"Undeclared Wars"

Exploring a Peacebuilding Approach to Armed Social Violence

Barbara Unger, Véronique Dudouet, Matteo Dressler and Beatrix Austin (eds.)

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1 Setting the scene: what is this dialogue about and whom does it address?

There is a growing awareness today that the nature of violence around the world is changing. A milestone in this assessment was the World Bank's 2011 World Development Report, which noted that civil war and inter-state conflict are becoming less common but that there has been an increase in violence linked to crime, terrorism and civil unrest (World Bank 2011, 1). There has been, on the one hand, a decline in the lethality of conventional, large-scale inter-state wars, especially after the Second World War (Human Security Research Group 2014; Melander/Pettersen/Themnér 2016). This has been, overall, a steady development, despite the current deadly civil wars raging, for example, in Syria (Human Security Research Group 2014, 80). On the other hand, there has been growing concern that the death toll associated with "undeclared wars" involving more amorphous and shifting enemies is increasing in a manner that demands attention, and action: "the almost 13,000 deaths from organized crime in Mexico in 2011 were greater than the 2011 battle-death tolls in any of the three countries worst affected by armed conflict and violence against civilians between 2006 and 2011 – Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sudan" (Human Security Research Group 2014, 52). Also in the past decade, the rise of 'extremist' violence by non-state and especially Islamist actors (Melander/Petterson/Themnér 2016, 731ff.; IEP 2016, 28/29) has given further cause for concern that the "better angels of our nature", to quote the title of the seminal book by Steven Pinker (2011), might be fighting a losing battle.

According to the most recent Global Burden of Armed Violence report, "non-conflict" violence (i.e. interpersonal or criminal violence) was causing over six times more fatalities than armed conflict in the years 2007-2012 (Geneva Declaration Secretariat 2015, 2). As just one example, urban violence "is (or has become) the most serious form of lethal violence in the world" (EUISS-IDRC 2012, 14ff.). In fact, experts are envisioning cities as the primary site of tomorrow's warfare, noting that violence in urban spaces has begun to "resemble classic armed conflict situations" (Moser/McIllwaine 2014, 333). In Latin America, the phenomenon is most prominent (as exemplified by street gangs, drug trafficking or vigilante groups), but it is also on the rise in other regions such as the Sahara (epitomised in smuggling of people and illicit goods) and clearly present in the cities of the Global North as well, documented most visibly for the United States, with Baltimore and Chicago being examples (OAS 2015, 10/11; Beckett 2016). At the same time, it has been noted that, in terms of countering this trend and working to reduce urban violence, "the evidence base for what works and what does not is extremely thin" (Muggah 2012, ix).

With respect to addressing what we will call "armed social violence",[1] there are both promising and worrying developments. Colombia, on the one hand, will be an eagerly observed 'fishbowl' for seeing how a country with diverse forms of violence can use the momentum generated from a peace accord[2] – resulting in a drop of conflict-related casualties – for undertaking the transformations needed to deal with other actors and factors of violence (Paffenholz/Charvet/Ross 2016). Another case – the Philippines – offers a

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[1] Our lead authors offer a useful definition of the term, describing armed social violence as "situations in which groups in society use large-scale violence to pursue non-political goals" (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 5).

[2] A peace agreement was signed on 26 September 2016 between the Government of Colombia and FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*): "Colombia peace deal: Historic agreement is signed" (BBC, 26 September 2016), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37477202. A referendum held on 2 October 2016 has since rejected the specifics of the peace deal. However, both the Colombian president and the FARC leadership have committed to prolong the ceasefire until the end of October 2016 and to try and salvage the peace deal ("Colombia peace deal: President says Farc ceasefire will end this month" (BBC, 5 October 2016), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37558825).

less promising outlook. Here, a change in leadership is causing the world to sit up and take notice of a combative strategy: elected in 2016, in large part for his hard-line, iron-fist responses to organised crime, new Filipino president Rodrigo Duterte is fighting crime without respect for human rights.[3] He has named a chief of police with a track record of human rights violations. This appointment has resulted in a sharp spike in extrajudicial killings of alleged drug dealers and a reported fall in the crime rate (Hansen 2016).

On the multilateral development agenda, bi- and multilateral agencies have started to embrace broader concepts of violence, conflict and peacebuilding: in 2015, the United Nations 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development was adopted. Its Sustainable Development Goal 16 "Peace, justice and strong institutions" promotes "just, peaceful and inclusive societies" and aims to "significantly reduce all forms of violence" (United Nations 2015).

In sum, from academia to journalism, calls for a conceptual and practical broadening of our understanding of violence can be heard with increasing urgency. There is, also in the field of peacebuilding, increasing and urgent recognition that forms of violence related to urban grievances, organised crime or social exclusion – previously a rather marginal topic in conflict transformation and peace research – pose challenges at least as pressing as those forms of violent conduct related to civil and international warfare or tackled in post-war contexts. The debate about what can effectively be done to counter this new type of violence is only just beginning to broaden beyond the security and development communities.

This twelfth issue of the Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series is therefore dedicated to better understanding what we call "armed social violence" (often also characterised as "non-conventional" or "non-conflict" violence). Which tasks, opportunities and dilemmas does this new global landscape of violence pose for the field of conflict transformation and peacebuilding, in comparison with the fields of security and development? We are aiming to shed some light on the forms, factors (i.e. sometimes "invisible" or remote influential aspects), force fields and actors of such violence, as well as on their connection to the "conventional" field of peacebuilding. We are setting out to explore the challenges such forms, factors and actors of violence pose for building peaceful societies and the efforts that have been made to date to deal with the phenomenon through constructive, comprehensive and/or holistic approaches.

It is a dialogue issue which, by the nature of its subject, draws on and addresses a multitude of fields, levels and actors: from the local peacebuilder to the international policy-maker, from the development practitioner to the political analyst, from the Global South to the Global North.

2   The contributions to this dialogue

The lead article in this Handbook Dialogue – *Armed Social Violence and Peacebuilding: Towards an Operational Approach* – comes from Bernardo Arévalo de León, Senior Peacebuilding Advisor in Interpeace's International Peacebuilding Advisory Team, and Ana Glenda Tager, Regional Director of Interpeace's Latin America Office. Building on their own and their organisation's experience in different localities of the world, the authors propose that inclusive and participatory peacebuilding methodologies provide a (much-needed) operational strategy that will allow the international community to engage effectively with issues of armed social violence. The authors see the prime advantage of these methodologies in providing "a highly granular, context-specific understanding of the social dynamics of each phenomenon and [in] mobilis[ing] stakeholders to take collaborative and complementary action across the state-society divide" (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016a, 2). This is crucial, in their analysis, since "violence is systemic in nature but unique in its expression": each setting requires the development of a shared understanding of how violence works, why it works, whom it benefits, what it means and why it matters (ibid., 23).

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3   "Duterte: From 'Punisher' to Philippines president" (BBC, 30 June 2016), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-36659258.

Arévalo de León and Tager define the – editorially set – term "armed social violence" as "situations in which groups in society use large-scale violence to pursue non-political goals" (ibid., 5). Importantly, they underline, "societies are not violent by default or by mistake, and … opting out of the instrumental use of violence in society is a matter of *political incentives*" (ibid., 4; our emphasis). They propose four markers which tell apart 'pacified' societies, which exhibit low levels of armed social violence, from 'unpacified' societies, in which armed social violence may be pronounced (see Table 1). The differentiation builds on a comparison between the processes of state formation in Western Europe and Latin America.

Table 1: Levels and nature of violence in 'pacified' vs. 'unpacified' societies

'Pacified' societies		'Unpacified' societies	
Violence is…		**Violence is…**	
residual	… only a leftover from the effective pacification process	non-residual	… an essential component structuring state-society relations, used to regulate socio-economic and political life
marginal	… no longer central to social dynamics, persisting only at the fringes	central/not marginal	… a key component of social life in important sectors, with considerable social and legal acceptance of violent behaviour and values
dysfunctional	… not serving any constructive purpose, an obstacle to normal life	functional/not dysfunctional	… serving practical purposes in society's functioning, at least partially/spatially seen as a legitimate, if illegal, element of social and political interactions
private	… exercised within the private sphere, not affecting/being acknowledged in the public realm	pervasive	… spreading throughout the private and public spheres, finding expression in different areas (individual to national, economic to political, communal to interpersonal)

Based on Arévalo de León/Tager 2016a, 4/5.

The authors subsequently trace the conceptual debate on conventional and non-conventional, social and political violence. They delineate actors, motivations and factors in armed social violence, concluding that "[c]lear-cut distinctions and easy categorisations have become elusive, and each context seems to generate its own peculiar mix of actors and factors" (ibid., 9). Urban violence and organised crime are being highlighted as areas of particular practical interest, where conventional security and development approaches fall short of reaching systemic, sustainable impact: "policing efforts", for example, "that address social phenomena such as youth gangs and organised crime exclusively through violent repressive strategies do not work" (ibid., 15). This observation is further strengthened in their recommendations, where they posit: "deficits of trust and social cohesion … lie at the root of social violence problems" (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016b, 84/85, Box 4). They give examples from Timor-Leste, where a ban on martial arts groups, some of which were involved in organised crime, "has failed to address the root cause of violence and has further excluded youth from participating in the development process of the country" (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016a, 10, Box 2), and Guinea-Bissau, where political volatility and institutional weakness have contributed to the country's transformation "from a simple stopover to an operational location for increasingly powerful criminal groups" (ibid., 12, Box 3).

In the policy-orientated section of their lead article, Arévalo de León and Tager call for a deepened understanding of key characteristics of armed social violence, which they describe as "both political and systemic" (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016a, 12). In this context, the authors promote a holistic approach, which "can only be attained by taking into account the perspectives of all actors involved at both the national level … and the international level" (ibid.). The key factor in successfully addressing armed social violence, they underline, will be "to increase the analytical and operational capacities of local actors in state and society in such a way that they can strengthen their generic capacities for effective policy development and implementation while simultaneously developing ad-hoc strategies for addressing violence" (ibid., 23). They point to several operational challenges, chief among them a greater emphasis on process design and the political (legality) and practical (access) obstacles precluding direct engagement with armed social actors. With respect to the latter, they present the example of the gang truce in El Salvador, where the persistence of a hostile environment at the national level, incoherence and inconsistency within governmental agencies, negative public opinion and recent legislation declaring youth gangs to be terrorist groups have contributed to an unravelling of the truce successes (ibid., 19/20, Box 4).

In her response, *The "Violence Turn" in Peace Studies and Practice*, Jenny Pearce, Professor of Latin American Politics in Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, UK, proposes that the phenomenon of violence should take centre stage in the peacebuilding field. She picks up the lead article's focus on armed social violence, extending the debate by advocating an emphasis on understanding and tackling the multitude of existing violences: state and inter-state, armed and unarmed, collective and individual.

The essay deals with conceptual issues of situating violences at the heart of peacebuilding, as well as the challenges of operationalisation in local and international peacebuilding that this entails. Pearce argues that conceptually, there is a "need to build much greater sensitivity to the plurality of violences and the feedback loops between them" (Pearce 2016, 32), a point welcomed by the lead authors and included in a revised list of recommendations as a call for "violence sensitivity" (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016b, 84/85, Box 4). From an operational standpoint, for peacebuilders, this awareness necessitates working together with the different societal groups experiencing one or a multitude of these violences in order to build security agendas "capable of responding to the differentiated experience of the plural violences of everyday life" (Pearce 2016, 37). The response illustrates the topic with examples from the author's research in Medellín (Colombia) and her practical work in Bradford (United Kingdom).

Andy Carl – former long-term director of the peacebuilding NGO Conciliation Resources – addresses *The (Not So) New Challenge of Responding to Armed Social Violence with Peacebuilding* in his response to the lead article. Taking a historical perspective, the essay retraces how the peacebuilding field has long engaged with different expressions of violence which go beyond conventional warfare. Carl thus contests the lead article in its assumption that armed social violence is novel to the sector.

Turning to present challenges, the response proceeds to expand the lead article's analysis on "working across sectoral and professional boundaries" for tackling armed social violence (Carl 2016, 42). Offering successful examples from the United Kingdom, Carl stresses the need for better collaboration between the security and peacebuilding sector in particular, as well as the necessity for dialogue between international and domestic responses. This exchange, in Carl's opinion, promises grand potential for mutual learning in order to "prevent, end and transform armed conflicts (both conventional and social)" (Carl 2016, 47). The lead authors pick up his call in their revised set of recommendations as an appeal to foster the development of a new global consensus on countering violence in society.

Gema Santamaría, Assistant Professor in the Department of International Studies at the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, focuses her response *From War-Making to Peacebuilding?* on the challenges of operationalising a peacebuilding approach. She takes as her starting point the negative consequences that hard security responses to violence have had in contemporary Mexico, underlining the pertinence of adopting a peacebuilding approach instead, as presented by the lead authors. However, in her analysis, at least three challenges need to be addressed if such a peacebuilding approach is to be successful. Santamaría proposes several ways forward, with the case of Mexico in mind (Santamaría 2016, 54-57):
1) to adopt context-specific regulatory frameworks that 'shield' a peacebuilding approach, which might otherwise inadvertently feed into a *pax mafiosa*[4] and which may unintentionally lead to criminal collusion and impunity;
2) to aim for a gradual transformation of public attitudes and perceptions of crime, which would help legitimise a peacebuilding approach in communities divided by warlike responses to violence and wracked by increasingly ruthless and predatory types of organised armed social actors; and
3) to undertake careful analysis of the organisational capacities and cohesiveness of armed social groups, as well as their "code(s) of conduct", in order to identify robust interlocutors in participatory and dialogical processes.

In their response, *The Value of Listening to Community Voices*, Karen P. Simbulan and Laurens J. Visser report about their experience with Listening Methodology (LM). They write from the perspective of practitioners at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) which supports peace processes in South-East Asia. Listening methodology is a specific tool to create opportunities for actors in conflict, whose voices often go unheard, to share their understanding of the (armed) conflicts they are affected by.

Simbulan and Visser highlight the methodology's potential for addressing issues of armed social violence, and thus deepen the lead article's discussion about applying participatory peacebuilding tools to the phenomenon (Simbulan/Visser 2016, 64-65).

The authors detail how LM can help improve peacebuilding interventions in both politically and socially driven conflicts through: (1) generating a granular understanding of the conflict and its violences; (2) supporting stakeholders in engaging with the different understandings of a conflict that exist; (3) "empowering community stakeholders by recognising the importance of their perspectives and opinions" (ibid., 62).

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4   Santamaría defines this (with reference to Snyder/Durán-Martínez 2009) as the relationship pattern which existed between the Mexican political elites and organised crime and drug trafficking organisations from the 1940s into the 1990s. The *pax mafiosa* was marked by political elites offering protection and selective enforcement in return for payments or non-violent or less visible criminal behaviour (Santamaría 2016, 53).

The response illustrates how CPCS applies LM in Myanmar to monitor local ceasefire agreements, and how this work has revealed armed social violence's specific linkages with political armed conflict in Myanmar's north as a caveat for human security, a finding the organisation hopes to feed into the ongoing peace process.

In the final response, *Countering Armed Social Violence in Guinea-Bissau*, Marco Carmignani, Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General (Political) in Guinea-Bissau, and Fernando Cavalcante, formerly with the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), review the implementation and impact of a community-based policing model, the Model Police Station (MPS). This police station – located in a neighbourhood of Bissau – was designed through multi-stakeholder collaboration. Its remit was to tackle challenges identified through participatory research, namely organised crime and low public trust in the police force.

