Peace, War and Conflict: Social Representations Shared by Peace Activists and Non-Activists*

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The article suggests the use of social representations theory to provide a positive approach to peace research and a theoretical framework for understanding peace movements. Studying peace, war and conflict in this perspective enables exploration of these concepts as objects socially constructed, elaborated and shared by different groups. Four groups of activists are compared with people not belonging to any association, in order to investigate the existence of particular social representations of peace, war and conflict. As in previous cross-cultural research, an independent social representation of peace emerges only among activists. The social representation of war is also different in the two groups: non-activists see it as frightening, whereas activists see ways of tackling it. The greatest difference between the two groups is in the social representation of conflict. Conflict is assimilated to war for non-activists, whereas activists represent it as more manageable and normal. The results support the idea of understanding peace activism as a particular form of coping - community coping - based on the group as a whole, rather than on individual capacity to manage problems. At a theoretical level, the article discusses the importance of linking social representations to practice and group identification. At a practical level, it suggests that support for pacifism will be only transient and superficial until these underlying differences in representations can be changed.

Introduction

There is a Latin maxim that states, 'Si vis pacem para bellum' ('if you want peace prepare the war'; paraphrased from Vegetius, Epitome Rei Militari, lib. III, praef.), whereas a more recent slogan ascribed to Gandhi says, 'There's no way to peace, peace is the way'. Throughout history, many other aphorisms have been used, most of which are coherent and seem to encapsulate what peace really is and how to get it. However, many of them, like the two presented above, are opposite in meaning. Following one or the other could lead to dramatically different outcomes, such as preventive wars or Gandhi's satyagraha. The same contradictions have emerged strongly in Western societies over the past few years, when the Latin words have been used as an irrefutable political paradigm, dividing public opinion into at least two major groups, perhaps referring to different meanings of peace: those supporting and those against military interventions to enforce or keep peace.

The study of peace activism from a social representations viewpoint entails investigating the shared meanings that can give rise to such strong divisions; it means retrieving the social and cultural dimensions of pacifist
action, going beyond the individual aspects that have so long predominated among research studies in this field.¹ This study is intended as a first exploratory step in this direction. It is a preliminary investigation designed to highlight possible different social representations of peace, war and conflict that can distinguish peace activist groups from people not involved in any social movements. Before presenting our empirical study, we briefly review the use and the potential of the social representations approach in peace psychology.

A Theoretical Frame of Reference: Social Representations

The idea of social representations has its roots in Durkheim’s distinction between individual and collective representations, in structuralist anthropology and in Piaget’s distinction between childish operative thinking and adult formal thinking. Like collective representations, social representations are shared within groups; just as in primitive cultures and in operative thinking, they are not based on logical rules. The underlying concept of the theory is that people refer to a reality that is socially constructed, based on common agreement on what is real and what is not. Social representations are thus defined, shared and used by groups and contribute to defining the environment in which the life of these groups and of their members takes place. Thus, they draw wider systems within which specific attitudes can develop (Doise, 1989). They may be defined as forms of common sense/knowledge, emotionally loaded, that allow members of a community to communicate and understand each other (Moscovici, 1961/1976, 1998a,b).

To highlight their social nature, the theory stresses the importance of the processes of communication within groups in the emergence of representations. When faced with an important but unfamiliar event, thoughts and discourse on the subject proliferate, and this set of interactions gives rise to a new social representation (Wagner, Valencia & Elejabarrieta, 1996). A social representation is, therefore, an explanation constructed by a group to cope with something new. This first function, termed ‘symbolic coping’, is carried out through processes of anchoring and objectification. Anchoring consists of a series of responses that attempt to relate the content and structures of the individual’s previous knowledge to the new event in order to make sense of it (Doise, 1992). Later, with objectification, ‘an icon, metaphor or trope [is constructed] which comes to stand for the new phenomenon’ (Wagner et al., 1999: 99). Thanks to this process, even abstract or hazy concepts may be used by everyone and modified like real objects.

Social representations have a twofold nature: they are stable concepts, since we do not redefine everything everyday, but they continue to evolve in relation to external, individual and group changes. To understand this twofold character, two zones – one central, the other peripheral – may be distinguished in the representation. According to Flament (1987) and Flament & Moliner (1989), peripheral elements allow us to relate rapidly to the world around us. They also absorb the changes that concern the representation, by adapting to the changing situations. The central nucleus of the representation is, on the contrary, more stable and consists of ‘one or more elements, whose absence would end up destroying or giving a radically different meaning to the

¹ After 11 September 2001 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, we seem to be light years away from January–April 2001, when this research was carried out. Nevertheless, our data could be read as a baseline before these new wars and the mass demonstrations for peace. Even if millions of people all over the world reacted against the war, their underlying social representations of war, peace and conflict did not necessarily change.
representation overall' (Abric, 1989: 197; see also Abric, 1993). According to this approach, two social representations are different only if the central nuclei are different. People who share the same representation may differ, therefore, only in the peripheral elements to which they refer.

