938:397). A “realistic” approach, Georg Schwarzenberger (1939:72-75) argued, would see that a great deal of criticism against treaties, and international law *per se*, was objectively justified. By perpetuating the status quo while providing no mechanism for peaceful change, the satisfied empires behaved in a hypocritically self-interested manner, using international law as an “ideological cloak” to disguise that the status quo was in their interest.

Another advocate for realist peaceful change, E.H. Carr, also saw German dissatisfaction as a product of an excessively punitive Versailles Treaty and blamed the interwar crisis mainly on the satisfied powers who had mistakenly equated peace with the maintenance of the status quo but neglected that this status quo was in their particular interest, not the general interest of the world as proclaimed. Carr argued that revolts against the peace settlements stemmed from the fact that victors had imposed their own political system on the vanquished, mistakenly tying values such as democracy to the status quo of the peace settlement, and therefore resisted change. This led him to argue that there “is no more urgent problem, if peace is to be preserved and democracy survive, than what is known as the problem of peaceful change.” (Carr, 1936:860). However, Carr’s (1939:270-272) approach to peaceful change saw the central problem in the “recurrent conflict between “haves” and “have-nots” as one of accommodating “Have-nots”. The problem of peaceful change could only be solved once dissatisfied powers realize the possibility of remedying grievances by peaceful negotiation (preceded by threats of force) and satisfied powers are presented with a *fait accompli* of imminent war and give concessions. Unlike many contemporary scholars of peaceful change, Carr (1939:282) treated “Herr Hitler” as a leader that could become satisfied with the status quo and therefore endorsed appeasement as the only realistic policy for maintaining peace, famously

⁴ Here and in many other instances, “Haves” and “Have-nots” seem to be used synonymously with “status quo” and “revisionist” powers. The two were not identical, however. Haves/Have-nots referred primarily to possessions, such as territory, raw materials, and colonies, and was the predominant vocabulary in these debates, even if especially touted by the self-proclaimed “Have-nots”. Revisionism was a more behavioral category, which also referred to calls for treaty revision, breach of treaties, and unlawful behavior. Calls for appeasement equivocate the two in arguing that only by redistribution from those who Have to those who Have-not can the latter be transformed from revisionists to defenders of the status quo.

characterizing the Munich Agreement as “the nearest approach in recent years to the settlement of a major international issue by a procedure of peaceful change.” Prudent as the realist he was, Carr toned down the favorable attitude towards appeasement as a method of peaceful change in the postwar edition, and replaced “Herr Hitler” with “Hitler” (Fox, 1985).

Critiques of Appeasement as Peaceful Change

Many other contributions to the peaceful change discourse opposed the appeasement policy. Even scholars advocating negative peaceful change were skeptical that war could be averted if the “Haves” appeased the territorial demands of “Have-nots” (Dunn, 1937:5). One argument questioned the *effectiveness* of appeasement, particularly territorial and colonial redistribution, if demands are driven by other considerations than an actual economic need for territory, population relief, and raw materials (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1936:5–14; Dunn, 1937:8–31; Moresco, 1937:10; Staley, 1937:9). Rather than blaming the conservatism of status quo powers, numerous studies dismantled the economic claims of “Have-nots”, arguing that Germany would access few resources in former colonies or that the economic benefits of colonial possessions were exaggerated (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1936:7–8; Gregory, 1937:77; Staley, 1937:7; Condliffe, 1938:22). Dunn’s study, and several others, argued the primary motivation for “Have-nots” was not actual needs for territory, but prestige and recognition. He emphasised the symbolic “signs of defeat and dishonor” and “position of inferiority” imposed on Germany at Versailles when it was deemed unworthy of having a colonial empire. The removal of these symbols of defeat combined with a preservation of the balance of power—not territorial appeasement—would be an important step towards peace (Dunn, 1937:20–21, 139; on prestige as source of revisionism, Carr-Saunders, 1937:323; Staley, 1937:187; Mair, 1937:82–84; Mannheim, 1937; Schrieke, 1937:4, 15–16; Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1936:5–7, 1937:66; Moresco, 1937:2). Even scholars acknowledging the injustices of the status quo questioned whether the roots of the problem of peaceful change would disappear by “moving a few misplaced boundaries” only to reveal more “sore spots” (Moon, 1936:27–29).