By providing this practical example, the authors tie in with the lead article's argument for participatory research methodologies and multi-stakeholder coherence as a vehicle for looking beyond technical security approaches to armed social violence. However, they also reflect on the political obstacles which have impeded the territorial expansion of the model and its societal impact on drug trafficking in Bissau until now.

In their final reflections, the lead authors conclude the critical yet not fundamentally controversial conversation with their respondents by presenting an expanded set of nine recommendations geared towards international actors (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016b, 84/85, Box 4):
1.   Prepare to stay put long-term... and invest
2.   Allow local leadership to emerge
3.   Foster the development of state-society coalitions
4.   Foster the development of a new global consensus on countering violence in society
5.   Invest in the strengthening of local analytical capacity
6.   Encourage the development of violence sensitivity approaches
7.   Invest in the strengthening of local facilitation/mediation capacity
8.   Foster and reward experimentation
9.   Review legal/operational frameworks

3 Themes and dilemmas

The rich contributions to this dialogue reach across several continents – from Latin America (Mexico, El Salvador and Colombia) and Africa (Guinea-Bissau) to the Middle East (Syria), Asia (Myanmar and Timor Leste) and Europe (United Kingdom). They each provide their own granular analysis, but at the same time, they point to a number of common aspects, which merit our attention in the remainder of this introduction.

Armed social violence: a useful terminology?

First, the analytical category of "armed social violence" introduced by the editors and spelt out by the lead authors seems to offer an innovative angle to capture phenomena such as urban youth gangs or organised crime and trafficking. However, it is also contested by some contributors (directly or implicitly) for suggesting clear-cut boundaries between various forms of violence of the "conventional" ("political" or "conflict-related"), or "unconventional" type, or anything in between. One might in fact better characterise the political vs. social or criminal agendas ascribed to violent actors as fluid categories. These categories

co-exist along a continuum ranging from individuals and societal groups (mis-)using political channels to pursue economic or criminal goals (such as drug barons and 'grands trafficants') to organisations resorting to criminal or illicit activities in support of their socio-political agenda (such as, notably, FARC in Colombia) (Planta/Dudouet 2015). In fact, contemporary armed actors are increasingly characterised as "hybrid" in nature, seen as using "a tailored mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behaviour in the same time and battle space to obtain their political/economic objectives" (Hoffmann 2014).

As argued by one respondent in this dialogue (Pearce 2016) and confirmed by the lead authors in their rejoinder, the term "armed social violence" might also be too narrow as it tends to over-emphasise the "visible" forms of violence, at the expense of their cultural and structural manifestations or root causes. That violence has different expressions and factors beyond warfare, however, is not a new insight, and less so in the conflict transformation and peacebuilding field. Johann Galtung's conceptualisation of interlinked forms of violence (Galtung 1969) and the subsequent graphic representation (see Figure 1) of the triangle positioning visible, armed violence as only the tip of the iceberg, with structural and cultural patterns related to it, dates back to the 1970s. This longstanding engagement with and conceptualisation of violence, its factors and expressions has not been mentioned by any of the authors, perhaps due in part to a certain blindness of the peacebuilding field towards our own (recent) history, as Andy Carl might point out. At any rate, for dealing with armed social violence it is important not only to analyse its expressions, the direct acts of violence, but also to take into account the cultural and structural factors feeding into it, as Arévalo de León and Tager point out in their concluding remarks (2016b, 78). Mexico's narcocorridos – part of a cultural phenomenon which emerged around drug trafficking, glorifying the narco bosses – and legal frameworks which may be structurally impeding constructive transformation of agents of violence are but two examples that highlight the continued pertinence of Galtung's scheme.

Figure 1: Violence – triangles and icebergs
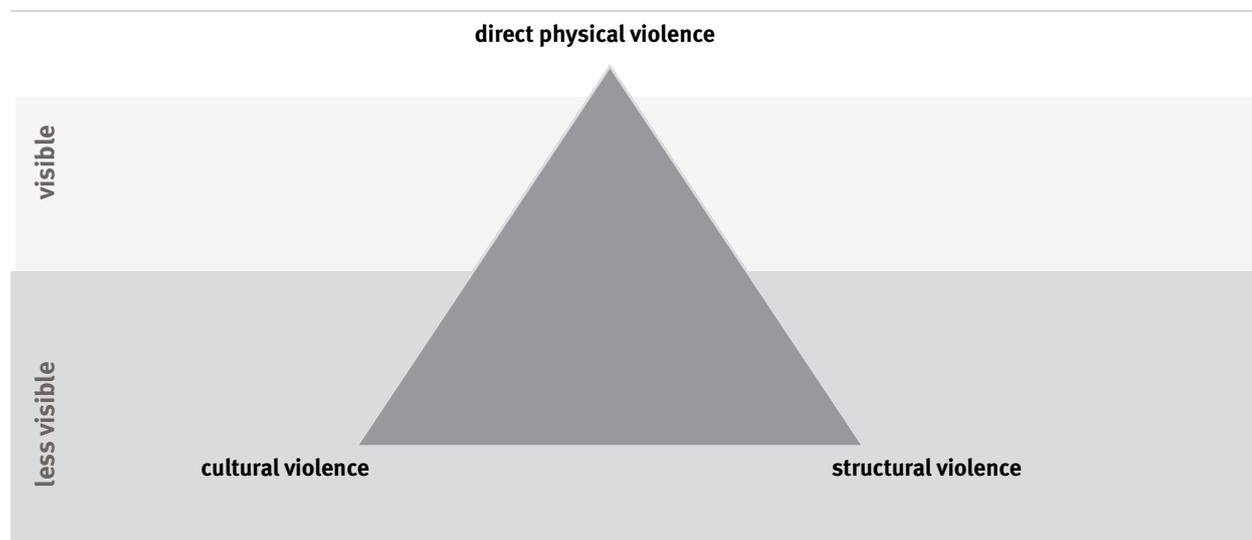
Source: Galtung 1969, 1990.

How to operationalise systemic and participatory peacebuilding?

There is little disagreement among the contributors that what is needed to successfully address armed social violence is **a "comprehensive", "integral", "coherent" or "holistic" approach**. (Relatively little is said about the specific shape this would take.) Andy Carl calls for the identification of "collaborative, comprehensive and cumulative ways" of *learning together* what works in preventing and ending organised violence (Carl 2016, 47/48). There remains the great practical challenge of how such approaches, organised among a multitude of stakeholders operating at multiple levels and through distinct sectoral (or disciplinary) approaches, can

then be broken down to actionable endeavours in specific localities. This calls for deeper reflection on the supposed contradiction between operational and effective measures (called for by security scholars such as Santamaría) versus an open-ended, process-centred, principle-driven approach (promoted by the "traditional peacebuilders"). Jenny Pearce (2016, 34) captures the dilemma: "Rigid frameworks and parameters around violence prevent us seeing all the violences that matter. However, without tight and specific guidelines, operationalising policy and practice in violent contexts becomes very difficult." All authors, we understand, can agree upon the fact that we need principles (participation being a prime example) and process-orientation. More creativity (and, perhaps, more historical and cross-disciplinary awareness) is needed to come up with ideas, approaches and guiding frameworks, in order to initiate progress in the contexts where violence prevails. A range of tools for participatory diagnostics and joint intervention planning is already available, associated with conflict-sensitive approaches, conflict transformation, and the do no harm school of thought.[5]

We believe that in order to overcome what Santamaría describes as a potentially intrinsic limitation of a peacebuilding approach to operationalise and strategise holistic approaches "on the ground" (Santamaría 2016, 52), peacebuilders and their colleagues from other disciplines will need to develop greater agility in putting their **principles into practice,** keeping sight of the consequences each has on the other in practice and moving forward step by step in a wider network than ever before. Tools such as scenario building (Kahane 2012), guidelines to improve the connecting of bottom-up/top-down approaches (Mac Ginty 2010), insider and outsider interventions (Interpeace 2010) and strengthening resilience (Interpeace 2016) seem of particular importance here. In order to find better ways of dealing with the complexities, we must fine-tune our analytical tools to better understand the factors, actors and phenomena of armed social violence. We must, at the same time, become much more nimble at changing perspectives: systemic thinking applied to conflict transformation would advise us to alternate our perspective regularly, combining an understanding of the whole context with all its interdependent aspects (adopting, figuratively speaking, a bird's eye perspective) with a very practical, on-the-ground focus on what needs to happen next (switching, figuratively, to a frog's eye perspective) (see Wils/Unger 2006, 7; also Burns 2007; Koerppen/Schmelzle/Wils 2008; Koerppen/Ropers/Giessmann 2011). It is only this alternation (see Figure 2) that enables us to put principles into practice when working in a specific region (see also Andrews et al. 2015 for an alternative approach, which they call Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)).

Figure 2: Complexity and agency – from bird's eye to frog's eye and back again
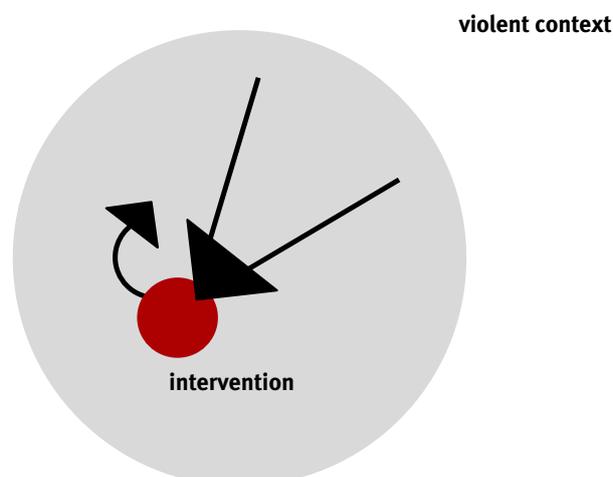
violent context

intervention

As we are envisioning multi-stakeholder networks, and as several of our contributing authors continue to underline the necessity of putting the local voices centre stage (Arévalo de León/Tager, Pearce, Simulan/ Visser, mildly contested by Carl), it becomes ever more important to clarify – in partnership discussions and project proposals – when **participation** is truly "participatory", i.e. when does it give voice and agency *along the whole of the process* to those with a stake in the process or the outcome? Too often, it is still used rhetorically or half-heartedly, and participation ends with an inception survey or focus group events. It caught our attention, for example, that in the case of the Model Police Station in Guinea-Bissau there was community involvement in the needs assessment done through participatory research, and there was some involvement in the activities. However, the specific proposal for the model police stations was "jointly developed" by "UNIOGBIS and national authorities" (Carmignani/Cavalcante 2016, 5), apparently without the involvement of those surveyed or those invited later on. It seems to us that truly participatory approaches which implement local ownership fully will have to ensure local representation, if not leadership, as Arévalo de León and Tager strongly advocate, throughout all stages of project management and process design. Hence a crucial question for those wishing to transform violence in partnership will be how participation is to be operationalised across the span of a peacebuilding process, also preventing it from being hijacked or side-lined by actors with ulterior motives.

Reflecting on the practical examples of this dialogue from Mexico to Cambodia or Myanmar, it is, furthermore, impossible not to wonder how exactly the procedural approaches of dialogue and listening will create (political, economic or personal) **incentives** for actors of armed social violence to embrace change or encourage political actors or other beneficiaries or bystanders to do the same. How can these actors' inclusion in peacebuilding strategies be responsibly managed (see also Santamaría 2016, 56/57)? These reflections highlight once more the value of comprehensive responses which must address multiple stakeholders simultaneously (violent actors, their surrounding communities, and local/national institutions, including politicians benefiting from – or instrumentalising – armed social violence). With regard to timeframes, short-term quick-impact interventions also require integration with longer-term approaches aimed at improving institutional capacities, developing alternative socio-economic incentives, and transforming cultural norms of violence and patronage (Dudouet 2015). A further suggestion we take from Jenny Pearce, however, is to make the experience of those living with the diverse manifestations of everyday violence, and having first-hand, "bodily" experience of it, as accessible as possible to all those wanting to transform armed social violence, or, simply, violence. One of the most powerful incentives, according to Pearce, is that the harm that violence does is no longer understood as 'just' the harm to the invisible, far-away other, but in some way the harm done to *our* community, *our* family, *ourselves*.

4 Where do we go from here?

As Arévalo de León and Tager write (2016a, Box 2, recommendation 6), successfully addressing the issue of violence in our own lives and societies and in the lives and communities of our partners around the world will require everyone involved to move out of their "comfort zone" – the comfort of business as usual, the comfort of the "silo" of one's profession, the comfort of ready-made, clearly mapped processes. It will require us, in each and every case, to look closely and jointly at what is happening in a certain locality and its environment. It will require us to define what we can do and how, and also where we are ill-equipped or feel no call to engage. The authors in this dialogue have given us ample food for thought – and stepping stones for practice, with a considerable number of caveats firmly lodged in our minds.

We thank all the contributors to this Dialogue for their rigorous and inspiring thoughts and are indebted to Glenine Hamlyn (Brisbane, Queensland/Australia) and Hillary Crowe (Telford/UK) for their sensitive and professional language editing. Thanks go, furthermore, to all our colleagues in-house and

internationally who have helped us shape this dialogue with their constructive feedback and collegial curiosity.

As the issue of armed social violence is set to keep local and international actors engaged for some time to come, we warmly welcome any additional thoughts on the questions raised in this Dialogue. We encourage the readers of the Berghof Handbook to send us further comments, which may be included in our online version of the *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*. Please contact us at handbook@ berghof-foundation.org.

Barbara Unger, Véronique Dudouet, Matteo Dressler, Beatrix Austin
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Armed Social Violence and Peacebuilding

Towards an Operational Approach

Bernardo Arévalo de León and Ana Glenda Tager

Content

1 Introduction

Until recently, the international community showed limited interest in the problem of violence in society. If it was not part of an international conflict or an expression of internal political turmoil, social violence in its different forms – criminal violence, inter-communal violence, gender violence, etc. – was considered inconsequential to the international system, inexistent for international policy and irrelevant to state-centred scientific disciplines such as political science and international relations. With the demise of the Cold War, however, it became evident that these forms of violence threatened important international development goals and security interests, and that even though non-political in motivation, they had significant political effects at the national and international levels. Whether it be international drug-trafficking networks encroaching on the emerging state institutions of Guinea-Bissau, or youth gang violence in El Salvador driving homicide rates that are higher in peacetime than during the civil war, or criminal violence creating "violent pockets" that condemn urban populations to a life of violence in Brazil, or socio-economic tensions resulting in xenophobic violence in South Africa: all these examples are expressions of an emerging global phenomenon that will here be called armed social violence.

The conceptual and operational frameworks required by the international community to effectively address these phenomena are still incipient. Attempts to transpose the conventional "political conflict violence" paradigm to situations of armed social violence have not been effective, and important efforts are being undertaken by the academic and international policy communities to better understand the nature of the problem and determine the strategies that should be adopted. Public health approaches to violence, security sector engagement with small arms proliferation and citizen security, and international coordination on transnational organised crime are expressions of this trend. Important insights are beginning to emerge from these different fields on the nature of the problem and the elements needed to address it.

Peacebuilding has been a latecomer to these efforts. It emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century as part of the international peace and conflict continuum, originally addressing the post-conflict phase of "conventional" situations of violence. While peacebuilding initially ignored issues of social violence, evidence of the negative impact of this form of violence on the consolidation of peace became unequivocal. It has given rise to innovative approaches, such as the work of the Pailig Foundation on community-level gun violence in Mindanao, Interpeace's work with youth gang violence in El Salvador and Honduras, and Viva Rio's experience in crime mitigation in Rio de Janeiro and Port-au-Prince (Banfield 2014; Aguilar Umaña/Arévalo de León/Tager 2014).