It is also possible that, within the same cultural framework, different groups may take up distinct positions in the representational field, by referring to different social representations. These differences are assumed to be systematic and organized on the basis of psycho-social variables (Doise, Clémence & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1992; Doise, Spini & Clémence, 1999), among which identity plays a crucial role. The question is whether identity is a function of the representation itself (Duveen, 2001) or if the contrary is equally true (Brewer, 2001), since the two themes are inextricably linked. From this viewpoint, sharing a social representation is a consequence of belonging to a group, but it is also a way of defining oneself in opposition to outgroups with different representations. Social representations thus regulate intragroup and intergroup relations, create cohesion (Breakwell, 1993) and help form social identity (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983) as well as its evolution and preservation (Breakwell, 2001; see also Chryssochoou, 2000, 2003).

Social Representations: Possible Contribution to Peace Psychology

The contribution that the social representations approach can make to peace psychology is twofold. At a general level, it enables the focus of research to be shifted from the individual characteristics of the peace activist, which have been amply studied (e.g. Oskamp, Bordin & Edwards, 1991; Horvath, 1996; Blumberg, 1998), to the group processes of peace activism. At another level, this approach enables us to investigate the underlying meanings of pacifism; meanings that arise from the relations between groups and the historical, political and cultural contexts they face daily; meanings that, once constructed within the group, form the basis of the identity of activists and their activities (see Klandermans, 1997).

Downton & Wehr (1998), in their research into the origins and maintenance of commitment, stressed the need to study the role played by context. According to these authors, context has two functions: first, it renders certain themes salient, thus pushing individuals to join pacifist associations, and it then becomes fundamental in maintaining commitment. Commitment is, in fact, maintained by taking on the social identity of the peace activist and by sharing with other members of the group concerns about war and a long-term vision of possible change. The idea of peace activism as a reaction to worrying events or situations is by no means new and harks back to the interpretation of such movements as forms of coping. Peace psychology has studied in depth the theme of fear of a nuclear catastrophe in both the United States and Europe (Smith, 1988; Van Hoorn & French, 1988). If the findings of these studies are taken together with the description of the individual activist’s distinctive characteristics, there emerges an overall picture that ties in with ways of coping with stressful situations (McKenzie-Mohr, 1992; Boenke et al., 1993). More specifically, peace activists are more active politically than other members of the public (Fiske, Pratto & Pavelchak, 1983) and have a lower score on the authoritarianism scale (Larsen et al., 1988). Other correlates of peace activism reported by various studies include a greater sense of effectiveness regarding the possibility of reducing the nuclear threat and a shared belief in being able to prevent the outbreak of atomic war, but also a greater degree of
anxiety and concern about these matters (Schatz & Fiske, 1992).

The psychological links between concern, self-efficacy and behaviour are well explained by the models on stress and coping. Lazarus's model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and later versions (Rippetoe & Rogers, 1987) form the starting point for Fiske (1992), among others. Basically, it is assumed that, faced with an apparently threatening situation (primary appraisal), activists, who see their resources as effective in tackling it (secondary appraisal), activate adaptive forms of coping with types of behaviour designed to tackle the source of stress. Most people, on the other hand, show a lower level of self-efficacy and seek refuge in disadaptive forms of coping, such as denying the danger or fatalism. This interpretation has the advantage of combining large amounts of data gathered from a number of viewpoints in a single model; it manages to relate research on the individual characteristics of activists, in particular self-efficacy, with the findings of national and international studies. Second, it provides an explanation for the commitment of various associations by identifying links between individual constructions, attitudes and behaviour, enabling us to make predictions about future action and to put forward initiatives to encourage it, for example through forms of community empowerment (Horvath, 1996). However, this approach is based on two problematic assumptions. The first is that models developed from studies of the individual can be transferred to groups. Research on coping originated in a clinical context and was chiefly aimed at investigating individuals' reactions to changes and threats that involved them as individuals (Sommerfield & McCrae, 2000); simply transferring the model to a group situation blurs the elements that are featured in this level of analysis. This problem might be overcome by considering a particular type of coping: community coping. This is 'a process in which a stressful event is substantively appraised and acted upon in the context of close relationships' (Lyons et al., 1998: 582). According to these authors, the three constituent features of this process are: frequent interpersonal communication about the agent of stress, that is, the definition of the significance of the situation within the group; a community orientation, whereby the problem is perceived as common to several people and collective action is regarded as more effective than individual action; and finally, cooperative action to build common strategies of action to combat the circumstances in which they find themselves.

There remains, however, another question: that of defining the processes that lead groups of people to perceive a common threat in a given situation. Social representations theory provides an explanation for the construction of meaning that forms the basis of community coping. In addition, it supplies the theoretical tools for understanding the group sharing of concerns and hopes that seem to be typical of peace activists. This approach also allows us to broaden the concept of coping, from a response to a threat to a normal cognitive process needed for constructing reality, thus allowing us to study peace activism as a positive creation of meanings and not just as a reaction to war and nuclear threat.