A related argument stressed that *power politics* disqualifies the appeasement policy as a solution to peaceful change. In the world of “power politics”, there are few historical examples of strong states voluntarily handing concessions to the weak on the ground of “ideal justice” or to prevent them from taking it with force (Armstrong, 1935:4). The “Haves” would therefore resist “tenaciously” any proposed change of the status quo that alters “the existing power ratio” regardless of the grounds on which it is based (Dunn, 1937:12). It was also questioned whether “Have-nots” were satiable. Since states rely on “self-help”, they cannot feel secure until in a superior position (Dunn, 1937:13) and there is no assurance that “even wise and timely” concessions “will satisfy and halt a state seeking expansion.” (Armstrong, 1935:4). Uncertainty over whether Japan would be satisfied with Manchuria, Italy with Abyssinia, Germany with Austria and Danzig made it “hard to imagine the “haves” adopting a policy of voluntary territorial concessions and change in favor of the “have nots.”” (Armstrong, 1935:5). Expansionism to the point when it is difficult to further improve one’s position is inherent in human nature, argued the Austrian delegate Blühdorn, and consequently conflicts between expansionist and conservationist powers are inevitable (Bourquin, 1938:31). To yield territory to states seeking superiority would more likely start an endless spiral. Therefore, as Dunn (1937:129) concluded two years before Carr condoned the appeasement policy as an example of peaceful change, “the proposal to placate the dissatisfied Powers or bribe them into keeping the peace by yielding to their demands, one by one, appears to be fully discredited.”

A third argument against appeasement as “peaceful change” stressed *timing*. Appeasement is not only too little, but too late. Appeasement can even worsen the situation under the wrong

circumstances, namely threats of war, treaty violations, and exaggerated demands for change (Forster, 1933:344–350, 361–362). Once in a “war economy” where countries prepare for war, all assets are counted as constituent elements of national power and measured in relative terms. The problem of raw materials and territory then becomes an armaments problem and states become willing to fight for them (Staley, 1937:234; also Dennery, 1938:90). To appease countries already threatening war through peaceful redistributive changes that ensure a more “equitable” distribution of raw materials—essentially “fighting power”—will be outright dangerous and “produce the wars that they are designed to prepare for.” (Staley, 1937:29–30). Concessions under duress will be interpreted as weakness and lead to further demands. Reshuffling the territorial and colonial status quo in favour of states threatening violence might therefore “simply whet their appetite for more, and perhaps encourage other states to try the same tactics.” (Staley, 1937:187–188; Toynbee, 1936:31; Webster, 1937:10). The mistake was not to give concessions, Toynbee noted after Munich (1939:317–319, if they had been given to legitimate demands of Weimar Germany, but to so at the eleventh hour when “our acquiescence wears the appearance of a capitulation, under an immediate threat of war, to a Nazi dictatorship.” Peaceful change through concessions to Have-nots could have worked under the collective security system and a strong League, but became a “free pass to aggressors” once appeasing powers had “shown they could be bullied” (Jackson and Lee, 1941:90; Dulles, 1939:123–124; Whitton, 1936:111).

Fourth, scholars advocating *just* peaceful change, criticized the *injustices* of appeasement. Appeasement based on unjust redistributions would not bring lasting peace. “To many”, Webster (1937:8–10) contended, concessions that sacrifice weaker states to maintain peace among great powers “seem dishonourable even if they help to preserve peace”. Peace therefore cannot be an end in itself, justice and injustice in the present distribution of territory must be considered. Although such considerations were limited to injustices done to weaker *European* states, others stressed injustices done to colonial subjects. Even “the most backward tribe” cannot be exchanged like “cattle”, argued Emanuel Moresco (1937:11) the ISC rapporteur on colonial questions, especially not to a dictatorial Germany with its National-Socialist race doctrine. Another proponent of just peaceful changes similarly criticized the policy of redistributing colonies, mandates, or raw materials for “the white people to settle their quarrels” while ignoring that “the fate of the colonies is not only of interest to the white peoples” (Lorwin, 1936:465).