This paper proposes that the inclusive and participatory methodologies offered by peacebuilding approaches provide an operational strategy that allows the international community to engage effectively with issues of armed social violence. Instead of the reliance on theoretically grounded conceptual frameworks and internationally defined generic policies, the dialogue and research methodologies of peacebuilding allow the development of a highly granular, context-specific understanding of the social dynamics of each phenomenon and mobilise stakeholders to take collaborative and complementary action across the state-society divide.

Section Two of this paper examines existing approaches to understanding the phenomenon of armed social violence, starting with some insights into the role of violence in state-formation processes (2.1). We proceed to review ongoing discussions on the nature of violence and conflict in the contemporary world (2.2), before discussing two of its most prominent and challenging expressions: urban violence and organised crime (2.3). The section closes with some reflections on the features common to all manifestations of armed social violence (2.4).

Section Three focuses on policy responses to these challenges, identifying the key features of standard development and security approaches and the limitations that have rendered them ineffective (3.1), before discussing the characteristics and merits of peacebuilding approaches to contexts of armed social violence

(3.2). We also examine the challenges that peacebuilding still needs to address in order to contribute more effectively to the design and implementation of viable operational strategies for addressing armed social violence. We then propose a series of concrete policy recommendations to the international community (3.3).

The contribution closes in *Section Four* with some reflections and conclusions that summarise the key points of our argument, pointing out the added value that peacebuilding can bring to the development of effective policy responses to armed social violence.

2 Armed social violence: reviewing a heterogeneous phenomenon

Our current understanding of the nature of violence in society derives from academic disciplines such as sociology, political science and history, and from the accumulated experience of practitioners engaging with violent phenomena in the context of their work in the humanitarian, development, and peace and security sectors. This section begins with a review of the role of violence in state formation using the examples of Europe and Latin America (2.1). It is followed by an examination of various classifications pertaining to the forms of violence, actors and factors covered by the concept of armed social violence (2.2). Subsection 2.3 summarises the common trends emerging from two empirical expressions of armed social violence: urban violence and organised crime (2.3). Finally, the commonalities between all these phenomena are examined with the help of innovative analytical tools to grasp more effectively their political and systemic features (2.4).

2.1 Violence and state formation

Thinking about "what peaceful societies look like" (Banfield 2014, 14) has become a key element in the design of peacebuilding and conflict prevention interventions on issues of armed social violence. The quote infers the use of participatory efforts to visualise what needs to be transformed in a given context in order to eliminate violence from social, political and economic relations. Yet it is also important to look into the historical record to identify success stories or best practice. Without falling into the quagmire of the ongoing debate, sparked by Steven Pinker, about the universal nature of the long-term decline of violence (Pinker 2011, 2015; Gray 2015; Ray 2011, 2013; Human Security Research Group 2014), we can clearly identify one region in the world that has successfully transitioned from societies that made extensive and intensive use of violence to societies in which violence has been pushed to the margins of social life: Western Europe. What we know about violence in society, or, to be more precise, about the way in which violence can be extricated from social and political life, derives mainly from the historical process of state formation and the implicit development of social habitus – values, norms and behaviours – in this region.

Briefly speaking, what took place in Western Europe starting in the Middle Ages was a process of internal pacification. This process relied on the development of political systems that used non-coercive methods of domination; it rendered violence dysfunctional to social life and developed an associated set of norms regulating public conduct. These shaped society and the social self (Tilly 1992; Giddens 1987; Elias 1989; Fletcher 1997). Through a *concentration* process, authorities claimed the monopoly over the means of violence in society and the legitimacy to use it. Through a *containment* process, authorities limited the use of violence in society in two directions: away from the public sphere into the private sphere, and away from internal threats and targets towards external threats and targets. This is what has been known as a

civilisation – or civilianisation[1] – process, a gradual and systemic move away from the use of violence in society and the use of violence by the individual in society. Socially it has brought with it:

≡ the transfer of power from ministers of violence (warriors/military) to ministers of management (politicians/bureaucrats),
≡ the strengthening of civil society – non-violent expressions of interest vis-à-vis the state,
≡ the creation and nurturing of social bonds between different groups in society,
≡ the development of repugnance towards overt violence,
≡ the development of internalised norms/conduct associated with these societal changes (Tilly 1992; Giddens 1987; Elias 1989).

In pacified societies, violence in society is transformed in several ways. It becomes *residual* – what is left over from the effective pacification process. It becomes *marginal* – no longer central to social dynamics and persisting only on the fringes. It becomes *dysfunctional* – not serving any constructive purpose, and becoming an obstacle to normal life. And it becomes *private* – being exercised within the private realm to the point that it does not affect the public realm: this can be seen, for example, in contemporary social tolerance to domestic violence or to 'pornoviolence' (i.e. passive engagement with violence through participation in video games, blood sports and film).

Outside of Western Europe, however, the path to state formation can be different. Though the Westphalian nation-state has become the paradigm for the development of governance structures on the international scene, it is clear that it has not taken root in many places around the world (Policzer 2005). It is also questionable whether it can become a model at all, particularly in its "neo-liberal" form (Centeno 2002; Migdal 2001; de Coning 2013). The resulting pattern is one of countries adopting Westphalian features as a function of their integration into the international system, in which liberal institutions co-exist with endogenous social traditions and political cultures, with varying patterns of the prevalence of violence in political and social relations.

In such contexts, problems in the processes governing the concentration and containment of violence may render internal pacification non-existent, or inefficient as a means of eradicating violence from society. In the concentration process, the authorities may lack the will and the capacity to effectively claim the monopoly over legitimate violence in society: they might not want, or want but fail, to monopolise the means for violent coercion, or to legitimise this monopoly. In the containment process, they may lack the will and the capacity to eradicate the use of violence by non-state actors, whether in the political realm (state-society relations), the social realm (relations between social groups without reference to political structures) or the realm of interpersonal relations.

From another region of the world, Latin America, we learn that societies are not violent by default or by mistake, and that opting out of the instrumental use of violence in society is a matter of political incentives. Reflecting on the relative weakness of state institutions in Latin America and the prevalence of violence as a strategy for governance well into the twentieth century, Miguel Angel Centeno (2002) indicates that historically this is not the result of the cultural inadequacy of its elites or the absence of managerial capacity. Developing strong political institutions and integrated nations was simply not in the interest of the ruling elites, as violent coercion was a cheaper and more viable power strategy in the absence of external threats. In the case of Europe, on the other hand, Charles Tilly (1992) showed that the development of strong political institutions, integrated nations and pacified societies came through concessions made by the ruling elites to the masses not because of an enlightened and benevolent will but out of sheer necessity in the face of external threats for survival.

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1 Norbert Elias' original term is "civilisation", but this has led to suggestions of an evolutionary and discriminatory bias that Jonathan Fletcher indicates are wrong, as they obscure the term's real meaning. Fletcher instead proposes the term "civilianisation" (Fletcher 1997).

It is clear, therefore, that pacification is part and parcel of state-formation processes through which societies shape the nature of political institutions – the relationship between power and authority, the mechanisms regulating conflict in society, the norms and values that guide social interactions, etc. Each society has its own profile of violence, shaping the pattern of its expression in socio-economic and political relations, the scope of its use in the different realms of social life and the intensity with which it is wielded. Regulating violence in society – containing, mitigating or transforming it – is, therefore, not a technical problem but a political one. It needs to be understood as part of state-formation processes that range from the psycho-social to the political. Unpacified societies are societies in which violence is still an important factor in the way they function. In these cases, violence is:

- *Not residual*, meaning that it is an essential component structuring state-society relations and is used to regulate socio-economic and political life. Authoritarian polities and coercive labour relations are clear expressions of its central role.
- *Not marginal*, meaning that it is an important component of social life, used in different ways in social interactions at the national, community and interpersonal levels, at least for important sectors in society. The social and legal acceptance, or tolerance, of violent behaviour and values express their relevance.
- *Not dysfunctional*, meaning that it serves concrete purposes for the way in which society is functioning, and that at least for some sectors, violence is perceived not as a problem to be overcome but as a legitimate – though illegal – instrument and component of social and political interactions.
- *Pervasive*, spreading throughout the public and private realms and finding varied expressions in the different areas of social life, from the individual to the national, the economic to the political, and the communal to the interpersonal.

2.2 Key characteristics of armed social violence

The term "armed social violence" is used to describe situations in which groups in society use large-scale violence to pursue non-political goals. Armed social violence is not associated with conventional conflicts (civil wars) or unconventional conflicts (terrorism). It can take the form of urban violence driven, for example, by violent youth gangs, vigilantism or inter-communal grievances, or by organised crime, with national and international criminal organisations resorting to large-scale violence in the context of their trade (Briscoe 2015; Planta/Dudouet 2015; Hellestveit 2015). In this section we review the policy and scholarly 'discovery' of the phenomenon, and various attempts to categorise conflict-related and non-conflict-related violence, along with their characteristics, actors and motivations.

2.2.1 What makes violence "unconventional"?

In 2014, reflecting on a decade of research and practice on urban conflict and violence, Caroline Moser and Cathy McIlwaine remarked how much the field had changed in terms of its understanding of, and approach to, the issue. When Moser published her first review on the matter (2004), "violence was seen as yet another development problem to be challenged and overcome" (Moser/McIlwaine 2014, 331). By 2014 there was a realisation that violence was "an integral part of the current model of development itself" and that there was a need to rethink the conceptual framework that linked violence, state and society in order to undertake more effective interventions (ibid., 332).

Their remark applies to not only issues of urban violence and conflict but also a wide range of violent phenomena, from community-based violent crime in Central America (Aguilar Umaña/Arévalo de León/ Tager 2014) to the links between political and criminal agendas in the internationalised Syrian conflict (Hallaj 2015) or between political and tribal interests in Libya (Tabib 2014).

> **Box 1: Syria** – **from conventional political unrest to unconventional civil war**
> The Syrian crisis started as one of the offshoots of the Arab Spring, with peaceful civic protests against an authoritarian regime. An economic crisis had caused the erosion of social safety-nets and the development of inequalities in Syrian society, limiting the measure of legitimacy required by the coercive regime to maintain social order.
>
> The regime's militarised response to emerging civic dissent drove a hesitant population to take up arms. Initially they used hunting weapons and personal weapons, but gradually they accessed military-grade armaments through local operations and financing. The country fractured into multiple territories, each with its own dynamics and actors. In the process, the patronage networks used by the regime became stronger and more autonomous. But as the cost of sustaining the military effort rose, the relevance of international financing increased, with the different local rebel outfits reaching out to their own external sources. Radical Islamist groups in particular found munificent international patrons.
>
> In addition, both insurgents and government forces used other resources, such as smuggling archaeological artefacts, drugs and oil, and kidnapping and looting. Their engagement in the illicit trade was gradual and could be explained in terms of the need to fund insurgent activity, but with time some of these operations became ends in themselves. A new range of spoilers now have a stake in a war economy that is sustained by profit made by overpricing goods due to increased commercial risk, and warlords sustain violence to the point that benefits their stake. This makes the war economy one of the obstacles to the peace process in Syria (Hallaj 2015).

That such diverse forms of violence are subsumed under a generic distinction between *conventional* and *non-conventional* is no coincidence. The international community's lens on these phenomena derives primarily from its attention to inter-state and civil wars. Their view is framed by international conventions that define and norm the phenomena according to a specific set of categories and actors. These conventions constitute the basis of the conceptual and operational framework through which the international community approaches issues of violence (Hellestveit 2015). Within this framework, developed between the end of the Second World War and the end of the Cold War, attention to armed conflict and violence has to do with issues of contested state sovereignty, i.e. conflicts between states, or struggles between conflicting parties to gain political control of a state. Violence is a function of these inter-national or intra-national political conflicts; its motivation is political, as are its results. Violence not guided by such motivations receives scant attention and tends to be considered as 'communal' or 'criminal', with limited – if any – international implications and impact.

With the decline of global strategic confrontations associated with the demise of the Cold War, the international community began to realise that most of the remaining or emerging conflicts did not conform to the conventional paradigm. Initially, the perception prevailed that it was a new scenario characterised by an increase in the number of internal armed conflicts (David 1997), by a senseless and more cruel use of violence (Kaplan 1994), and by the absence of a global logic to emerging conflicts (Anderson 1992). However, evidence indicates that there has been a decrease in the number of internal armed conflicts (Human Security Research Group 2014), and that the essential nature of violence in 'old' and 'new' internal conflicts has not changed (Kalyvas 2011), though new forms of armed violence are emerging in new contexts (Schultze-Kraft/Hinkle 2014). The perception of a 'world disorder' seemed to be more the result of the disappearance of the Cold War as the organising paradigm of international relations than of a change in the dynamics of internal conflicts.

It has also become evident that the frontiers between different categories of violent phenomena – such as the distinction between war (violence between states or organised political groups for political motives), organised crime (violence undertaken by privately organised groups for private purposes, usually financial gain), and large-scale violation of human rights (violence undertaken by states or organised groups against individuals) are becoming blurred (Kaldor 2001). Again, in Syria all these categories converge in what is a

progressively internationalised civil war, while the Salvadoran cycle of youth gang violence and "Iron Fist" governmental response (see Graph 1, page 15) does not really fit the scale.

Moreover, the realisation that violence was threatening important interests of the international community in "post-conflict" or "no conflict" scenarios has led to a conceptual and policy shift in international perspectives on conflict and violence, de-coupling the conventional "violence in conflict" focus and thus enabling attention to violence in itself. A first step in this direction came with the shift from the conventional state-centric and militarised international security paradigm of Westphalian origin to a "human" or "democratic" security concept that made the well-being of the population the basis and ultimate goal of national and international security (Somavía/Insulza 1990; UNDP 1994; Arévalo de León 2002). This was followed by the realisation that conflict and violence were, in turn, posing serious risks to human development and post-conflict reconstruction goals, examples being when more young men died in El Salvador as a result of gang warfare than during the internal conflict, or when stabilisation and development efforts in Guinea-Bissau are endangered by international drug gangs encroaching on its security apparatus.

Concerted efforts by international governmental and non-governmental organisations have generated solid data and analyses of the violence around the world and succeeded in placing the issue on the international policy agenda. As early as 1996, the World Health Organisation declared violence to be a global public health problem and launched a campaign to mobilise public action toward the prevention of personal, interpersonal and collective violence. As part of the campaign, a landmark report on violence and prevention was published (Krug et al. 2002). The Geneva Declaration (2008, 2011, 2015) evidenced that less than 15 per cent of violent deaths in a given year were directly attributable to armed conflict, but that the majority of non-conflict violent deaths were taking place in a relatively small number of violent countries. This trend was confirmed in another quantitative analysis, the Global Peace Index 2015 (Institute for Economics and Peace 2015). The "Conflict, Security and Development" Report of the World Bank (2011a, 2) epitomised this emerging trend by indicating that 25 per cent of the world's population lived in conditions of long-term violence, "in fragile or conflict-affected states or in countries with very high levels of criminal violence ... that ... do not fit neatly either into 'war' or 'peace' or into 'criminal violence' or 'political violence'". Instead it recognised a mixed set of conditions (i.e. governance problems, growing inequality, crime, environmental degradation) that lie at the root of conflict and violence. The report showed that countries exposed to violence and conflict are less likely to meet development needs and achieve programmatic development targets such as those established in the Millennium Development Goals (World Bank 2011a).