Peace, War and Pacifism: Contributions to Social Representations Theory

To date, there have been few studies on the social representations of war and peace. Orr, Sagi & Bar-On (2000) investigated the way the social representations of war and peace among Israeli and Palestinian adolescents differed from those of Europeans of a similar age. They found a representational field among Middle Eastern adolescents in which war was seen to be justified and importance...
was attached to the costs of peace instead of its benefits; peace was thus excluded from the field of important values. Orr, Sagi & Bar-On (2000) explain their findings as a form of collective coping: adaptation to a situation of conflict, regarded as basically unsolvable, through justifying current reality as the only one possible. Wagner, Valencia & Elejabarrieta (1996), using free associations, examined the social representations of war and peace among inhabitants of Nicaragua and Spain. The authors focused their attention on verifying the influence of context on the structures of social representations. The most important of their findings was the lack of a stable social representation of peace in the Spanish sample. The explanation offered is based on the small amount of salience this concept has in a European country like Spain, compared to a South American one such as Nicaragua; this does not encourage discussions on the theme, thus the formation of social representations is impaired. Both studies make an intercultural comparison and seek reasons for the emergence of social representations at this level. Both suggest that people involved in war develop specific social representations of the threat that afflicts them, as well as its opposite, peace. In this way, however, the process of symbolic coping tends to overlap with coping as a response to a real threat.

Comparing the social representations of war and peace of peace activists and non-activists would overcome this blur. This comparison would also allow us to stress the importance of real groups, within broader society, as places where specific social representations may be worked out. Finally, the study of those actively involved in peace groups offers us a preliminary overview of the complex but fundamental relation between social practices, representations and identities. The very existence of these associations is, in fact, intimately linked to the social representations of war and peace through a relation that Moliner (1996) defines as ‘structural’. Actively participating in the set of behavioural and discourse practices that take place in the group is at the same time both a fundamental feature of the social identity of the activist and a primary driving force in the formation of the social representations that define it. With these theoretical considerations as a basis, an exploratory study was carried out to gather a broad range of both qualitative and quantitative data, by means of which various aspects of peace activism were explored.

Aims

The first aim of this research is to investigate the existence of specific social representations of war and peace shared by members of peace movements and people not belonging to any association. Following the findings of Wagner, Valencia & Elejabarrieta (1996), it can be expected that stable social representations of both war and peace should emerge only from the activists’ groups, whereas outside these groups, only the representation of war should emerge clearly.

Another fundamental aim is to investigate possible differences in the contents of social representations that emerge from different groups and social categories. Content differences should result in the representations of war and peace among those involved or not involved in peace groups. Moreover, we could expect a link among peace activists between identification with their own associations and adherence to the representations emerging from them. In the same way, we expect to find divergences between people of different political persuasion, those who define themselves religious or atheist, as well as those with war-zone experience and those without. On this last point, we might expect people with first-hand experience of an armed conflict to express more concrete and unrefined contents. A further item we
investigate is the relationship between the representations that the activists interviewed have of the peace activist as a person, the way they see themselves and their representation of their association. According to the findings of Simon et al. (1998), activists might be expected to describe themselves with reference to their association, the nearest reference point, rather than to the broader general category.

Method

Participants and Procedure

To distinguish pacifist associations from others, the aims expressed in the statutes were used as a selective criterion. Only those whose articles explicitly referred to peace were selected, yielding several associations with different traditions and historical and cultural backgrounds. This led to cooperation with four important Italian associations with different ideological and historical backgrounds, in two cities in north-eastern Italy.

Since it would have been impossible to distribute the questionnaire personally to every activist, this task was delegated to one member for each association. Questionnaires distributed in this way were collected personally in most cases, with the remaining few arriving by post. This phase took nearly three months in the spring of 2001. Having obtained the cooperation of the peace activists, we considered the four associations as a single group and selected a control group (recruited in public places such as trains), similar as regards sex, age and education, but consisting of people not belonging to any association. Fifty-seven questionnaires were collected from the peace activist group, and the equivalent control group consisted of 30 participants. There were a total of 54 men and 31 women (2 did not state their sex), all with an average to high educational level; 62 described themselves as believers, the other 25 agnostics or atheists; almost all the participants described themselves as left-wing politically, occupying more or less extreme positions.

It should be noted that the local sections taking part in the study are not necessarily representative of the national associations to which they belong; nor are the participants necessarily representative of their local sections. For this reason, although the data collected from the groups contain some differences, here they will be presented together, leaving closer examination of those peculiarities emerging from the different associations to further analysis.