Finally, proponents of legal peaceful change criticized appeasement for undermining international law. Since there were already some legal mechanisms for peaceful change of both rights and law itself within the given order, Quincy Wright (1936:57) questioned whether the (Have-nots’) call for peaceful change arose from discontent with specific international laws and inadequate mechanisms for changing them or a discontent with international law *per se*: whether dissatisfied states “prefer anarchy and the opportunity to fish in troubled waters to law in international affairs.” Contrary to Carr, Wright (1939:29–32) held that the “Munich settlement was not a case of peaceful change” but an intervention that violated international law; the “dictates of Munich” fulfilled legal obligations and justice as much as the “dictates of Versailles” they sought to rectify. Toynbee (1939:318) did view Munich as an “unprecedented” instance of peaceful change, but one achieved at the “extreme threat of war” and the price of the League: “it would hard to say that it is not good. And yet the League seems to be dying of it. She is like a mother dying in childbirth because the birth is so long overdue.” Several other scholars were also critical that Anschluss and Munich had been cases of “Peaceful change” because they were presented as *fait accomplis* backed by the threat of force, did not look so peaceful to Czechs and Austrians, and had done little to satisfy Hitler’s ambitions (Eichelberger, 1938:121; Rogers, 1939:13, 15). In sum, while the concept of peaceful change clearly intersects with appeasement, the many critiques serve to demonstrate that peaceful change need not be synonymous with appeasement—although it was to Carr.

Decontextualizing “Peaceful Change”

The original peaceful change discourse was richer and also more embedded in its 1930s context than realist expressions suggest. Rather than positing peaceful change as a perennial problem, I have offered a conceptual archaeology that retraced the concept(s) to its original context. As peaceful change reappears on the IR agenda, it is important to pay attention to the normative, political, and disciplinary context the concept originated from, its conceptual multiplicities, and potential conflation with appeasement. But we cannot stop here. The contextualist project of restoring and reinterpreting concepts in historical context too often presupposes that this context is singular (there is only one, not many), discrete (it does not overlap with other contexts), bounded (it is delimited in time and space) and holistic (context englobes the idea) (Armitage, 2012:32; Gordon, 2014; Hall, 2017).

The interwar period looks deceptively discrete and discontinuous because it is so conveniently delineated by the world wars. But the assumption of a radical discontinuity of time is problematic. It implies that interwar thought was so different from the present that we can neither understand interwar concepts using present-day concepts nor use interwar concepts outside their own narrow political and intellectual context (Hall, 2017:246). Where perennialism conjures up the image of a concept traveling through history like a high-speed train, with little attachment to the scenery and little change in meaning, the contextualist emphasis on discrete contexts risks immobilizing the concept by getting off at only one station (Gordon, 2014:36). If contextualism implies that “peaceful change” exhausted its relevance within ‘its original context’, we are denied the possibility that it has “aspirational significance” and “unredeemed potentialities” for the present (Gordon, 2014:45-46; Hall, 2017:254). Unmodified contextualism risks turning into “sterile antiquarianism” where past international thought becomes interesting only for historians of international thought (Bevir, 2011:18). This would drive a wedge between IR historians, as self-appointed custodians of the proper use of past international thought, and IR theorists, to whom antiquated international thought would be useless for present theorizations of peaceful change.

It is therefore paramount to critically assess the extent to which “peaceful change” can be—and has already been—decontextualized from its context of emergence to provide contributions to contemporary IR theorizing. There is room for analyzing the entire diachronic life of peaceful change—along the lines of Koselleck’s (1990) *Begriffsgeschichte* or Armitage’s (2012) “serial contextualizations”—but this is beyond the scope here. However, it is worth briefly discussing the post-war travelogue of the concept(s) peaceful change. Here I will primarily discuss the causes of its marginalization, particularly the significance of critiques that “peaceful change” is idealistic, legalistic, irrelevant in a nuclear age, synonymous with appeasement, and Eurocentric for its theoretical relevance today. I furthermore discuss some of its lingering influences, including in later realist, liberal, legal, functionalist and constructivist work.