Only then did the international community – and the peacebuilding field amongst it – start to pay attention to violent contexts that had no direct link to political conflict, such as organised crime in Brazilian favelas, or where violence could not be explained as a direct derivate of previous political conflict, e.g. in Honduras.

In turn, scholars have come up with a range of categorisations to make sense of the various forms of violence in contemporary societies. For example, the Crisis States Centre of the London School of Economics distinguishes three types of violent conflicts: *sovereign conflict*, in which organised violence takes place with international state involvement; *civil conflict*, in which organised violence is waged between military groups within sovereign boundaries; and the non-conventional category of *civic conflict*, in which violence is the reactive expression of grieved urban populations against the state or against other urban actors (Beall/Goodfellow/Rodgers 2011). A similar categorisation has been established by the Human Security Report Project of Simon Fraser University for its periodic analysis of conflict trends around the world: *state-based conflicts* are international and national armed conflicts in which at least one of the parties is the government of a state; *non-state armed conflict* refers to fighting between two groups, neither of which is the government of a state; and *one-sided violence* refers to targeted attacks on unarmed civilians (Human Security Research Group 2014).

2.2.2 An agency approach: perpetrators and those affected

As defined earlier, non-conventional forms of violence are perpetrated by actors other than parties to a conventional armed conflict. Paramilitaries and vigilantes, youth gangs and transnational drug cartels, pirates and terrorists are among the actors who, both in conflict and non-conflict contexts, in different continents and with different socio-economic, cultural and political profiles, become agents of violence in their societies.

In terms of categorisation, Mary Kaldor (2001) describes the new conflicts as being waged by a mix of traditional state bureaucrats and politically-oriented actors, along with non-state actors such as criminal groups, tribal leaders and social outcasts. From a legal perspective, Cecilie Hellestveit (2015) distinguishes between *tribes* (customary structures of social authority that can become involved in violent conflict against other social groups or against the state), *thugs* (the different local, national and transnational expressions of organised crime) and *terrorists* (non-state groups that use politically motivated violence against non-military targets inside of formal conflicts – such as Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria – or outside of them, such as Al Qaeda in Europe). James Cockayne (2013) distinguishes between different types of criminal entrepreneurs: *warlords* (pre-modern criminal chieftains), *mafia* (criminal networks embedded in the population and the state); *terrorists* (groups using the streets for military confrontation), *blue ocean* (criminal groups that through displacement come to settle in uncontrolled territories); and *joint ventures* (in which mafias encroach on government structures).

It is also worth noting that the dichotomous distinctions between parties in a conflict that forms the basis of international legal approaches to the protection of victims of armed violence – humanitarian law and human rights law – do not function in contexts where violence is inflicted by one actor against a collective that neither socially nor legally constitutes a party (Hellestveit 2015). Violence against unarmed populations by drug cartels in Mexico or by Islamist radicals in Nigeria (ICG 2014) does not respond to the traditional logic of adversarial parties confronting each other through violence, as the violence is unilateral and – from the perspective of its victims – unwarranted.

Nevertheless, large-scale, non-conflict violence threatens not only the well-being and the security of the population of afflicted countries, regions or cities. It can also threaten conventional international security interests by creating conditions that criminal and political actors can use in the context of illicit transnational flows, e.g. of drugs, arms, people or money. Social actors such as organised crime groups, youth gangs and paramilitary groups of tribal or political orientation all use violence to attain their non-conventional goals. Their tactics foster the corruption of state institutions, penetrate and weaken structures of authority and security, and prevent the sovereign control of national territory, allowing these actors to establish territorial and institutional havens that can be used by transnational networks of crime or terror. The concepts of "ungoverned territories", "insecurity pockets" and "hollowed-out states", all reflect the security concerns of an international community that sees non-conflict violence as a source of risk to the international system and to the security interests of peaceful nations.

2.2.3 Motivations and factors leading to armed social violence

What factors and motivations are at play? In the immediate post-Cold War era, different schools of thought began to emerge in the scholarly community, proposing alternative explanations to the ideological/ political rationale for remaining or emergent conflicts. Those emphasising *vertical inequality* pointed to the presence of economic gaps between social groups or regions within a polity, and to their associated grievances, as the factor motivating disenfranchised sectors to rebel against authority or privileged social groups (Auvinen/Nafzinger 1999; Hirschleifer 1994). Some pointed to *horizontal inequality* – "inequalities in economic, social or political dimensions or cultural status between culturally defined groups" (Stewart 2008b, 3) – as the source of armed confrontation (Stewart 2008a; Ostby 2008). Finally, some suggested the key motivating factor behind armed conflict was not grievances but sheer greed – the possibility of

making a profit through engagement in violent conflict, even when it was tactically disguised in grievance justifications (Collier/Hoeffler 2004; Berdal/Malone 2000).

But it soon became evident that monocausal explanations were insufficient: different conflicts were driven by different causal factors. Also, in some conflicts, actors were driven by more than one set of motivations, and both actors and motivations could change as conflicts developed over time.[2] Ideologically motivated guerrillas in Colombia entered into tactical arrangements with drug cartels and later themselves became involved in illicit trafficking – of drugs, minerals and precious stones (Felbab-Brown 2005). In Syria today, political motivations driving the internationalised civil war are entangled with ethno-religious affiliations and war economy incentives (see Box 1, page 6). Ethnic agendas are also driving a civil war between former political allies in South Sudan (ICG 2014a).

On the subject of Latin America, Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt (2004, 6) underline the "de-facto coexistence of formal constitutionalism, (electoral) democracy and an often vibrant civil society [with] the use of force to stake out power domains or pursue economic or political interest", indicating the coexistence of parallel and contradictory logics and behaviours in society. Clear-cut distinctions and easy categorisations have become elusive, and each context seems to generate its own peculiar mix of actors and factors. It is a realm of "hybrid" conflicts in terms of the mix between conventional and non-conventional features.

2.3 Disciplinary lenses: insights into urban violence and organised crime

The explosion of social violence in large cities and the surge in transnational organised crime around the world over past decades have generated two distinct policy research fields. These are not the only expressions of social armed violence – ethnic-based and religious-based inter-communal violence are but two others. Yet their growth, and with it the extent of their social and political impact, have turned them into prominent areas of policy concern and exploration.

2.3.1 Urban social violence

Most countries of the Global South are undergoing processes of intense urbanisation (Muggah 2012). Cities are magnets that lure an often destitute rural population with the illusion of work and welfare, creating urban concentrations marked by "heterogeneity, density and compressed inequality" (Beall/Goodfellow/ Rodgers 2011, 7) in contexts with depleted institutional capacities to manage and respond to the resulting social demand. In such contexts, civic conflicts – crime, gang warfare, sectarian riots and terrorism – are reactive expressions of the frustration and grievances some social actors hold against the state or other social actors (ibid.). There is sufficient evidence to establish a causal relationship between rapid urbanisation and inequality as predictors of violence, but more research is needed into the impact of other factors such as poverty and population density (Muggah 2012). Violence associated with criminality is fostered by the erosion of social cohesion (Mathéy/Matuk 2015), generating a symbiotic relationship between conflict and violence expressed not only in the violent agent – the gang, the criminals, the drug cartels – but also in community responses to the threat, such as vigilantism and lynching (Moser/McIlwaine 2014). The lack of attention and adequate policy responses to emerging urban frustration and grievances in post-conflict countries results in the emergence of civic conflicts even in cities that during the conflict were peaceful refuges for those escaping violent rural areas (Beall/Goodfellow/Rodgers 2011).

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2   The debate focused on the reductionist perspective of Paul Collier and the "greed" approach, according to which any grievance (economic, political, religious, ethnic, etc.) is a mere cover for profiteering (Bensted 2011; Nathan 2008; Keen 2012).

Most importantly, urban violence is not a community or municipal problem but a national one. Given the proximity between state institutions and urban populations, and the political importance of cities in national contexts, the impact of armed social violence is not restricted to the affected communities but extends to the state itself. The scope of the problem, and the way it is handled, can erode or consolidate emerging or fragile state institutions, a phenomenon particularly acute in post-conflict settings. Urban violence by martial arts gangs in Timor-Leste after the withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping force in 2005 threatened to undo what at the time had been declared a success story of post-conflict reconstruction and led to a renewed intervention (UNMIT 2012; see Box 2). The *Mano Dura* ("Iron Fist") state response to youth gang violence in El Salvador relies exclusively on repression, incarceration, and the criminalisation of marginalised youth; it has jeopardised efforts to consolidate democratic institutions in the wake of peace agreements (Cruz 2010). Similar state responses in Mexico (Osorio 2015), Brazil and South Africa (Muggah 2012) are also affecting non-conflict countries that have seemingly solid state institutions.

Box 2: Martial arts groups in Timor-Leste

The post-independence period in Timor-Leste was characterised by the violent actions of martial arts groups and paramilitaries. The violence unleashed in the capital and rural areas by the crisis of April and May 2006, resulting in the destruction of up to 6,000 houses and the displacement of over 140,000 people, demonstrated the destructive potential of these groups.

Clandestine resistance groups created during the Indonesian colonial period evolved into a heterogeneous multitude of collectives, including disaffected veterans, illegal groups, political fronts, martial arts groups, village-based gangs, youth collectives and security organisations. Social tensions in Timorese society, and the weakness of the state and its institutions after the end of the Indonesian occupation, were the main drivers of the gangs' diversification. High unemployment drove their proliferation in the post-conflict context, with about one-third of Dili's labour force aged 25–29 unemployed or no longer actively seeking employment, rates that rose to 50 percent in the 20–24 age group and 60 percent among male teenagers.

While martial arts groups, youth gangs and paramilitary leaders generally denied their political affiliations, informal and highly fluid links between politicians and these different groups existed. Factors influencing the likelihood of group violence were diverse, including pre-existing conflicts and revenge killings among ethnic groups for grievances that went back decades, property disputes, systemic unemployment, political grievances, turf rivalries, predatory crime and self-defence.

Although in some cases local martial arts groups became problematic due to their extortion of local businesses, drinking and violent acts, in many cases they were accepted as part of the community and could even play authority roles such as that of village chiefs. Small-scale extortion became the main source of income for most gangs, though increasingly they started to integrate with organised crime groups, including Indonesian and Chinese mainland groups.

In 2013 the government decided to ban three of the major martial arts groups in order to restore public order. As a result, martial arts-related violence has decreased, but incidents of youth violence have continued to occur countrywide. The ban has failed to address the root cause of violence and has further excluded youth from participating in the development process of the country (TLAVA 2009; CEPAD 2015).

2.3.2 Organised crime

Growing international interest in organised crime is the result of recently heightened awareness of its corrosive effect on statebuilding and development efforts. Large-scale violence by organised crime threatens the well-being of the population in both post-conflict and non-conflict contexts: communities become targets of violence and a source of revenue for criminal networks, and violence prevents development

efforts from bearing fruit. In addition, violent contexts erode social capital. They inhibit the capacity for constructive collective action and weaken the link between the population and state institutions, which are perceived as incapable of providing protection (World Bank 2011a; Banfield 2014).

Furthermore, organised crime threatens local and national governance institutions by directly encroaching on them at the local or national level as part of its business strategy to foster conditions favourable to their particular criminal enterprise. Crime is a phenomenon that festers in social contexts marked by socio-economic exclusion. It is often a survival strategy in the absence of alternative livelihoods, but it requires an entrepreneurial effort to structure it as an organised outfit. Organised crime emerges in the nexus between crime, state and society. It adapts to the surrounding social and institutional environments in ways that impact on political and social life, e.g. by delegitimising state institutions, weakening the rule of law, fostering institutional corruption, instilling mistrust and fear in society, and entrenching social violence. Globalisation has added an additional layer of complexity to these processes by generating transnational illicit networks of narcotics, people, arms, protected species, etc. These place stress on state institutions and society from the outside in, and from the inside they project the impact of criminal networks outwards beyond national frontiers (Cockayne 2011; Banfield 2014; World Bank 2011a; Shirk/Wallman 2015; Kemp/Shaw/Boutellis 2013).

National and international criminal networks assume different violent strategies vis-à-vis society and the state. Adopting *predatory strategies*, they use violence to foster insecurity in the population and inhibit the development of licit livelihoods in favour of illicit ones. *Parasitic strategies* employ violence to shield illicit patronage networks from interference by state institutions and community efforts. *Symbiotic strategies* involve the penetration of state institutions at national and local level as part of the criminal networks' efforts to shape and control illicit market conditions to the point at which the state responds mostly to the interests of these networks. Under such conditions, the sovereignty principle of international relations can actually shield criminal structures, deterring effective international interventions (Cockayne 2011; Banfield 2014; Briscoe 2013; World Bank 2011a).

Moreover, in some instances organised crime can constitute illiberal governance structures, assuming direct control over the population through coercive methods, either as an alternative to an absent state – such as smugglers in the Sahel – or as a parallel authority that competes with official institutions – for example, when taxes are levied through extortion by youth gangs in Guatemala City neighbourhoods (Levenson 2013). In such contexts, criminal networks might develop bonds with the population, providing social services, job opportunities and security against petty crime, thus fostering the development of "perverse social capital". This is the case, for example, with criminal role models and youth socialisation patterns in Antioquia, Colombia (Rubio 1997). Each case of organised crime responds to its own cultural and social context, meaning that criminal configurations are multiple and varied, though those involved in large-scale violence share some common characteristics (Briscoe 2013):

≡ organisational structures that follow a network logic,
≡ transnational connections to varying degrees,
≡ full integration of violence into their modus operandi, and
≡ a capacity to operate at a distance from formal political authority.

Box 3: Drug trafficking and the state in Guinea-Bissau

When Guinea-Bissau, one of the poorest countries in the world, and one with fragile political institutions, was going through an economic and political crisis in the early 2000s, changes were taking place in the global cocaine trade. A combination of successful interdiction and enforcement efforts in the Caribbean and an increase in cocaine consumption in Europe led Latin American drug traffickers to search for new ways to reach an increasingly profitable market.

By 2012, an increasing proportion of all cocaine bound for Europe was passing through Guinea-Bissau. The country became the most prominent front door for drug trafficking in Africa; once in its territory, drugs move in multiple directions. The most common route out of the country has been through northern Senegal to Mali and Niger and on to Libya and Egypt in trucks. In the context of the chaos created by the 2012 coup d'état, a number of illicit actors strengthened their control over drug trafficking. Alliances within the political-military and business elites were consolidated, and political institutions were used to cover and foster the illicit traffic. Although the extent of the impact of the drug trafficking on the internal political situation is being disputed, Guinea-Bissau was transformed from a simple stopover to an operational location for increasingly powerful criminal groups with an overwhelming interest in ensuring that drugs are delivered onwards, impacting on the regional level (Kemp/Shaw/Boutellis 2013; Voz di Paz/Interpeace 2010; Voz di Paz 2015; Noticias on line 2014).

2.4 Commonalities between all types of armed social violence

Despite numerous attempts to categorise the various types, actors and factors of conventional and unconventional violence, the fact is that "there is no 'grand theory' of contemporary forms of armed conflict and (organised) violence, and it does not seem likely that there will be one" (Schultze-Kraft/Hinckle 2014, 10). Categorisations, such as the distinction between different levels of organised crime established in the United Nations 2000 Palermo Convention, might facilitate policy-specific interventions to guide international law-and-order initiatives. However, they fail to capture the multiple factors and angles of each individual case and to integrate them into a coherent interpretive framework that sufficiently explains the relationship between specific expressions of violence in their socio-political context. The problem is that the mix of actors, motivations and agendas in each context renders taxonomic classifications tentative and partial. What outsiders understand as a phenomenon common to a group of countries might present contextual variations that make aggregation into a single category only partially useful. Such is the case with the youth gangs in Central America, where apparent similitudes of origin, structure and identity belie a dynamic that is unique to each country in terms of the interactions between the gangs, the state and communities (Savenije 2007; Tager 2012).