Instruments

The data were collected by means of a self-completed questionnaire, divided into several sections. The first questions concerned various aspects of involvement in the associations, aimed at making more salient the social identity of participants belonging to peace movements. A word association task was used to explore social representations of war and peace. This method is half-way between qualitative and quantitative methods (Wagner et al., 1999), and it is one of the more frequently used procedures in social representation studies, especially during exploratory phases of research, when it is necessary to leave participants free to express the significant categories they use. Following the more classic procedure, participants were asked to write the first words they associated with the stimuli presented. The three words used, each on a different page, were peace, war and conflict. The latter was chosen as a third term of comparison owing to its widespread use and the key role it often plays in pacifist literature. Moreover, conflict resolution has been the subject of a number of studies in peace research (Blumberg, 1998), aimed at finding ways to solve conflicts (e.g. by redefining the environment or self). These studies, however, often focus on the
theoretical explanation of conflicts, without also taking into account the underlying representations. We should also remember that conflict has had a fundamental role in the history of psychology, from Freud to Piaget's interest in conflict as the driving force of development, as well as modern intergroup theories. But, whether it is treated as a variable or as a developmental phase, more interest has been devoted to overcoming it than to defining the meaning it has for people in general. As in Wagner, Valencia & Elejabarrieta (1996), to assess the stability of the representations in different contexts, the order of presentation of the first two stimuli was alternated (war–peace or peace–war), so that the reference was to a 'war context' or a 'peace context'. Similarly to the research of Di Giacomo (1980), we used word associations to investigate the peace activists' representation of themselves. To this end, a further three terms were added as stimuli: the pacifist, my association, myself. Only the activists were asked to complete a scale of identification with their own association (Brown et al., 1986; in the Italian translation by Capozza, 1995), as an index of perceived belonging. Lastly, respondents' personal and social details were collected.

Results

Free associations were analysed using SPAD-T (Lebart et al., 1989), an IT package for the quantitative analysis of qualitative data (i.e. textual data). The texts produced by the free association task were first processed to make the corpus of words more uniform and less ambiguous. Terms that expressed the same semantic content and differed only in grammatical form (gender, singular/plural) were grouped together. Words that were different but semantically equivalent were put together; for example, weapons: guns, bombs, pistol, etc. (Cipriani & Bolasco, 1995). The items that emerged from these operations then underwent two different types of analysis, mainly correspondence analysis. Correspondence analysis is very similar to principal component analysis (a reason why it was named in French analyse factorielle des correspondences); its aim is primarily to reveal features in the data rather than to confirm or reject hypotheses regarding generating underlying processes. It is especially suitable for categorical data and allows us to present visually the results pertaining to two (or more) sets of them (Benzecri et al., 1976; Clausen, 1998; Greenacre, 1984; Greenacre & Blasius, 1994; Lebart & Salem, 1988). The remaining data were analysed using the SPSS statistics package. The two procedures frequently intersect; the results of the analysis of respondents' personal details and the identification scale were used as illustrative variables in procedures carried out using SPAD-T.

Peace, War and Conflict

The contingency tables crossing the three stimuli and the words associated with them (256 words for the peace activists, 184 for the control group) were submitted to correspondence analysis using the APLUM procedure. Figures 1 and 2 show the way in which words were associated with the three stimuli, peace, war and conflict, and the relations between them. In both groups, two factors emerge that are mainly defined by the contributions of peace and conflict. The

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2 In Italian spoken language, 'pacifists' is used as a synonym for 'peace activists'.
3 Two other sections were aimed at studying the attitude towards 'just war' and some theoretical definitions of pacifism. Although data pertaining to these parts are not discussed here, they support the reading of the present results.
4 The absolute contribution of a point to a dimension is the proportion of inertia (variance) explained by the point. The sum of the contributions of the points to each factor is equal to 1.00. In the figures, only points with relevant contributions (i.e. > 100/n where n is the number of points) are reported in bold. In the tables, relevant contributions are highlighted with an asterisk.
relationship between the three terms used as stimuli seems to be the same for the two groups. However, an analysis of the contribution of the single associated words shows that, though the structures are similar, different meanings underlie them. We can thus interpret the position the three terms occupy on the factorial plane. Both the factorial plane that emerges from the activist group and that of the non-activist group show the opposition of abstract values, such as ‘calm’ and ‘solidarity’, at one pole of the abscissa, to more concrete and violent terms, such as ‘weapons’ and ‘blood’, at the other. This first factor should, therefore, be defined as ‘reality level’, from abstract to concrete, from values to violence. The second factor, shown on the ordinate, is different for the two groups. For the activists’ group, it basically opposes war, with terms such as ‘death’ and ‘destruction’, to the view of conflict as normal and the possibility of finding a ‘solution’. The non-activist group, on the other hand, places in opposition on the ordinate axis two different, but nevertheless violent, views of conflict. The first pole is characterized by conflict on a global scale: ‘armies’, ‘destruction’ and ‘violence’; the second pole, at a local level: ‘struggle’, ‘interests’ and ‘quarrel’.