A common critique is that historical events, namely the violent changes of WWII, revealed the idealism of peaceful change and explain its post-war irrelevance. This argument was made by post-war scholars who read the attempt to refine and perfect methods of peaceful change as part of the idealist interwar spirit, the League, and its focus on “good” things (Fox, 1949:67–75; Bull, 1972:35; Smith, 1987:191). This argument assumes discreteness and “holistic fit” between concepts and their “original” context, outside which they are by definition anachronistic (Gordon, 2014:39). Peaceful change then becomes not a concept, but an *interwar concept* embodying the pacifist, progressive *Zeitgeist*. This critique is unconvincing, first, because the realist myth that interwar IR was dominated by flawed ‘utopian’, ‘idealistic’ and ‘legalistic’ thinking about peace and progress has been debunked by decades of historiography (Long and Schmidt, 2005; Ashworth, 2013). Second, because casting peaceful change as the child of a homogenous, idealist interwar *Zeitgeist* is clearly an over-

simplification considering that peaceful change was subject to *controversy*, addressed pressing political issues not only “good things” and ideal blueprints for a better world, and contained realist notions of self-help, power politics, and the conflict between “Haves” and “Have-nots”. Third, because the assumption of discreteness ignores that many post-war scholars, including realists, continued to view peaceful change as a central problem (Morgenthau, 1948a:494–495; Thompson, 1953:768).

A realist rejoinder might be that the failure of the League and the outbreak of war discarded only the most flawed legalistic-idealistic interwar approaches to peaceful change, which explains why only the realist approaches of Carr and Gilpin endure. This argument is whiggish and triumphalist. Firstly, it is not at all clear that positive and legal approaches to peaceful change were more flawed than Carr’s. So if political events determined the course of the discipline and theories were emphatically falsified by complex multi-causal events, WWII should have also relegated interwar realists who advocated for peaceful change as appeasement to the dustbin of history. Secondly, the argument for “peaceful change” through international law survived the League and played an important role in discussions on the post-WWII organization of peace and the UN. The League experience provided the general peaceful change lesson that a peace organization must be strong enough to preserve peace, but cannot perpetuate the status quo and must provide instruments for ordered change guided by principles of justice rather than merely peace preservation (Dunn, 1944; Wilcox, 1948; Price, 1954; Claude, 1956; Bloomfield, 1957; Wright, 1958). Yet, some former advocates of peaceful change argued that prospect for peaceful changes through law faded as the political foundations of the UN crystallized into the East-West divide. What was needed then was stability, order, and conservation (Brierly, 1946:358; Lauterpacht, 1955:13; Jenks, 1960:34–35). The concept “peaceful change” nonetheless survived in post-war international law where it retains separate dictionary entries (Owada, 2007). But the post-war split between International Law and International Relations increasingly marginalized the legal discourse in the latter. Adding to the marginalization of peaceful change in IR is that the ISC, under which the multidisciplinary peaceful change debate took place, eventually faltered due its affiliation with the League, its multidisciplinary nature, and “less realistic and more academic” approach (Rietzler, 2008:27; Long, 2006:619).

Another objection concerns the continuing theoretical relevance of peaceful change in a changed geopolitical and technological context. Hedley Bull (1969:633–634) contended that peaceful change had “lost its urgency” in a bipolar world where the two top powers were also winners of the last great war, mainly concerned with conserving the status quo and their position, and possessed nuclear weapons which made great power war unthinkable. While peaceful coexistence, stability and status quo maintenance was a prime Cold War concern, the question of peaceful change occasionally resurfaced, with decolonization, détente, Ostpolitik, France’s withdrawal from NATO, and the ‘second Cold War’ to mention a few examples (Abi-Saab, 1962; Stein and Cabreau, 1968; Gilpin, 1981; Antola, 1984; Niedhart, 2016). The context of nuclear deterrence clearly puts the problem in a different light, but does not make it redundant. The change is arguably more relative than absolute. Remember that the interwar problem of peaceful change was already premised on an argument that the newly discovered destructiveness of war necessitates alternative mechanisms for change. Nuclear weapons change the horizon of expectation: Future changes of international order *must* be peaceful because the alternative to peaceful change is not violent change, but cataclysmic change. Innovations in technologies of destruction thus make peaceful change *more* urgent (Bloomfield, 1957:1; Keohane, 1986:197–198). Many post-war realists also maintained that peaceful change was an, if not the most, important problem for the preservation of peace, and that nuclear weapons and the Cold War rivalry had made peaceful change both more difficult *and* more urgent because they increased the costs of pursuing political change in the status quo through force (Dunn, 1959:278–285; Herz, 1959:181; Gilpin, 1981:217). But post-war realists were more pessimistic about the prospects for peaceful