More than an elusive universal taxonomy or pragmatic sector-specific categorisations, a deepened understanding of key characteristics of armed social violence could provide a useful basis for designing policy approaches and operational strategies . In over two decades of work, researchers and practitioners in the development, security and, more recently, peacebuilding communities have refined the identification of some key characteristics based on the combination of specific case studies and comparative research.

In essence, all instances of armed social violence are both political and systemic. Firstly, a shared characteristic of conventional and non-conventional conflicts is that in both contexts, violent actors challenge the state monopoly of coercive power, whether intentionally or not (Policzer 2005). Their capacity to use violence is based on the inability of the state to exercise the monopoly over the means of coercion inherent to the Westphalian state paradigm. This is evident in the case of conventional violence, in which politically oriented groups wrestle the control of political institutions and territory from the state, but it applies as well to tribes and thugs who thrive due to the incapacity or unwillingness of state institutions to concentrate resources of violence in the hands of national or local bureaucracies. This

implies that armed social violence is always political, if not in its motivations and goals, then certainly in the conditions that explain its occurrence, as well as in its consequences and impacts.

Secondly, violence is systemic in the sense that violent phenomena and violent actors are an integral part of socio-political systems. In these systems, a multiplicity of factors and their interactions determine the development of violent dynamics in the different social realms – individual, interpersonal and collective, public and private, urban and rural, social and political, etc. (Krug et al. 2002). Each of the many factors that interact in a violent context can change, and its variation will have a concrete impact on the others, thus generating continuous changes in the system. Given the multiplicity of factors, the result is a non-linear social system that does not respond to simple cause-and-effect logic and that as a result becomes rather unpredictable (Adams 2014; de Coning 2013; Krug et al. 2002). Different aspects of its systemic nature are:

≡ **the complexity of the interactions.** From their initial adoption of monocausal conceptual frameworks for explaining conflict and violence, usually followed by siloed approaches based upon organisational mandates, international actors have come to understand that violent contexts are the result of multiple interactions that take place between a range of factors at different levels and that transform and adapt to each other over time (Briscoe 2013; Schultze-Kraft/Hinckle 2014). Economic conditions such as poverty and inequality interact with social exclusion based on ethnic, religious, class or territorial criteria, and all of these factors generate local and national dynamics that are continuously interacting with international processes, affecting and being affected by them (World Bank 2011a).

≡ **the porosity between the different factors and realms involved.** Hybridity is possible because boundaries between different social, economic and political realms are not clear-cut, obscuring the distinctions between political, economic and criminal agendas or between the actors driving them. Cooperation between conventional power contenders (non-state actors with political agendas), criminal networks (national and transnational drug cartels) and social violence actors (gangs or militias) results in a hybridity expressed in the methods, composition and motivations of violent actors in each context (Planta/Dudouet 2015). Thus, the range of violent contexts and actors covered by the generic qualifier of "non-conventional" defy the conceptual and operational categories established for international and civil wars in a variety of ways (Policzer 2005).

≡ **the multiple expressions of violence in the different social realms.** Violence is an attitude towards the instrumental or expressive use of force that permeates a social system. It is used by social actors in different realms and in different ways, and it is reproduced in society through a range of social mechanisms at the macro and micro levels: institutions, norms, behaviour and attitudes (Ray 2011). Therefore, while short-term positive outcomes may be gained by focusing narrowly on one specific form of violence without understanding its interactions with other forms of violence, this will not sufficiently address the problem of violence overall; consequently, it will be unsustainable.

≡ **the possible entrenchment of violence in the system.** The term "chronic violence" characterises situations in which rates of violent death are at least twice the average rate of those in countries with a similar average income, where these levels are sustained for five years or more, and where frequent acts of violence – not necessarily resulting in death – are recorded across several socialisation spaces, including the household, the neighbourhood and the school (Pearce 2007). In such contexts, violence becomes assimilated and tolerated, permeating social life and reproducing through social institutions, resulting in widespread social and psychosocial trauma (Adams 2014).

≡ **the context-specific spatial distribution of violence.** Some social or geographical "pockets" can be more afflicted by violence than their surrounding groups or territories. Honour killings in Germany are the result of cultural enclaves abiding by norms of honour and restitution; they subsist in the midst of a modern society (Ray 2011). Radical Islam affects mainly the northern states of Nigeria (ICG 2014b), and violence in Port au Prince is predominantly concentrated in its slums (Dziedzic/Perito 2008). Spatial distribution, however, also refers to different patterns of violence in different spaces, as in the case

of gender-based violence, with male partner violence more prevalent in rural areas, while in urban settings male non-partner violence is prevalent (Moser/McIlwaine 2014).

Existing analyses on the phenomena of urban social violence and organised crime thus point to a need for improved understanding of their complexity, to be gained by adopting a holistic approach. This means analysing not only the problem in itself, but also the ways in which it interacts with its wider social, economic and political context, including international actors, whose dynamics impinge upon the problem. A nuanced, contextual understanding of armed social violence can only be attained by taking into account the perspectives of all actors involved at both the national level (victims, perpetrators, state officials, civil society) and the international level (bilateral and multilateral agencies, INGOs). Such a considered understanding then forms the basis for effective analysis.

In particular, external factors matter. They should not be rendered invisible but be incorporated explicitly into the analysis. This is not just about the conditions that enable the internationalisation of local criminal activity through transnational networks and access to illicit markets, but also about the impact international actors can have on a problem. Externally driven interventions based on bilateral or multilateral interests and policies can have both positive and negative effects – as the "War on Drugs" has shown. They make international actors part of the local mix. The next section will describe a range of methods and tools offered by the peacebuilding approach advocated in this article. These can provide a deeper understanding of the actors of armed social violence, their relationships and motivations, and the factors and dynamics at play.

3 Policy responses to armed social violence: added value of a peacebuilding approach

Over the past few decades, national and international actors have addressed the emergence of armed social violence using a variety of methods anchored in traditional (hard) security and development approaches, often with limited success and sometimes with outright failure. In this section we first review some of the shortcomings of these approaches as identified in the academic and practitioner literature (3.1). We then discuss the added value that peacebuilding approaches can provide for the development of more effective policies (3.2). Finally, we address a few challenges and open issues still faced by the peacebuilding community, as well as key lessons learnt. The section closes with recommendations for the international community (3.3).

3.1 Security and development approaches

To date the international community has addressed the phenomenon of armed social violence primarily from two angles: security and development.

From a security perspective, initial efforts were based on "technical" law enforcement approaches. These were conceived as reactive strategies emphasising public order through policing, trials and incarceration. The limitations of these approaches soon became evident: the international War on Drugs strategy has had negative socio-economic and political impacts on countries of production and transit,

enhancing criminality and violence without controlling the illicit flow of narcotics. Incarceration and hard-line law-and-order strategies have been shown to exacerbate violence (Global Commission on Drug Policy 2014; Merino 2011; Cruz 2011).

Indeed, policing efforts that address social phenomena such as youth gangs and organised crime exclusively through violent repressive strategies do not work. In the best of cases, such strategies are not sustainable, merely displacing violence from one part of the city to another (Mathéy/Matuk 2015; Shirk/Wallman 2015). In the worst cases, the strategies themselves turn into drivers of violence, as armed social actors respond to state violence with more violence (Cruz 2011; Serrano 2012). In the absence of institutional solutions to violence, the population resorts to individual coping strategies that generate perverse social capital, undermining long-term prevention strategies either by fostering tolerance to violence and inhibiting collective responses, or by fostering violent collective behaviour as a form of self-help (Muggah 2012; World Bank 2011b).

Graph 1: The contrasting effect of operational strategies on violence: repressive vs. negotiated approaches to violence mitigation in El Salvador
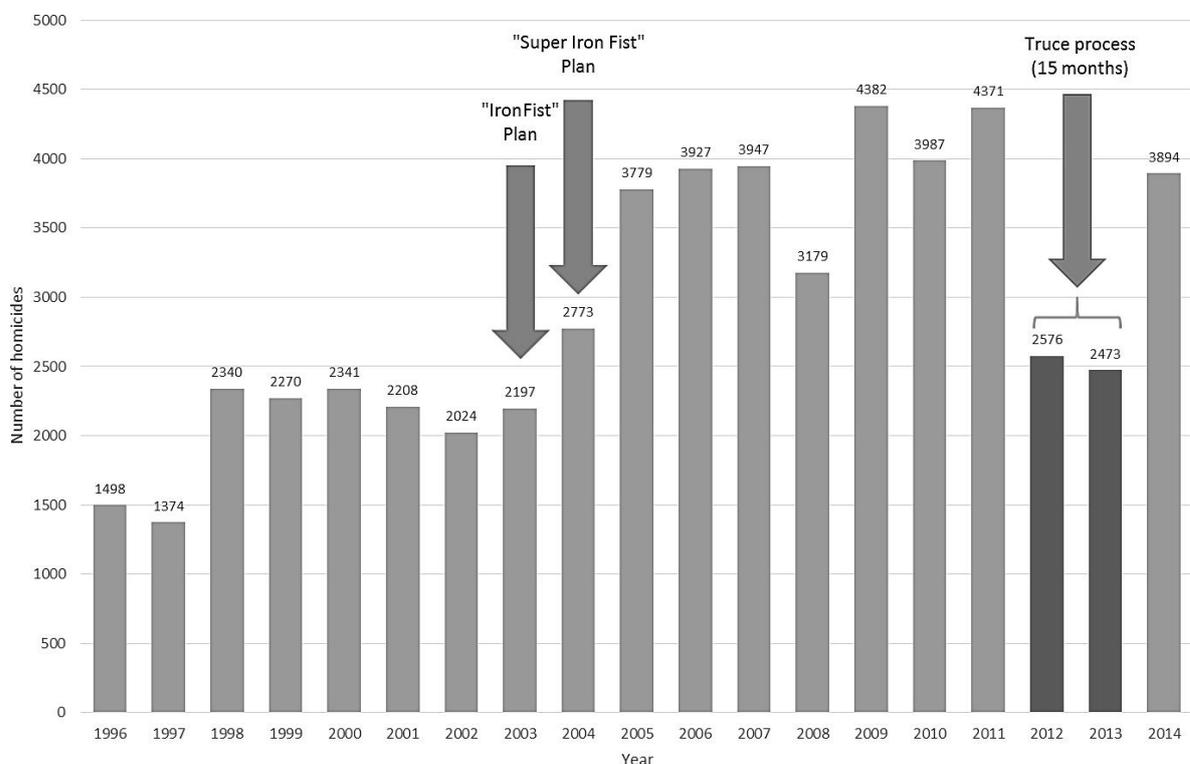
Total homicides per year 1996–2014. Source: Civil National Police, El Salvador

Policy approaches that focus on individual manifestations of violence are ineffective and do not contribute to an overall reduction of violence in society, especially if they are formulated in reaction to public perceptions based on sensationalism and exaggeration. Different expressions of violent cycles reinforce each other: repressive responses on the side of governmental agencies; violent imageries in society that foster self-help reactions such as vigilantism and lynching; domestic, gender and school violence that reinforces such violent imageries. All of them need to be addressed simultaneously and in a coordinated way in order to achieve effective and sustainable results.

From this perspective, violence prevention becomes a critical element in effective responses to violent contexts. For instance, the World Health Organisation's epidemiological approach to violence requires the identification of the different factors originating patterns of violent behaviour at the different levels –

individual, community and societal – and developing complementary interventions addressing each one of them.

Existing analysis thus suggests that law-and-order strategies focusing on policing, legal repression and incarceration cannot work unless they are complemented by development-oriented interventions addressing the structural conditions in which violence emerges and the social mechanisms through which it is reproduced at the macro and micro levels. However, while there is growing acceptance of the need to conceive complementary security and developmental interventions, reactive and siloed approaches are still prevalent due to funding patterns and organisational mandates (Global Commission on Drug Policy 2014; Banfield 2014; Santamaría 2014).

From a development perspective, most efforts have followed micro-level strategies. These approach the problem at a community level, working on specific factors and engaging civil society, such as in the successful implementations of epidemiological approaches in violent neighbourhoods of Chicago according to the Cure Violence model (Cure Violence 2015). Most of the time, these efforts do not address wider societal factors, creating at best small-scale success in "pockets of stability and peace" that fail to translate into systemic impact. Technical responses that address specific factors of a problem without considering its political dimensions do not work, because crime and violence exist as a function of state-society relations.

Although the threat posed by organised crime to post-conflict state-building efforts is already well known, it is still a secondary issue for interventions such as peacekeeping operations, which seek more to contain violence than to actually build peace (Cockayne 2011; Banfield 2014). The international "War on Drugs" is a good example of this: institutional interests and mandates generate narrow coalitions across the national-international divide that respond to often pre-cooked definitions of the problem and its solution. At the national level, formal policy formulation mechanisms rely on rigid institutional mandates and representation mechanisms, excluding critical stakeholders in society that do not hold any official function or formal position of authority but who nevertheless hold valuable insights, such as academic institutions, local NGOs, religious leaders and community activists.

3.2 A peacebuilding approach to holistic and inclusive intervention

Peacebuilding is a term of relatively recent coinage, created by the international community to identify a policy and operational approach with which to help countries escape the cycles of recurring conflict and build sustainable peace. While there are different interpretations of the term, often conflating it with peacemaking, peacekeeping or conflict resolution, there is convergence around the notion that it refers to the process of strengthening "local and national capacities for peace (values and attitudes; social processes and relationships; political and social institutions) necessary to incrementally and effectively overcome the dynamics of conflict that lead to polarisation, violence and destruction" (Interpeace 2015a, 2).

Peacebuilding is therefore about long-term, endogenous and holistic processes of conflict transformation that rest on two key principles. Firstly, peacebuilding strengthens endogenous social agency for peace through inclusive and participatory engagement of all stakeholders across social and political divides. Secondly, peacebuilding identifies collaborative strategies that simultaneously aim for the tangible outputs (political declarations, peace accords, adequate legislation, intelligent policies, well-equipped government offices, trained civil servants, etc.) and the intangible outcomes (trust between individuals and between groups in society, legitimacy of political institutions and processes, non-violent values, attitudes and behaviour) that underpin peaceful societies (Interpeace 2015a, 2015b). Peacebuilding is not about state-building, which usually defines international support for the replication of the institutional frameworks that reflect pre-defined Westphalian models. It is about state *formation*: about supporting the internal political and socio-economic processes through which nations endogenously develop their social

contracts, and the institutional frameworks and conceptual underpinnings that support healthy state-society relations (Boege et al. 2008; Vu 2010; Bliesemann de Guevara 2010, 2012; Interpeace 2015a).

It is only recently that the peacebuilding community has started engaging with issues of armed social violence such as organised crime or urban violence. Though peacebuilders have worked for a long time in contexts of both conventional and non-conventional violence, the fact that peacebuilding is part of the international peace-and-conflict continuum has limited its mandate and its toolbox to the traditional post-conflict reconstruction issues (Banfield 2014; Planta/Dudouet 2015). Most recent field experience has been in post-conflict societies, where through their ongoing presence, international and national peacebuilding and conflict resolution organisations have been able to witness the continuous morphing and transformation of conflict and violence, and the way in which the different social and political actors interact around it. Often they have reviewed their conceptual and operational frameworks of peacebuilding to adapt them to the emerging challenges identified in previous sections.