On the basis of these findings, the item that seems to distinguish most clearly between the groups is ‘conflict’. Used outside the context of peace activists’ groups, this word has a set of negative connotations and evokes a situation of irreconcilability.

Figure 1. Peace, War and Conflict: Non-Activist Responses Projected on the First Two Factors

The x-axis shows the first factor; the y-axis, the second factor. Number of respondents: 30; number of words: 184. Words shown around the symbol ⌨ overlap on that point.
Figure 2. Peace, War and Conflict: Peace Activist Responses Projected on the First Two Factors

The x-axis shows the first factor; the y-axis, the second factor. Number of respondents: 57; number of words: 256. Words shown around the symbol asterisk overlap on that point.

between people or states. This point is fundamental in the light of the fact that many initiatives in peace education are based on nonviolent techniques for resolving conflicts. On the other hand, war and peace, whose social representations we are investigating, appear to be similar in structure. In both groups, war is marked by strong reference to concrete objects and images, whereas peace seems to be mostly defined at a more abstract level and to involve values. Although for each word separately the various frequencies that discriminate between the two groups rarely show statistically significant differences, the similarities and differences in structures, indicated by correspondence analysis, would deserve a closer look. For this aim, further correspondence analysis was carried out on a respondent-by-word matrix.

This second procedure, ASPAR, uses the words associated with each of the stimuli in forming the axes and allows us to use numerical variables as illustrative. It is thus possible to show the positions of different groups of people as regards the factors that emerge from the text as a whole. The variables used to define the groups are: the main distinction between peace activists and the control group; the participants' sex; religiosity (believer or non-believer); age (youth or adult). This was checked by a different analysis provided by SPAD-T: MOCAR. As regards: war – non-activists associate armies more frequently (p < .01), activists evil and hate (p < .05); peace – non-activists associate prosperity more frequently (p < .06), activists nonviolence (p < .01), freedom (p < .05) and justice (p < .06); conflict – non-activists tend to associate struggle more frequently (p < .09), activists resolution (p < .09).

6 The positioning of an illustrative variable on a dimension is measured by value-v-test. If a v-t is greater than 2 in absolute value, the chances that this positioning is not due to hazard is 95%. Only variables with v-t equal to or greater than [2] are presented and discussed.
### Table I. Words Associated with War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Algebraically negative pole</th>
<th>Algebraically positive pole</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Words</strong></td>
<td>Coordinates</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Genocide</td>
<td>−7.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inertia = 5.42%</td>
<td>Evil</td>
<td>−1.89</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Battle</td>
<td>−7.47</td>
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<td>Inertia = 5.22%</td>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>−3.50</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Soldiers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Weapons</td>
<td>−0.53</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>−2.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inertia = 4.78%</td>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td>−2.22</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>−1.84</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Uselessness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Horror</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[activists; young]</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Destruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inertia = 4.63%</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>−1.81</td>
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<td>[activists; men; believers; more right; higher identification]</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Injustice</td>
<td>−1.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inertia = 4.43%</td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>−0.78</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>−1.53</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pain</td>
<td>−0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>−2.59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inertia = 4.07%</td>
<td>Idiocy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defence</td>
<td>−1.90</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[non-activists; no experience; peace context]</td>
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* Relevant contributions (see note 4); † Groups positioning significantly are in brackets.
adult); political persuasion (subdivided into two levels by means of a median-split procedure); first-hand experience (or lack of it) in war zones; degree of identification (high or low, deduced from Brown's scale (Brown et al., 1986; by means of a median-split); the presentation of the stimuli in the order war–peace–conflict or peace-war-conflict (conditions defined respectively as 'war-context' and 'peace-context'). Below we discuss the most significant findings.

War
As regards the concept of war, the first six factors emerging from the ASPAR procedure (on a 48 words × 87 participants table) are strongly marked by a mixture of material aspects with values and ideals (see Table I for details). One finding, emerging from the differences on factors 2 and 4, shows the greater propensity of women to refer to emotions, whereas men cite mainly objects and practical problems. A similar distinction separates young people and adults; the former refer more often to tangible aspects and the illogical nature of war, as well as more conceptual aspects connected to them (factors 2, 3, 5); the latter tend to evoke feelings, emotions and an experience of impotency and being overwhelmed. It is almost as if the more adult subjects refer to individual experience, whereas young people refer to an event that is substantially rationalized and extraneous.

Of particular interest are the differences between the two main groups, activists and control. Only those not belonging to any association are differentiated on the algebraically positive semi-axis of the fourth factor: they portray a scene of impotency in the face of danger: e.g. 'fear', 'sorrow' and 'terror'. This scenario is further strengthened by references to 'pain' on the second axis and 'abuse' and 'violence' on the third. Overall, it would seem that subjects in the non-activist group describe the impotency of the victims, as well as their own, when faced with the phenomenon of war. Members of pacifist associations, on the other hand, refer to aspects of material 'destruction' on the fourth factor; those with a high level of identification consistently refer to such aspects; those with low identification do so to a lesser extent.