change, that established powers would (or should) give concessions, and certainly that the problem could be solved through legal provisions. Peaceful change might be successful through “old-fashioned” and “time-honored” Concert diplomacy where *force*, not law, stabilizes and changes the status quo, and international negotiations are guided by a pragmatic willingness to pressure, accommodate, and comprise (Spykman, 1942:463; Morgenthau, 1948a:494–496, 1948b:416–419; Kennan, 1951:91; Thompson, 1953:755–758, 768; Herz, 1959:90).

The most potent challenge to the post-war relevance of peaceful change is its conflation with appeasement. This is not entirely unfounded. By revisiting how “peaceful change” was invoked in the 1930s, we saw some uncanny resemblances to appeasement. Particularly in arguments for “realist peaceful change” understood as how to avoid war by territorial appeasement of “Have-nots” threatening war. Yet, peaceful change *per se* became associated with appeasement. Cold War IR increasingly read the concepts as synonymous because peaceful change was read through Carr’s *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* as a cynical and amoral policy of “prudent yielding” that could come about only in response to a threat rather than through arbitration, judicial settlement, and an element of morality (Bull, 1969:626–7; Fox, 1985:5–7). In Martin Wight’s critique, the specific interwar argument about peaceful change suffered from two vices: that it was begun too late, after change was conceded, and that it was conducted “not by the strong to the weak on grounds of justice, but by the comfortable to the violent because of alarm.” Peaceful change to the Nazis therefore “acquired the appearance of sacrificing small powers to the aggressor.” (Wight, 1995:212). Peaceful change in the appeasement mode depended on the premise that the dissatisfied are satisfiable—one that was challenged post-Hitler and in the context of the Cold war (Bloomfield, 1957:18). The experiences of appeasement ‘filtered through’ the concept, discrediting peaceful change after WWII. It is important to remember, however, that many interwar scholars objected against the equivocation of peaceful change with appeasement. There were alternative—conceptually and politically non-appeasing—modes of peaceful change that do not focus only on satisfying rising great powers through territorial and other kinds of redistribution. Their counterargument would be that the League failed not because of peaceful change, but a wrong *kind* of peaceful change; Because it did *not* provide for just and consensual peaceful changes in time (Wright, 1942:345; Mitrany, 1943:5–6; Bloomfield, 1957:14). From this perspective, the failure of a particular *kind* of peaceful change using particular *mechanisms* in a particular *historical case* does not imply that the concept of peaceful change *per se* is flawed and forever irredeemable.

A related critique is that the “traditional” interwar focus on peaceful *territorial* change is outdated in contemporary IR. This argument exaggerates historical discontinuity. Firstly, the concern with peaceful territorial change is not exclusive to interwar debates but continued after the war (Bloomfield, 1957; Kacowicz, 1994) although the post-war strengthening of the territorial integrity norm, the proscription of conquest and annexation, has meant that boundaries are less frequently altered by force (Zacher, 2001). Second, the problem of territorial grievances and peaceful territorial redistribution to rising “dissatisfied” powers is not completely redundant—as evidenced in the East and South China Sea, along Russia’s Western borders, and in Kashmir—although it constitutes only part of the contemporary problem of peaceful change of the ‘liberal international order’. Third, by recovering the wider interwar discourse, for example Mitrany’s approach, we found that not all interwar scholarship conceived peaceful change in territorial-redistributive terms. Peaceful change in the communitarian-functionalist vein is not about appeasing, say, China’s territorial ambitions, but how to unthink the need for boundary revisions entirely. Mitrany’s functionalist approach to peaceful change left traces on subsequent developments in neo-functionalism, regional integration, and security communities. Karl Deutsch and Ernst Haas defined security communities and political communities as integrated groups of people that have developed a sense of community (we-feeling), institutions and practices strong enough to assure “dependable expectations of peaceful change”