In the light of these challenges, the applicability of a peacebuilding approach to issues of armed social violence seems evident. As the policy focus has expanded from an initial interest in violence containment to a focus on violence mitigation and transformation, peacebuilding approaches can provide conceptual and operational frameworks that respond to the multiple complexities and nuances of large-scale social armed contexts.

In the following section we will outline the critical ways in which a peacebuilding approach can improve the processes and policies addressing armed social violence, grouping these into three interdependent themes: developing holistic and context-sensitive strategies of analysis and intervention (3.2.1), enabling intersectorial collaboration (3.2.2), and engaging with violent actors to support their constructive transformation (3.2.3).

3.2.1 Developing holistic and context-sensitive strategies

As mentioned above, international and national responses to armed social violence situations tend to follow sectorial mandates that ignore the systemic nature of the problem and therefore address it in fragmented and inadequate ways. Holistic strategies, however, are about processes of social change that require multiple mid- to long-term, simultaneous and consecutive conflict-sensitive interventions that have the flexibility to adapt to changing conditions over time. These responses need to be designed as multiple-entry-point initiatives that work across a range of policy arenas and address the diverse social, economic and political dimensions of crime and violence. Therefore, law enforcement plans, violence and crime prevention strategies, public health measures, social and economic development policies, and international security and diplomacy efforts – among others – should be conceived as complementary initiatives that respond to a systemic understanding of the problem and address it from different angles.

To this effect, time-bound project formats that are not embedded in a process logic will fail to deliver sustainable results. First it is vital to have a systemic and shared understanding of the situation. A peacebuilding approach may contribute significantly to developing holistic and integrated responses through the facilitation of constructive multi-stakeholder interaction in the analysis of the situation, as the base for the subsequent design of collaborative responses.

In terms of analysis, participatory methods combining research and dialogue – such as action research, participatory action research or grounded theory – can produce insightful understandings of complex realities and map systemic interactions and linkages. Actor/issue mapping tools such as stakeholder analysis, impact/influence grids or social network analysis also enable the identification of social relationships and interactions that cut across formal and institutional channels, fostering a more nuanced understanding of information, influence and power flows in a context. Moreover, heeding stakeholder definitions of causes, drivers and triggers of violence facilitates a systemic interpretation of the situation that prevents fragmented or siloed readings based on sectorial perspectives or institutional mandates.

Shared, robust theories of change developed through participatory approaches can serve as the basis of an integrated strategic framework that guides parallel and complementary sectorial interventions at the various local, national and international levels. Conflict-sensitive and "Do no Harm" approaches can provide parameters for humanitarian, security and developmental interventions that prevent sectorial operations from interacting negatively with the dynamics of violence in a given context. For instance, a shared police/community conceptual framework developed by the Unidades de Policía Pacificadora has enabled the implementation of complementary security and development interventions that have effectively mitigated violence in some of Rio de Janeiro's most violent favelas (Banfield 2014).

3.2.2 Enabling intersectorial collaboration

Violent contexts are characterised by trust gaps that inhibit constructive collaboration among social actors, between social actors and state agencies, and in some cases among different parts of the state itself. Spaces where these actors can converge are scarce, and "dialogic" traditions enabling direct communication are weak, if not inexistent. Creating bridges between the different social actors – community, civil society, state and international agencies – is a critical element in the development of effective and sustainable interventions.

Experience shows that *civil society and community organisations* such as churches, community associations, NGOs, academic centres and trade associations can fill the gap left by deficient state capacity and complement the state's efforts in the design and implementation of operational strategies addressing insecurity, crime and violence. Yet civil society should not be idealised: in hybrid contexts, what some authors call "uncivil society" – social "agents or groups that force their interests upon the public domain on the basis of coercion and violence" (Koonings/Kruijt 2004) – can be a source of violence. International cooperation dynamics can generate "client" civil society organisations that monopolise international-national interactions, obscuring and blocking access to more genuine representatives of social interests. But wherever care is taken to distinguish between uncivil and client civil society outfits, genuine civil society organisations can provide additional inroads into a problem, as they can more effectively reach out to illicit actors than governmental institutions, and they can engage non-conventional actors constructively in the search for creative solutions. Experiences in countries as different as Brazil, Haiti, Colombia, South Africa and El Salvador show the potential of community and civil society engagements to effectively address armed social violence.

For their part, *international actors* are also well placed to play an enabling and empowering role, supporting and facilitating coordination among all the different stakeholders. However, they should acknowledge that their interventions are neither neutral nor merely technical inasmuch as they respond to national or institutional interests. Their role should be discussed just as openly as that of any other stakeholder. That being said, external actors cannot be, in essence, builders, but they can be enablers. They might understand the conceptual need for bridging but can only do it by supporting local actors who understand the need and lead the process – and who have been working to reduce violence well before international peacebuilders arrive. Local actors do not necessarily conceptualise themselves as peacebuilders, defining their actions instead by referring to the local definition of the problem (democratisation, violence, human rights violations, conflict prevention and mediation, reconciliation, etc.) and by describing the use of dialogic tools for their peacebuilding objectives.

In short, intersectorial and multi-stakeholder collaboration lies at the heart of the peacebuilding approach to intervention, which aims both to promote a multi-perspective analysis and to forge a shared understanding of the situation, fostering collaborative engagement around common problems and shared goals amongst all actors. This is especially important where state and society are deeply divided. The process as such can constitute a confidence-building mechanism through which collaborative values, attitudes and behaviour are gradually developed.

These principles have been pioneered, for example, by the international organisation Interpeace in its various peacebuilding programmes in Central America. Interpeace seeks to bring relevant state agencies and social actors together around a policy development effort, mobilising stakeholders into constructive coalitions that enable collaborative action. In one case, a participatory research and dialogue process on resilience to environmental violent conflict has enabled representatives of the state and the private sector, as well as environmental and social activists, to converge around a strategy for collective preventive action in Guatemala (Interpeace 2015c). The dialogue and research project "Public Policies for the Prevention of Juvenile Violence" provides another illustration of state-society collaboration at the local, national and regional levels. This project has enabled the development of policy proposals in the seven countries of the Central American region, the adoption of official prevention strategies in several of them, and the creation of a regional intergovernmental body, the "Regional Commission for the Prevention of Juvenile Violence of the Central American Integration System" (SICA) (Interpeace et. al. 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c).

3.2.3 Reaching out to actors of armed social violence

While methodologies for engaging with parties to a conventional violent conflict are fairly well developed, this is not the case with those for working with non-conventional actors and large-scale armed social violence contexts, where the dysfunctionality of conventional dichotomies and legal/operational frameworks make it necessary to explore alternative avenues. Some initial experiences of engaging non-conventional actors in peace processes have been documented (Planta/Dudouet 2015), though these are still few and tentative, and they are taking place in the context of formidable legal and operational constraints.

The multi-stakeholder approaches described above might provide safe spaces at the local and community level for unofficial contact and informal communication channels between violent groups and community and state representatives, either through direct engagement with violent actors, or by engaging with their proxies. Such dialogic strategies ought to contribute to a better understanding of their needs and expectations, enabling the exploration of practical solutions to reduce the exposure of the population to armed social violence. Understanding the problem from the perspective of non-conventional actors also allows the identification of practical measures that enable them to opt-out of violent engagement. The stakeholders can be individuals, such as in the training and jobs schemes developed with the communities in the context of Rio de Janeiro's Unidades de Policía Pacificadora (UPP), which included a social development programme to complement the policing strategy (Banfield 2014). They can also be collective entities, as in the case of small economic enterprises run by the gangs and their families collectively, developed in El Salvador as part of the municipal "peace covenants" developed in the context of the youth gangs' truce (Interpeace 2014a).

Box 4: Using a peacebuilding approach to territorialising the truce in El Salvador

In March 2012, a truce between the two main warring youth gangs in El Salvador was facilitated by civil society activists with the discreet support of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In contrast to previous Iron Fist approaches, which tried to contain violence through repression and incarceration but merely exacerbated the problem, the truce succeeded in dramatically reducing the number of homicides (see Graph 1, page 15). A bipartisan group of mayors of cities highly affected by violence, such as Ilopango and Santa Tecla, decided to seize the opportunity and turn what was a national agreement between the warring youth gangs Mara Salvatrucha (MS) and Barrio 18 into an opportunity to effectively "pacify" their communities by mitigating armed violence. The decision by local authorities to explore alternative mechanisms to the failed repressive policies provided the mantle of legitimacy and public trust the process required, particularly considering that the legal framework criminalised not only violent acts but also gang membership itself.

The relationship between the youth gangs, the community and municipal authorities had been marked by years of violence, fear and repression. Huge mistrust existed between communities that had suffered the brunt of the gangs' violence, local authorities that felt besieged by criminal activity, and gangs that suffered the rejection and stigma generated by their activities. The truce provided an opportunity to engage with the gangs at the local level and break the cycle of violence.

Trained community mediators started exploring the expectations and needs of the gangs and the community, mobilising their will to engage in a collective violence reduction process. This enabled the youth gangs to ratify something that their national gang leaders had insisted upon, namely, that while they were willing to renounce violence in exchange for social inclusion and livelihoods, they be able to maintain their collective identity and organisation. This guided municipal authorities to explore economic opportunities enabling collective engagement by the gangs, such as poultry farms or food stalls in tourist areas. At the same time, arrangements between the community and the gangs made it possible to recover public spaces and eliminate the exposure of the population to everyday violence, through mechanisms that considered the territorial distribution of warring gangs. The result was the significant mitigation of violence in several communities and the development of a different relationship between gangs, communities and local authorities.

In setting up these arrangements it was crucial to regard the internal cohesion of the gangs as a resource that could be used in the context of a creative solution. Respecting their wish to maintain their collective identity enabled the exploration of alternative solutions for the gangs. This contrasts with traditional theories of change based on the principle that one has to bring youths out of the gangs to transform their attitudes and values. Such approaches have been proven ineffective in this context. Instead, bargains achieved with the *maras* (youth gangs) as groups, based on collective solutions, were more effective than previous efforts aimed at breaking up the groups and dispersing their members.

Notwithstanding the positive results at the local level, the persistence of a hostile environment at the national level risks making these achievements unsustainable. Incoherence and inconsistency within governmental agencies regarding their support for the process[3] has led to an unravelling of the truce. Recent legislation (August 2015) declaring youth gangs to be terrorist groups, and negative public opinion beyond the localities benefiting from the truce, are making it difficult for political figures such as mayors to sustain their commitment to the process (Interpeace 2014a, 2014b; Aguilar Umaña/Tager 2013; Argueta/Gálvez 2014).

3.3 Challenges and open questions

Three important challenges stand in the way of the effective implementation of peacebuilding strategies and approaches by the international community in situations of large-scale armed social violence.

3.3.1 Methodology

The first challenge relates to the necessity of adapting peacebuilding approaches and methodologies to armed social violence contexts, to guarantee both the security of participants and the effectiveness of the process. It has always been a fundamental tenet of peacebuilding practice to engage with spoilers, but inclusive and participatory instruments developed to this end were designed for contexts in which, although polarisation and mistrust among stakeholders continued, open violence had ceased. Using a

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3 The Salvadoran General Attorney and the National Civilian Police directly opposed "negotiating with criminals" and threatened to prosecute anyone doing so. Social support for the truce process was very low, and the media exacerbated the negative trend. The National Civilian Police harassed the gangs and provoked them into violent reaction. This made it difficult for gang leaders to sustain the commitment of rank-and-file members to the truce process, and it began to unravel. National authorities gradually dissociated themselves from the process, leaving the facilitators – and the negotiating gang leaders – without support.

peacebuilding approach in contexts where violence is current and the confrontation between different stakeholders is ongoing will require careful adaptation and innovative methods if an operational presence is to be established in an affected community or territory, violent spoilers are to be effectively engaged in a dialogic process, negotiable agendas identified for open discussion and confidence-building mechanisms developed to allow gradual progression.

A number of experiences have already provided valuable insights. In Colombia, NGOs working on violence prevention in afflicted communities have used ludic strategies such as art workshops, music festivals and street performances to establish a presence in communities afflicted by violence (CESUP 2014; Mincultura 2014). In Somalia, video screenings have been used as a mechanism to engage coastal communities in public discussions on the effect of community members' participation in piracy (Interpeace 2013). Participation by proxy has been used in the development of the municipal level pacification plans in El Salvador (Aguilar/Arévalo de León/Tager 2014; Interpeace 2016). There is, however, a need to systematise, share and develop these approaches.

3.3.2 Legal impediments

Although peacebuilding approaches might provide alternative ways of addressing problems of armed social violence from a methodological and strategic standpoint, national and international law-and-order policies and legal frameworks can make constructive engagement difficult or impossible. Active engagement in social and criminal violence place these actors beyond legality, and in some cases, any contact with them can be considered a criminal offence. Since in 2015 El Salvador declared youth gangs to be terrorist organisations, subjecting them to anti-terrorist legislation, international NGOs such as Interpeace have been forced to re-assess their programmes. Interpeace's recent activity in support of the territorialisation of peace at the municipal level (Interpeace 2014a, 2014b; Argueta/Gálvez 2014) might now be criminalised as provision of support to a terrorist organisation. There is a need to explore mechanisms that legitimise alternative peacebuilding approaches through legal frameworks and provisions, enabling them to operate in these legally complex contexts.

3.3.3 Financial and political constraints

Finally, there is a generic problem facing the peacebuilding community. The importance of peacebuilding as an effective framework for helping societies emerging from violent conflict to build sustainable peace is widely recognised, enshrined in political declarations and policy documents by the United Nations, the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development or the International Dialogue for Statebuilding and Peacebuilding, among others. Yet in terms of available financial and political resources, peacebuilding remains a "poor cousin" compared to the humanitarian, security and development sectors (Banfield 2014). Even when financial resources are available, peacebuilding frameworks and principles are not easily adopted by international institutions that operate mainly on the basis of narrow institutional mandates and interests. Their fixed operational frameworks respond more to international administrative cycles and needs than to the requirements of national state formation processes. Key principles of participatory approaches, such as local ownership and inclusivity, are more often preached than practised, pursued more in form than in substance and, whenever perceived necessary, readily sacrificed in the name of administrative expediency (de Coning 2013; Interpeace 2015b).

Without effectively adapting financial and operational frameworks so they can actually respond to the lofty peacebuilding principles regularly enshrined in international declarations, it will be difficult for international institutions to optimise the application of peacebuilding approaches in contexts of armed social violence. If they cannot facilitate the type of normative flexibility that makes it possible for mediation and peacemaking practitioners to engage illicit actors in dialogue without breaking the law, they will be subject to criminalisation and exposed to legal prosecution.

Box 5: Policy recommendations from a peacebuilding perspective

1. Prepare to stay put long-term … and invest: Peacebuilding is about accompaniment, not intervention, and there are no shortcuts to state-formation processes. Effectively addressing the systemic nature of armed social violence will require multiple interventions at different levels and moments of the socio-political process. The international community needs to be ready to commit for the long haul and accompany local stakeholders as their strategies and actions evolve along time.

2. Allow local leadership to emerge: Local ownership is about facilitating the emergence of local will and capacity to address the problems of violence in society, not about convincing local actors to adopt externally defined policies. The particular interests of international actors with regard to issues of armed social violence should be put on the table and openly discussed with local stakeholders. External input in the form of specialised know-how, comparative experiences and policy frameworks should be shared, without the development of locally defined and designed strategies being inhibited.