Finally, the context of presentation of the stimuli has relatively little effect; it influences only the sixth factor, on which 'ignorance', evoked by the 'peace context', is opposed to the more emotionally laden 'intolerance', evoked by the 'war context'. All these differences would seem to testify against the existence of a unified social representation of the concept of war. However, the highly evocative noun 'blood', which stood out in the previous APLUM analysis, defines none of the factors by which the groups are differentiated; it remains central to all of them. These results would suggest, therefore, that there is an intersection between at least two distinct representations, within which are to be found the set of material and more violent aspects to which all make reference. The two representations may, however, be distinguished on the basis of reaction in the face of war: an emotive reaction and impotence, on the one hand, and a more concrete reaction and the idea of something that can be tackled, on the other.

Peace
The same procedure, ASPAR, was applied to words freely associated with peace (57 words × 87 participants; see Table II). Again, in this case, there was a difference between the associations produced by men and women. The former mostly referred to symbolic aspects, on factors 3 and 6, and intergroup relations (e.g. 'populations', factor 4); women, on the other hand, tended to refer to close relations (e.g. 'co-habitation', factor 6; 'society', factor 4). Young people differed from adults on factors

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7 Mean: 26.22; median: 23.00; on a scale from 0 (left) to 100 (right).
8 Mean: 4.90; median: 6.10; on a seven-point scale.
Table II. Words Associated with Peace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Algebraically negative pole</th>
<th>Algebraically positive pole</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tolerance</td>
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<td>Inertia = 5.03%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nonviolence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Disarmament</td>
<td>-2.26</td>
<td>7.1*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>-1.63</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Justice</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inertia = 4.51%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[with experience; peace context; lower identification]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Symbols</td>
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<td>16.6*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>-2.45</td>
<td>14.6*</td>
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<td>Hands</td>
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<td>7.4*</td>
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<td>Church</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rainbow</td>
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<td>4.9*</td>
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<td>Silence</td>
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<td>[non-activists; men; young; no experience]</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Society</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>-1.62</td>
<td>3.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[non-activists; women; young; no experience]</td>
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<td>Growth</td>
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<td>Calm</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[non-activists; women; non-believers; no experience]</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Serenity</td>
<td>-1.04</td>
<td>9.3*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cohabitation</td>
<td>-0.79</td>
<td>2.4*</td>
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<td>Democracy</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
<td>2.1*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Civility</td>
<td>-1.34</td>
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<td>Inertia = 3.91%</td>
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* Relevant contributions (see note 4); † Groups positioning significantly are in brackets.
Table III. Words Associated with Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Algebraically negative pole</th>
<th>Algebraically positive pole</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Coordinates</td>
<td>Absolute contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Problem -8.71</td>
<td>67.8*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hostility -5.54</td>
<td>27.5*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[lower identification]†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ambivalent -3.62</td>
<td>18.1*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good -4.19</td>
<td>16.1*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bad -4.19</td>
<td>16.1*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[activists; higher identification; war context]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Useful -2.79</td>
<td>10.7*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Normal -2.56</td>
<td>9.1*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disorder -2.11</td>
<td>4.1*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uselessness -1.35</td>
<td>2.5*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fear -1.41</td>
<td>7.2*</td>
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<td>Tension -1.15</td>
<td>2.7*</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Pain -1.63</td>
<td>7.0*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intolerance -2.20</td>
<td>5.1*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hate -1.04</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[activists; women; adults]</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fatigue -2.60</td>
<td>6.7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion -0.95</td>
<td>4.3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strike -1.97</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[with experience; higher identification]</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rage -1.82</td>
<td>11.5*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Society -1.79</td>
<td>5.5*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ideas -1.65</td>
<td>4.7*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Irreconcilability -1.78</td>
<td>3.6*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Army -1.37</td>
<td>2.2*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Relevant contributions (see note 4); † Groups positioning significantly are in brackets.
3 and 4, tending to refer to external symbolic aspects, whereas adults were inspired by deeper values such as 'freedom'.

Those with first-hand experience in war zones were sharply distinguished from those without on the first five factors. Overall, those with war experience see peace as something dynamic, founded on everyday behaviour and attitudes, as well as important values. Those without war experience, on the other hand, refer to peace in terms of something static, abstract or tied to external symbols. The same interesting difference also appeared between those belonging to peace groups and those who do not. The latter refer to peace in terms of 'balance', factor 5; symbols linked to it and abstract components, factor 3; and close relations, factor 4. Activists, on the other hand, see peace in dynamic terms, such as 'discussion' and 'meeting', factor 5. Of interest is also the extent to which the participants identify with their own associations. Overall, those who identify less with their association refer more to external aspects of pacifist demonstrations and proposals, factors 2 and 4. Those who demonstrate a stronger sense of belonging associate peace with 'freedom', 'religion' and 'communication', factors 3 and 6. Finally, the context has a slightly greater effect: where peace was the first stimulus, responses were oriented toward more instrumental and deeper aspects, factors 2 and 6. In the 'war context', there was a tendency to lead responses in the same direction as the non-activist group on factors 2 and 6, that is, eliciting more symbolic representations of peace.