(Deutsch, 1957:5; Haas, 1961:366). Functionalist peaceful change is neither a legal mechanism nor a system where great powers make one-off bargains to avoid war, but a “continuous learning process” which gradually evolves into institutionalized interaction, shared understandings, “mutually compatible self-images” and eventually stable expectations of peaceful change (Deutsch, 1957:130; Haas, 1958:443). This connects to the more recent constructivist literature on peaceful change and security communities where war is unthinkable and peaceful change expected due to a sense of “witness” (Adler and Barnett, 1998; Patomäki and Wæver, 1995; Kupchan et al., 2001; Möller, 2007). However, where Mitrany’s focus was on global peaceful change, how to create an elastic *global* order adaptive to changing needs and conditions, subsequent (neo)functionalist and constructivist work focused more on the formation of regional, especially European and Transatlantic, security communities.

Apart from the constructivist lineage, which extends beyond the security communities literature (Dessler, 1989; Kratochwil, 1998), peaceful change also influenced institutional strands of liberal thought. Liberalism recasts peaceful change from a realist question of accommodating power shifts peacefully into a more aspirational one of bargaining a new global consensus by renegotiating, revising, and improving the global order and institutions from within. As Robert Keohane argued in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, “the problem of peaceful change is fundamental to world politics” but realism “fails to answer” it and “what we need to do now is to understand peaceful change by combining multidimensional scholarly analysis with more visionary ways of seeing the future.” (Keohane, 1986:199–200). Recent strands of liberal thought, notably Ikenberry’s, have proposed a kind of peaceful change by giving rising powers a larger stake in the liberal international order through global governance reforms (Ikenberry, 2008). The obvious limit to liberal-reformist peaceful change is that such grand bargains aim to change only to preserve; to reorganize the chairs around the table so as to give ‘new’ powers a seat, but not fundamentally change the international architecture. But peaceful change can be more than simply “accommodating rising powers” (Paul, 2016). Even a new grand bargain, a ‘twenty-first century peace treaty’, will not solve the fundamental problem concerning the elasticity and adaptability of international orders. The concept of peaceful change is useful exactly because it frames the problem more broadly than the conventional policy discourse on immediate Chinese, Russian, Indian, Brazilian, and now American, challenges to the liberal international order. In positive peaceful change terms, the main challenge to international order is neither Donald Trump nor Xi Jinping, but the order’s lacking ability to adapt itself, peacefully, to changing circumstances. In its most fundamental manifestation, peaceful change raises questions of peaceful *constitutional* change rather than only limited redistributive changes (Onuf, 1994). That is, what does a flexible and continually just global constitution look like in a 21st century international politics that is more culturally diverse than its predecessors (Reus-Smit, 2018)?

This brings us to a final limitation of the 1930s discourse on peaceful change: Peaceful and just changes were peaceful and just only from a certain perspective. Like most interwar IR and international law, peaceful change was framed in Eurocentric and often outright imperialist terms (Long and Schmidt, 2005; Vitalis, 2016; Koskiennemi, 2002). The fear of *European fratricide*, indeed erasure of *European* civilization, provided the impetus for peaceful change. The excessive focus on the Danubian question in ISC discussions was based on the Eurocentric assumption that the only demands for change that could trigger world war, and thus warrant any attention, were those of European powers (IIIC, 1938:214-256). The extra-European entered as a potential solution to a European problem. The Peaceful Change conference was subtitled “procedures, population, raw materials, colonies” and substantial parts discussed whether a peaceful redistribution of Europe’s colonial possessions could satisfy “have-nots” and their need for raw materials and population outlets (*Lebensraum*) (IIIC, 1938:169-213, 415-481; Moresco, 1939). Colonial subjects were not represented at the conference, but for the most part treated as objects to exchange for a new equilibrium of peace

in Europe. Although some protested against treating colonies as chess pieces to sacrifice and colonial subjects as “cattle” to exchange, these objections came from white Euro-American scholars who argued that the interests of people not represented should at least be considered. Arguments against appeasement through transfer of colonies to “Have-nots” were not necessarily anti-imperialist but often read as pro-imperialist arguments when they downplayed the actual value of colonies and emphasized the more humane British mode of colonialism compared to Germany. The problem of peaceful change in the contemporary context is less openly Eurocentric, but nevertheless risks reproducing a concept of peaceful change that aims to ensure peace and justice only among the great powers if it only draws on realist approaches.