3. Foster the development of state-society coalitions: The development of concerted action between state and society is critical in terms of the need to both tap into capacities available on both sides of the state-society divide and address the deficits of trust and social cohesion that lie at the root of social violence problems. Anchoring peacebuilding strategies in wide social coalitions will enhance the viability and sustainability of the effort.

4. Invest in the strengthening of local analytical capacity: The most important capacity required for effectively addressing armed social problems resides not at the level of the international community, but within the societies facing these challenges. Strengthening research capacities in academic centres, think-tanks, NGOs and governmental institutions, and fostering collaborative engagement among them and with external capacities, will be critical in sustaining the will and the capacity of local stakeholders to assume leadership in such efforts.

5. Invest in the strengthening of local facilitation/mediation capacity: The success of peacebuilding strategies reaching out to engage violent actors in violence mitigation and transformation processes requires local expertise in the design and implementation of action research and dialogue processes. Fostering the development of such capacities in practitioners' networks will render these capacities more readily accessible.

6. Foster and reward experimentation: Peacebuilding engagement in armed social violence challenges is only just beginning, and there is a need to explore, adapt and innovate its strategic and methodological approaches to improve their effectiveness. The international community should encourage practitioners to leave their "comfort zone" and be responsibly daring in the development of strategies and instruments that better respond to the particular complexities of problems of armed social violence.

7. Review legal/operational frameworks: Traditional law-and-order and international security frameworks impose legal limitations on the type of contacts that are possible with violent actors that engage in criminal activity. These limitations inhibit the development of alternative strategies aimed at engaging these actors in violence mitigation and transformation. Strict prohibitions criminalising contact with criminal actors should be made flexible, and new normative frameworks should be developed to enable and protect peacebuilding practitioners.

4 Concluding reflections

The approaches to violence used by international actors in their interventions are rooted in their own understanding, experience and interpretation of violence, i.e. the way it works in the pacified societies they usually come from. This is also the understanding that is fed into the normative frameworks used by the international community. However, transposing these normative frameworks and functional assumptions to hybrid states can obscure the understanding of violence in a society: how it works, why it works, whom it benefits, what it means, why it matters. Without understanding the profile of violence in a society (i.e. the scope and intensity of its use, its meaning for local actors, and its functionality for socioeconomic and political life), it will be difficult to design effective strategies that can contribute towards its mitigation, transformation and eventual eradication.

Looking at the range of cases that fall within the categories of non-conventional conflict and armed social violence, the most striking conclusion is the sheer peculiarity of each and every situation. Therefore, the categorisation of contexts, actors and factors does not contribute much to operational effectiveness. It is true that all socially violent contexts share some characteristics such as complexity, porosity and hybridity, and that in every case the particular type of violence takes place in a sociopolitical nexus that is part of a historical state-formation process. Nevertheless it is difficult to use these commonalities as the starting point for developing substantive, disciplinary-based parameters that identify certain key areas which, when combined, can provide a holistic framework for intervention. A review of recent theoretical and practice-oriented literature reveals that violence is systemic in nature but unique in its expression: in each case, it is expressed through different phenomena and reproduced in different ways in the different realms of society. The components that need to be addressed in each case are context-dependent to the point where it is difficult to imagine generic strategies, even if some phenomena share basic similarities, as in the case of youth gangs in the northern triangle of Central America.

This does not mean, however, that the development of holistic, integrated approaches to armed social violence is not possible. Rather, it should not result from the use of generic top-down, outside-in, "prêt-a-porter" approaches imported by international organisations or agencies adhering to institutional mandates, interests and frameworks. Such holistic and integrated strategies can emerge from the systematic use of process-based and participatory approaches that engage local stakeholders in a collective exploration of the problem, the collective design of a strategic framework, and the collaborative and coordinated implementation of the different sectorial interventions necessary to address the problem in its multiple facets. In the case of the municipal efforts to free the town of Ilopango of youth-gang violence (see Box 4, page 19/20), for example, those involved included elected municipal authorities and local-level government officials, the local police force, community leaders such as priests, pastors and teachers, relatives and representatives of the youth gangs, local formal and informal business people, and community-level organisations, including cultural and sports clubs.

While there is indeed a critical need for the enhancement of data gathering and analytical capacity to better understand and address these complex contexts, it will not be centralised international outfits that make a difference in the tractability of organised crime and issues of youth gang violence in the field. The key factor will instead be to increase the analytical and operational capacity of local actors in state and society in such a way that they can strengthen their generic capacities for effective policy development and implementation while simultaneously developing ad-hoc strategies for addressing violence. The international community can play a critical role in providing support for the implementation of process-oriented peacebuilding approaches, as well as delivering the relevant technical assistance on the relevant issues, once these have been identified by the local stakeholders.

In an ideal context, a bottom-up, locally led process would be adopted by all stakeholders addressing large-scale violence issues, whether they do so from a development or security perspective. In this sequential process, stakeholders would aim to: (1) understand the problem at a societal level and map actors and

issues in it; (2) gather all the relevant state agencies and social actors for a multi-stakeholder analysis of the situation and the design of a holistic strategy; (3) design and implement corresponding responses that span across relevant policy areas and provide their own platforms for state-society collaboration.

The methodological approaches are already available. Methodologies for participatory actor and issue mapping could be combined with processes of multi-stakeholder conflict analysis that from the outset involve representatives of various state and civil society agencies and organisations. Within adequate dialogue frameworks this would facilitate the development of a holistic and accurate identification of gaps and opportunities. The relevant mix of sectorial interventions (law enforcement, urban renewal, anti-corruption and transparency, skills and jobs, trauma healing) would be defined by the nature of the problem. This mix would be developed using inclusive methods of participatory policy dialogue that have the ability to create strong sectorial coalitions for change across the state-society divides.

It is at this point that international experience, and sector-specific good practices and guidance, can be drawn upon, limiting the risk that externally induced definitions of the problem will undermine true local ownership of, and leadership over, the process. Bringing together the stakeholder definition of the problem with the relevant disciplinary "state of the art" – the accumulation of international best practice and experience in each relevant sectorial area – will enable participant stakeholders to identify context-relevant and technically savvy operational strategies that address the systemic nature of the problem. Finally, the international community can play a supportive role by fostering implementation arrangements (including collective monitoring and evaluation strategies) that respond to institutional pertinence and coordination, instead of relying on pre-defined institutional mandates, which are usually those of the leading international agencies and their local partners.

In less than ideal situations, where due to political, institutional or financial limitations it will be difficult to develop a comprehensive strategy at a "whole of society" level, the peacebuilding approaches described above can be scaled down to fit the relevant context, be it violence in a neighbourhood or a city, or a certain type of violence such as vigilantism and lynching, or custom-based forms of violence in cultural enclaves in modern societies. An inclusive and participatory multi-stakeholder process would provide a platform for state-society collaboration that can identify the systemic variables of the problem and the range of interventions necessary to address it. Effectively used, these interventions would become entry points into the larger issues, enabling the development of the institutional synergies and networks of actors that can facilitate subsequent uptake.

The main obstacle, however, is not methodological but political. A bottom-up, inside-out approach requires the adaptation of many of the administrative and operational frameworks through which the international community works. These include assumed notions of relative capacity – unspoken but nevertheless disseminated – that determine the shape of interventions on the ground, such as the notion that internationals "own" capacity and "share" it with locals. The international community needs to be ready to "walk the talk" of its peacebuilding policy declarations.

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The "Violence Turn" in
Peace Studies and Practice

Jenny Pearce

Content

1 Introduction

Bernardo Arévalo de León and Ana Glenda Tager have written a succinct and substantive article, which adds to evidence of a shift from the centrality of war and conflict (armed and non-armed) in the study and practice of peace, towards a focus on violence, or rather that aspect of violence the authors call "armed social violence". Violence, I argue, is the opposite of peace and this step towards recognising the wider expressions of violence is to be greatly welcomed. Violence is extensively studied, but in disciplinary silos. We lack a "converter" to enable us to interpret the learning from these various silos and to help us build new understandings of the varied mechanisms of violence reproduction and reduction. Despite nods to interdisciplinarity, academia reinforces the silos, while practice cannot easily embrace the complexity within and between each.

In my response to the lead article, I will follow its structure, initially by addressing the conceptual issue of why violence is best placed at the heart of peace thinking and peacebuilding and secondly, why this is so difficult to operationalise. In response to the conceptual challenges, I will argue that we need to build much greater sensitivity to the plurality of violences (see Box 1) and the feedback loops between them. Peace processes do not end violence, as the experiences of Guatemala and El Salvador illustrate (Pearce 2016). While the scale of collective and organised violence remains an urgent preoccupation, I argue that we also need to trace the way violence, as a phenomenon with multiple expressions, reproduces through time and space. Thus, while I applaud the widening of the field of peacebuilding to acknowledge the significance of armed social and criminal forms, this still limits our approach to violence. I argue that we need to understand violence as a phenomenon with its *own* distinctions and multiple expressions. Violence is not always armed. Operationalising the "violence turn" involves enhancing sensitivity to multiple violences in order to avoid reducing peacebuilding to an expanded but still restricted focus on selected expressions of violence which are categorised as either (armed) political or (armed) non-political. The dichotomy between social and political violence can be exaggerated, as acknowledged in the article, and this has implications for how we frame the *phenomenon of violence*. We need to understand why violence remains such a potent "language" or medium of communication in social *and* political realms. Violence reduction is a prolonged process which requires a multiplicity of actions across all the spaces of socialisation – from the intimate to the community as well as to the construction of the nation state itself (Pearce 2005). The connections between these are neither self-evident nor inevitable. When violence takes collective forms, its dangers will obviously multiply. However, our willingness to use violence in such forms does not spring from nowhere. Understanding violence as a phenomenon with its own distinctions is a critical task alongside the urgent efforts to deal with its everyday manifestations. This also has implications for building forms of security that do not produce more violence. Peacebuilding can delimit and prioritise its tasks, it will be argued, while remaining alert to the way violences reproduce and mutate in everyday lives, particularly in those of the poorest, as well as differentially across the domains of gender, generation and sexuality.

2 The "violence turn": conceptual issues

The lead article offers us a new concept of "armed social violence" to describe what the authors call an emerging global phenomenon. This phenomenon consists of the varied forms in which organised violence expresses itself, including in countries which have been involved in relatively successful peace processes. In other words, violence through trafficking drugs, arms, and/or people, through youth gangs and vigilante groups. The significance of the urban nature of much of this violence is highlighted in contrast to the predominantly rural theatres of historical inter-state and many civil wars. The influence of Latin America on these debates is no coincidence. Nine out of the ten most violent countries in the world today are calculated to be in Latin America (UNODC 2014; Igarape 2016). As the most urbanised region of the global South, with a prolonged history of wars, civil wars, military dictatorships, organised state repression, insurgencies, criminal and interpersonal and gendered violences, Latin America brings into sharp focus the way these "plural violences"[1] intersect and leave painful legacies on communities and society as a whole. Individual loss and trauma have social effects which can generate intergenerational transmission of violences (De Zulueta 2006). The idea of peace, therefore, requires us to understand the violences that are not necessarily organised, but nevertheless foster a capacity for the collective use of violence, such as in war.

Box 1: Plural violences

Why do we recognise some violences and not others? And why does this change over time? Rape in war, for instance, was only 'seen' after the rape of Bosnian women in the early 1990s. Yet it has been a practice in war for centuries. I would argue that the problem lies in the ring-fencing of certain acts of violence almost into a hierarchy of what, at any given moment, particular societies consider 'acceptable'. It is often social movements which have 'de-sanctioned' certain forms of violence, such as the movement which emerged in Delhi after the death of a victim of gang rape in 2012. Seeing violence in its multiple expressions enables us to explore questions about whether particular experiences of violence can lead to other violences (e.g. revenge killings). We can ask questions of childhood experiences of abuse and whether and in what contexts these might lead to violence against others in later life. Or is there a correlation between post-traumatic stress disorder from participation in war and acts of domestic violence in peace time? More than this, we can begin to see that violence has certain qualities as a phenomenon. One of these is the hurt inflicted on the body of the Other, either through specific physical acts or actions over time which generate harmful somatic effects through patterns of domination and humiliation between individuals. These effects might be physical and/or psychological. We then need to unpack the meanings within these acts and actions and/or the meanings they generate through performative messages of cruelty, for instance, aimed at controlling others through fear and terror.

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[1] Desmond Arias and Daniel Goldstein speak of "violent pluralism" to describe the way multiple violent actors operate within Latin American politics with varied and changing relationships to state institutions and political leaders (Arias/Goldstein 2010, 21). The idea of "plural violences" focuses attention on the acts and actions of violence rather than the actors (see Box 1).

2.1 The mutating violences of Medellín, Colombia

Experiences in Medellín, Colombia in the 1980s and 1990s – when the city was by far the most violent in the world, with a homicide rate of 381 per 100,000 people in 1991 (Melo 1995, quoted in Bedoya 2010, 95) – highlighted for me the notion of violence mutation and the complex blurring of boundaries between social and political violence. It is worth revisiting the case of Medellín briefly, as it is emblematic of the two arguments in the lead article by Arévalo de León and Tager: on the one hand, the specific contextual factors which generate violence and, on the other, the rise of armed social violence. It also reveals the intersections of multiple violences through space and time.

Following the civil war of the mid-twentieth century known as *La Violencia* (The Violence), displaced peasants built urban communities on the steep slopes above the Aburrá Valley, where Colombia's second city is located. They brought their experience of violence, yearnings for security and cultures of self-reliance to their new lives. They constructed houses, struggled for services and turned to their own for security in the absence of state provision. Medellín's poor neighbourhoods or *comunas* became sites with multiple social dynamics of increasing complexity during the 1970s and 1980s following the crisis in the textile industry and the steep rise in unemployment. Informality generated a form of violent entrepreneurship, epitomised by the trajectory of Pablo Escobar from petty car thief to head of the Medellín cartel. Escobar trained a generation of assassins amongst the teenage boys of the *comunas*. In the course of the 1980s, neighbourhood militias and insurgent militias (Bedoya 2010), linked specifically to the ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*) guerrilla group, established bases in some poor areas of the city. Homicides grew from the late 1970s and rocketed after the mid-1980s, when guns rather than knives became readily available. In the midst of the rise in criminal violences, 'social cleansing' assassinations of 'undesirables' appeared, of homosexuals, prostitutes and petty thieves, carried out by private right wing armed groups often with the involvement of the police. Human rights campaigners and social and political activists were also targeted.

In the 1990s, a new generation of drug traffickers emerged, collaborating with paramilitary forces now growing in strength and connected to the nation-wide struggle of the Colombian government against the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*), ELN and other guerrilla groups. Neighbourhoods were controlled by independent urban gangs or *combos*, sometimes collaborating with the paramilitary and sometimes defending their own territories and extortion rackets. Social intolerance killings continued. Violence against women and sexual abuse did not receive the same statistical attention as other violences, but was rampant. Towards the late 1990s, the violence became much more connected to the wider war, with the FARC establishing footholds in some of the *comunas,* notably c*omuna 13.* Meanwhile, organised crime had also transformed into what have been called "violence managing agencies" (Bedoya 2010). The *Oficina de Envigado* (the Envigado Office), for example, under its leader Don Berna, collaborated with the state to dislodge the FARC from *comuna 13.* When the paramilitary groups demobilised in 2005, the *Oficina* followed suit. While violence declined following the demobilisation process, when Don Berna was later extradited to the United States, the battle for control of his violent enterprise caused a new upsurge in violence in Medellín. Following this violent dispute, homicides once again began to fall and Medellín began to gain recognition for bringing its murder rate down to a high but, in historical terms, dramatically reduced rate. The year 2015 began with 32 murders, the lowest January figure in 35 years (Abello Colak/ Pearce 2015, 207).