Essentially, there would appear to be different social representations of peace. Activists refer to peace in dynamic terms but are differentiated on the basis of various factors, the most important being the level of identification. From the non-activists, on the other hand, there emerges a representation of peace that is more static, individual and linked to external symbols. The responses of those who produced associations after first responding to the stimulus war (war context) and those given by the non-activist group often share the same orientation on various factors. This tends to support the hypothesis that the representation produced by non-activists is not stable or independent, but is a reflection of the representation evoked by war.

Conflict
The findings for the third term given to the subjects, conflict (61 words × 87 participants; see Table III), would tend to confirm the differences that emerged from the first analysis. On factors 4 and 6, women differ from men by making greater reference to emotional experiences and interpersonal relations. On the same factors, young people differ from adults. Sharp and fundamental differences emerged (as in the previous analysis) between activists and non-activists on factors 2, 4 and 6. The former tend to give an 'ambivalent' description of conflict, whereas the control group mention only the negative aspects. Moreover, it is important to note the differences between activists with a high or low level of identification with their own group, on factors 1, 2, 5 and 6. Those who identify most with their group fully subscribe to the representation of conflict of peace activists. Indeed, it is 'normal', 'ambivalent', laborious 'fatigue', and is essentially represented as a useful dialectic confrontation ('discussion' and 'quarrel'). On the other hand, activists who identify to a lesser extent with their own association, while not directly assimilating conflict to war, invest it with more negative connotations and 'hostility'. Basically, they see it as a 'problem'.

The Pacifist, My Association, Myself
In the course of this study, we also collected words freely associated with the terms the pacifist, my association, myself, with the aim of providing a preliminary representation of the
identity of the activist. From the first analysis, obtained by means of the APLUM procedure, a structure emerged (Figure 3) that opposes on the first axis my association to myself; and on the second axis, both terms to the pacifist.

From the words most frequently encountered on the two axes, we can infer that the first factor (on the x-axis) describes the type of commitment activists possess. On one pole, we find characteristics that distinguish association life, especially 'valid', in the sense of strength and possibility of obtaining results, and then the particular features of specific groups: 'faith', the ageing of the group ('not young'), 'small'. On the other pole, we find characteristics of individual experience: 'incoherence', 'weariness', but also 'trust'. The second factor (y-axis), by contrast, appears to represent the opposition

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9 On a word matrix for texts, 271 × 3.
between two levels of reality: on the one hand, 'utopia' and all the positive features that a pacifist should possess, above all 'courage', and on the other, reality, connoted by 'doubts'. This would tend to support the hypothesis, albeit only at an exploratory level, of greater closeness of the individual to their own association compared to the superordinate category of pacifists. The pacifist, in fact, is countered by the other two terms almost at a different level of reality. The group and the activist are, instead, both real. They differ because it is the former, with its 'friendship' and liveliness, that comes to the aid of the latter, suffering from 'doubts' and 'uncertainty', thereby helping to make his or her commitment 'valid'.

Discussion

The present research had two main aims: to study groups of activists and the creation of specific social representations; and to gain a better understanding of peace activism by investigating the meanings that underlie the phenomenon. Given the exploratory nature of the enquiry, our findings provide support for our expectations but also raise many points to be taken up and further investigated.

Overall, the hypotheses on social representations of war and peace find support. As regards war, at least two main representations may be observed, with a common intersection. Non-activists represent war as a tragic event, which endangers life and against which there is nothing to be done; it gives rise to feelings of impotence and desperation. Activists, on the other hand, develop a more concrete approach to what can be done. This confirms the results of many previous studies (see Schatz & Fiske, 1992). As regards peace, a clear social representation would appear to emerge only in the case of the activist group, as expected, whereas the representation supplied by non-activists does not appear to be sharply defined. War-zone experience and identification with one's own association also account for the different contents of representations. Lastly, as regards representations of both war and peace, women make greater reference than men to interpersonal and emotional aspects. The social representation of conflict proves to be of major importance. The representation of conflict is the item that distinguishes peace activists from non-activists to the greatest extent. The former regard conflict as normal and ambivalent, whereas for the latter, it differs from war only because it is more local and interpersonal, but it is still exclusively negative. In addition, the more activists identify with their own association, the more they regard conflict as normal. A lower level of identification correlates with a more problematic representation of conflict.