Conclusion

Peaceful change, a key concept in interwar international thought, has long been neglected in the collective memory of IR. Although the “perennial problem” of peaceful change is currently resurfacing on the IR agenda, this is primarily its realist guise. Its wider conceptual history and foundational role in disciplinary history remains ignored. This paper aimed to recover peaceful change to its status as an IR problem *par excellence*. By revisiting the interwar discourse on peaceful change, it demonstrated that the concept of peaceful change comes with richer and more particular conceptual baggage than recent ‘rediscoveries’ suggest.

Peaceful change was a complex conceptual figure that only in its realist renditions is synonymous with non-violent change enforced through great power bargaining, sometimes appeasement. The broader premise was that any given legal, institutional, and territorial international order, usually the result of peace settlements, stands upon the economic, social and political fundamentals of the moment of creation. As these fundamentals change, and they always will, they become incongruent with the relatively more static order, causing pressures for order revision to mount. Such pressures become violent when repressed. In the interwar debate on peaceful change, there was a widespread sense that international law and organization—the international order embodied in the Versailles settlement—had not kept pace with the immense political, economic, technological, and demographic changes. The order had become so petrified that it might facilitate rather than prevent war. This led to calls for “peaceful change”. But what that meant, and how to implement it, was subject to debate.

The debate revolved around varying conceptualizations, mechanisms and policies of peaceful change. “Peaceful change” could mean anything from a method to prevent war by politically renegotiating the status quo through one-off concessions to dissatisfied states to a way of increasing the political elasticity of the order through legal, consensual, and just changes made through a permanent institutional ‘safety valve’ or through persuasion, reason, information, and community-building. By situating the realist concept of peaceful change, notably Carr’s, within the contemporary debate, we realize that this view on the conceptualization, mechanisms and policies of peaceful change, unlike many contemporaries, is largely synonymous with appeasement. The lessons for present theorizing is that concerns of morality and justice, not only for dissatisfied states, can play a role in peaceful change; that peaceful change can, in theory at least, take place through other mechanisms than statecraft, negotiations, and bargaining among great powers; and that peaceful change *need* not be synonymous with appeasement.

There is room for further research on peaceful change at a time when IR is again discussing power transitions, hegemonic wars, and the decline of an international order founded on a certain economic, political, and military base. The uncertainty spurred by seeming US retreat, EU disintegration, and the rise of new global power centres has already led to renewed interest in the uncertain interwar period. Rather than simply drawing analogies to the tumultuous 1930s, however,

there is much to learn by critically re-examining the *international thought* of the period. But the critical re-appropriation of its debates on “peaceful change” for present debates on power and order transitions requires a more reflexive and historically informed presentism. The political and intellectual context has changed immensely over the past century and ‘the problem’ taken different forms. There are obvious contextual differences from the multipolar system prevailing in the interwar period to today’s global and regional power structures, the military technology at their disposal, the nature of hegemony and revisionism. An unhistorical and selective transplantation of concepts risks being presentist and intellectually flawed, but also politically and morally hazardous as the conceptual relationship between negative peaceful change and appeasement illustrates. Present attempts to resuscitate the concept of peaceful change require a deeper understanding of its conceptual history, institutional embeddedness, the different ways scholars deployed it in debate, and how it interacted with other ideas and the world of international policy. We need to understand what peaceful change means today compared to earlier, to interrogate whether we have come to take an abridged view of it, whether it has alternative and contentious historical meanings. Only then can we see whether past concepts have unredeemed potentialities and aspirational significance.

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