This set of results fits in well with the theoretical perspective we proposed. In studies on social representations, reference is frequently made to macro-social analysis, attempting to compare representations shared by entire populations (Doise, Spini & Clémence, 1999; Orr, Sagi & Bar-On, 2000; Wagner, Valencia & Elejabarrieta, 1996). By focussing on small real groups, the present study stresses the importance they have in the creation of specific representations within society at large, as well as emphasizing the active role they play in defining the context in which they operate. The results obtained show the importance that practical activity (in this case, peace activism) has in giving rise and maintenance to social representations. Activists construct specific social representations of the issues they fight for, and these representations give meaning to their activity. At the same time, sharing these representations is a basic element in the social identity of the activist, as shown by the differences encountered among activists: those who identify less with their own group are also those who hold less prototypical
views on peace and conflict, which sharply
distinguish them from the outgroup, thus
confirming the role of social representations
in defining group boundaries. Identification
with one's own group may be viewed not so
much as a variable affecting the extent to
which each individual submits to normative
influence ('to espouse that same value
system', as suggested by Hinkle et al., 1996:
44), but rather as a variable linked to the
sharing of specific social representations.

Using a social representations approach
has enabled us to study peace as a positive
concept and peace activism as an active social
proposal, overcoming the strange distortion
where peace psychology concentrates mainly
on the effects of war and the resolution of
conflicts. In addition, as regards peace psy-
chology's contribution, we may at this point
hypothesize a general interpretative key,
which is not so much an ultimate goal as an
initial research hypothesis. The study of the
social representations of war, peace and
conflict supports the hypothesis that peace
activism may be interpreted as a form of
coping, not only in the face of a nuclear
threat but also as a reaction to the threat of
war in general. The non-activist group, in
fact, tends to refer to specific social represen-
tations with conflict seen always in negative
terms (war evoking scenarios of impotence)
and peace, in the superficial nature of
external signs and abstract principles, as only
a vague utopia. Not committing oneself
actively against war may be interpreted as a
form of emotional coping in the face of a ter-
rifying threat. For peace activists, on the
other hand, war is a concrete fact and can
therefore be tackled. Peace, by contrast, is a
dynamic confrontation characterized by,
among other things, contrasts. Finally,
conflict is perceived as something natural
that may be resolved positively. Activism
emerges decisively as a form of coping that
focuses on the problem.

It is not a question of an individual
approach based on one's own effectiveness
and one's own resources, but a form of com-
munity coping. In their theoretical elabora-
tion of this concept, Lyons et al. (1998)
emphasized the great importance of com-
munication processes within a close com-
munity – processes that were described in the
present study in the form of social represen-
tations. In support of the idea that efficacy
arises from the group, we find the free associ-
ations prompted by myself in relation to my
association. The doubts and weariness that
portray the single individual, combined with
trust, become a representation of the group
characterized by efficacy, friendship and
mutual support.

Since this preliminary enquiry is of a
highly explorative nature, many questions
remain unanswered and would benefit from
further research. More specifically, based on
these findings, subsequent studies with
different, specific methods should clarify
what is the central nucleus and what are the
peripheral elements of the various represen-
tations, as well as which specific elements
distinguish them. Since the number of
subjects investigated was relatively small, it
would be interesting to develop future
research to include larger numbers to
produce a clearer picture of the national
panorama and better balance the proportions
of men and women interviewed. Collection
of data from a larger and more representative
sample, especially if obtained using a random
procedure, would, in addition, prevent dis-
tortions due to the personal characteristics of
participants who choose to join the research.
The set of practices that effectively involve
activists should be investigated in greater
depth, to gain a better understanding of
the links between the origins and assertions
of the social representations. To this end, it
could also be interesting to investigate the
possible differences arising between people
involved in different groups actively involved
in peace actions (e.g. professional mediators,
volunteers). If we do not take practices to be just synonyms of behaviours but as units of action and social meaning, then we also need a deeper investigation of the whole specific culture in which they are embedded, to better understand their underlying sense.

Practical Considerations and Possible Developments for the Associations

Since the present work is also intended as an applied study, we might conclude with some brief practical considerations for peace movements. The representation of conflict that non-activists appear to hold should not be allowed to hold sway during meetings dealing with methods for finding nonviolent solutions to conflict. The preconception that conflict is something negative, to be avoided, and from which one party will necessarily emerge defeated should be rebutted. Only when this problem has been tackled can non-violent methods of solving conflicts be fully understood. Likewise, people must be made more aware of their potential to act against war. Rather than present an apolitical and abstract scenario, it should be stressed that even the most serious decisions are taken by men and women, on whom it is possible to exert pressure. In conclusion, it is essential to allow activists, especially new recruits, to take part actively in meetings and collective experiences. This might develop a greater sense of belonging to the group, greater adhesion to the culture of the group and more consistent behaviour — all aspects of fundamental importance for affirming the ideas that this admirable minority put forward.

References


Lebart, Ludovic; Alain Morineau, Monica Becue & Laurence Haeusler, 1989. *Système portable pour l'analyse des données textuelles* (SPAD-T) [Portable System for the Analysis of Textual Data]. Paris: CESIA.