However, extortion and abuse of all kinds continued in vulnerable neighbourhoods. Homicides were reduced but forced disappearances grew. What had changed, as I was told when visiting one of the *comunas* in April 2015, was that gangs had learnt that collaborating with the city's effort to reduce its murder rate enabled them to continue to exert territorial control with less interference. Permission to kill was needed from the gang leaders. However, mothers spoke of how the virginity of their daughters was being sold by violent entrepreneurs and extortion and daily loan scams still made life barely tolerable. Drugs were increasingly sold to the youth in the neighbourhood. Many talked of the infiltration into some *comunas* of a new generation of criminal bands, made up of former paramilitaries, of which the most powerful were the *Urabeños*. This group not only embedded themselves in urban neighbourhoods with a long history of

unrest, but also came to control cocaine trafficking routes to Holland, Spain and Belgium (InSight Crime 2016).

Over the decades, new expressions of Medellín's plural violences emerged as war, and criminal enterprise mutated. Homicide figures only partially reflect the evolution of these phenomena. This very brief overview shows how multiple violences are harnessed for social, political *and* economic goals. Their ebbs and flows respond to numerous factors, external and internal to their contexts. A multiplicity of actors was involved in Medellín – from state actors to youth gangs, to criminal syndicates and citizens themselves, only sharing the characteristic that the overwhelming majority were male.

Arguably, Medellín is an extreme case, but extreme cases can sometimes highlight aspects of the norm. It also exemplifies the trajectories of two distinct phenomena: criminality and violence. These are distinct in the sense that not all crime is violent and not all violence is considered criminal (e.g. UNODC 2014). This begs the question: what are the contexts and dynamics which cause violence to "go viral"? In asking the question, we do well to keep in mind what the lead authors highlight: the dangers of applying simplistically to other global regions the processes governing the concentration and containment of violence in Western European state formation.

2.2 The problem of violence

In the course of the 2000s, the "violence turn" has revealed more connections between violences and allowed us to ask new questions about the nature of contemporary lethality. The Global Burden of Armed Violence reports have taken what they call a "unified approach" to lethal violence where they take account of violent deaths from all sources: conflict, criminal and interpersonal (Geneva Declaration Secretariat 2011, 12). It is the logics and connections between these violences which remain under-studied.

Hence, we can follow the mutations of violence and criminality (of which armed social violence is evidently one) *or* we can begin to focus on the problem at their heart, which is not always measurable by counting bodies. This problem is that of violence itself. This is not the place to discuss this immensely complex topic but it will be covered in detail in a forthcoming book (Pearce 2017). The central thread for navigating the complexity is to recognise the way that violence affects our bodies, understood as mind as well as matter. Seeing it in terms of acts and actions of somatic harm can challenge the tendency to select which violences matter. We can focus instead on the meanings that are invested in such acts and actions, whether it be bullying at school, prolonged coercive control of women in their home, cruelty towards prisoners, etc. The social interactions and processes which turn the biological impulse for aggression into the cultural and social acts of hurting the body of the Other (and sometimes ourselves) can manifest themselves in any and every social space. While those of most concern at any point in history might involve the construction/destruction of nation states, we are now recognising that multiple violences in sub-national, particularly urban contexts also matter in terms of how the politics of state and nationhood unfold. At the same time, violence in homes, schools, streets and prisons also has an effect on violence reproduction and is accelerated by gender norms which make men 'more male' when they use violence (Pearce 2005). Hurting the body of the Other, it is argued, remains an immensely potent form for pursuing a range of goals but is also, at times, a goal in itself.

3 The "violence turn": operational challenges

Taking a new approach to which violences matter has opened up new possibilities for reflecting and acting on the sources of pain, trauma, insecurity and fear in our societies, in particular amongst the poorest. The poor suffer violences with greatest intensity. While the wealthy can pay for private security, live behind gates and use private transport and schools, the poor are exposed to ill-paid and often abusive state security, to warlords, drug traffickers, gangs, etc. The troubling question of our time is whether those who gain from this state of affairs and become rich by legal or illegal means have any incentive at all to adopt mechanisms aimed at reducing violence. Douglas North and his colleagues give a pessimistic interpretation. They argue that "natural states" or "limited access orders" are the "default social outcome" of historical responses to limiting human violence rather than "open access orders" (where, for instance, the rule of law, impersonal institutions and democratic forms of accountability are the norm). The latter emerged only some 200 years ago (North et al. 2009, 13) and the authors calculate that even today only 15 per cent of the world's population lives in open access orders.

I have myself argued that Latin America is on a course of "perverse state formation" in which the state is a source of violence reproduction rather than reduction (Pearce 2010). Elites in the region appear to have little incentive to invest in the rule of law, unless – as my own field research in Medellin, Colombia and Monterrey, Mexico shows – violence has a direct impact on their own bodies and those of their loved ones (through kidnapping, for instance) or on their ability to enjoy freely privileged personal lifestyles. It does not appear, in the early 21st century, that violence will be reduced globally through some inherent development of legitimate state monopolisation of the use of force alongside the rule of law (see also Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 3/4), despite the fact that Stephen Pinker identified this as one of his five factors to explain the decline in violence over time (Pinker 2011).

Action and agency are therefore required to generate new mechanisms to reduce violence and non-violent political dynamics which also address the political economy of criminality. In this context, what is the role of the policy, peacebuilding and practice communities that wish to act on armed violences? The authors of the 2011 Global Burden of Armed Violence report have argued that "convenient classifications and sharp distinctions *hinder* [my italics] our ability to develop effective practical and programmatic responses to armed violence in different settings" (Geneva Declaration Secretariat 2011, 15). They also argue that armed violence can have multiple and overlapping motives, it can change from one form to another over time, and it is rarely self-contained within a particular system of perpetrators, victims, survivors and conditions. There is, of course, a dilemma. Rigid frameworks and parameters around violence prevent us seeing all the violences that matter. However, without tight and specific guidelines, operationalising policy and practice in violent contexts becomes very difficult. Arévalo de León and Tager also argue for recognition of the multiple expressions of violence in different social realms but focus primarily on new forms of armed collective social violence. How, therefore, do we reconcile operationally the need to factor in the way violences interact over space and time with the need to focus on feasible and effective peacebuilding? We also face the problem that there is little research on such interaction at present. Those on the front line are in a position to gather evidence while seeking to act effectively as peacebuilders. However, if we begin to think in terms of plural violences, such front line community residents, researchers and acctivists might be encouraged to notice the extent to which individual experiences of intimate violences, for example, impact on collective participation in war and post-war violences.

Box 2: Everyday violences and co-constructing security from below: plural violences as a framework for practice

A plural violences perspective inductively constructs knowledge and practice together with those experiencing violence in everyday life. Without the knowledge that comes from lived experience of violences, we cannot understand how varied forms of violence impact on individuals and communities. This is particularly true in areas characterised by what I have called "chronic violence" (Pearce 2007; Adams 2014). Caroline Moser and Cathy McIlwaine (1999) recognised this in one of the early iterations of violence research through participatory methods. In Medellín, the Observatory of Human Security co-constructed a security agenda with community researchers, academics, NGOs and some individuals from the city administration. It began with building horizontal relationships in the *comunas* to give voice and agency to residents. Human Security was a term which resonated with people on the ground, as it did not require them to choose between the impacts of physical violence on their lives and those of unemployment, nutrition and shelter (Abello Colak/Pearce 2015). The methodology has also been used in some of the most violent *colonias* of Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Here, women living in the heartlands of armed groups gained a space as community researchers, exchanging experiences and highlighting the violences they are forced to navigate every day. A woman died every 13.8 hours in Honduras between 2005 and 2013, but in addition 27 per cent of Honduran women have reported experiencing some kind of physical violence at some point in their lives (Informe de Organizaciones Feministas de Honduras 2014). This violence cannot be explained purely in terms of domestic or criminal violence. Evidence suggests that women are killed because they are women, indicating a meaning-laden and meaning-generating component. This needs to be understood in the context of a country with one of the highest homicide rates in the world (UNODC 2014). From Medellín to Tegucigalpa, the kind of security the community researchers wanted to see would be an accessible public good, which *enabled* their participation so that they could express their various vulnerabilities and hold police as well as illegal armed actors to account.

I would argue that our first goal is to promote sensitivity to plural violences, and to recognise its spatial and temporal dimensions and flows. What kinds of acts and actions of somatic harm are present in particular spaces of socialisation and what are their mechanisms of reproduction over time? By asking the question, we at least begin to *see* the varied forms and contexts in which such acts and actions take place. The way to begin to generate this sensitivity is, I suggest, by working alongside those who experience everyday violences. Different policy and peacebuilding actors might work at different points on the spectrum of violences, with some focusing on its armed and collective expressions and others on its intimate and inter-personal kinds. However, the sensitivity grows by better understanding the feedback loops and their interconnections from the people who experience them directly. A second step is to work with those experiencing multiple forms of violence, to co-construct an agenda for security as a public good which is accessible to all, distributed equitably and does not generate more violence through the abusive behaviour of state agents, for example. This agenda would recognise not only the plural violences of everyday life, but also their differential impact on population groups, from young men, women and children, to gay, lesbian and transgender people, amongst others. I would therefore add to Box 5 of the lead article (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 22), an eighth recommendation: building security agendas capable of responding to the differentiated experience of the plural violences of everyday life.

Box 3: Bradford/UK: what builds a peaceful city?

Violence is a phenomenon of major concern not only in the global South, but in societies worldwide. In the United Kingdom, the 2001 Bradford riot, in which mostly Asian young men fought the police on the streets of this multi-ethnic city, is a case in point of how to understand and deal with violences in cities of the Global North.

In Bradford, a city of around 500,000 inhabitants in the former industrial centre of the UK, 21.09% of its population was of Asian heritage in 2010. The riot was provoked by far-right groups attempting to organise anti-immigrant marches. It included fighting on the streets and a number of arson attacks on businesses, and took place in July (two months before 9/11). The young male participants who took on the police, leaving 320 officers injured, did not, in subsequent interviews, talk of religion as a factor (Bujra/ Pearce 2011). Only later did some of those in prison turn more fervently to Islam.

The Bradford police learnt that building relationships with these young men and their communities was a far more sensible response than the everyday harassment and poor relationships which prefigured the riot. When another far-right group tried to provoke another riot in 2011, the communities, the local authorities, the University (through its Programme for a Peaceful City) and police, but also the former rioters themselves, had built much greater resilience to external threats. Problems of unemployment and marginality remain; drugs trafficking and interpersonal violences persist; policies towards the importance of community policing change. However, the post-riot responses in Bradford suggest that the solutions to violent threats lie in working respectfully with those most in danger of violent triggers to their frustrations and resentments against a society many feel has rejected them.

4 Conclusion

The "violence turn", as I call it, in peace and conflict studies has enabled us to recognise the complexity of violence in human interaction, and how the lens of inter- and intra-state armed conflict is only one of its variants. Arévalo de León and Tager have shown how this has begun to shift assumptions for practitioners and peacebuilders. They have emphasised the rise of armed social violence as one of the new variants of armed violence in the world today. This response to their article has suggested that we need to go even further in building sensitivities towards the nature of violence as a phenomenon and its multiple expressions. It has argued for new forms of interactions by researchers and practitioners with those who experience everyday violences, both to better understand their lived experience of the various mutations of violence and crime, but also in order to co-construct the kind of security that does not reproduce more violence.

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The (Not So) New Challenge of Responding to Armed Social Violence with Peacebuilding

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Content

1 Introduction

Reading the excellent article by Bernardo Arévalo de León and Ana Glenda Tager on armed social violence felt like a long walk in the mountains: challenging, invigorating – and definitely worth the effort. The three strands entwined in their rigorous discourse assert that armed social violence (including criminal and inter-communal violence) is a phenomenon distinct from conventional armed violence and different again from individual and terrorist violence – although they choose not to say much about these latter spheres. The second strand in their argument is that our developing field of peacebuilding has relevant experiences to offer to complement traditional criminal justice responses. Then they move to a call for a different strategic, systemic and operational response, one that fundamentally engages with the complex natures of social and conventional armed conflicts.

As an old timer with over twenty years of experience in the relatively new professional field of peacebuilding, I commend the authors for helping to bring to our sector more considered attention of such innovative practice. I agree with their main arguments; however, I question the premise of the relative "newness" of such engagement for the field. Both endogenous and international organisations focusing on preventing, ending and resolving violent conflicts have always been faced with complexities. The multiple and overlapping domains of violent conflict have long posed response and mandate challenges. How to better meet these challenges is indeed the prime operational task ahead.

In the next section of this response paper, I look back and test the assumption that the field did not engage with (or even actively avoided) these other overlapping spheres of violence, including the inter-communal and criminal. Then, in Section 3, I look forward and explore the outstanding challenges of working across our sectoral and professional boundaries. This involves, firstly, bridging security and peacebuilding actions as well as aligning international and domestic approaches into more coherent and deliberate responses to conflict. I will touch on just how overlapping the various types of armed violence – and the responses to them – are, cautioning against oversimplified distinctions and tactics. I will explore, thirdly, how we need to counter the inadvertent criminalisation of engaging with both criminal and conventional armed groups to prevent violence. I conclude with some reflections on how we can rise to the challenge of more inter-sectoral collaboration, learning and exchange in practice.

2 Remembering our history: know where we stand and stand there

Arévalo de León and Tager are quite right in saying that the peacebuilding community has historically sought to focus on responding to organised armed conflicts, paying particular attention to political violence and civil wars. In seeking to maintain that clarity of mission and mandate, sustained internal debates have taken place within every peacebuilding organisation about what should, and should not, fall within our remits – as Daniel Berrigan (1970) famously said: "Know where we stand and stand there."[1] But it is not entirely correct to say that "it is only recently that the peacebuilding community has started engaging with issues of armed social violence such as organised crime or urban violence" (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 17).

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[1] This was reportedly all of Daniel Berrigan's commencement speech at Xavier High School, New York City. See "Pax Christi pays tribute to Berrigan in NY", National Catholic Reporter, 20 February 2012 (https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/pax-christi-pays-tribute-berrigan-ny).

Here are some counter-examples: I began my work in this sector with International Alert (IA) in its first year in 1989. A focus on ending and preventing armed inter-communal violence was right at the heart of the organisation's new mandate. Its conceptual roots lay in defending human rights and preventing mass violence and genocide. "Ethnic violence" was the language we used, and we pursued programmes where the distinctions between armed conventional and social violence were blurred. Civilians were not bystanders but targets of organised violence. It was a very creative time for a growing international NGO in an emerging field.

One of our first pilot projects was working in Europe on the growing problem of racist armed violence (knives were the weapons of choice). We worked with anti-racist, black and migrant groups, promoting coordination of efforts within the EU, and encouraging international learning and exchange with other contexts, including South Africa and Sri Lanka, which were also responding to their own inter-group violence. The idea was that this comparative learning from the Global South would inform and inspire policy-makers and activists seeking to prevent the rise of this kind of organised violence. The project supported the launch of a new European Black and Ethnic Minority Consultative Forum (Smith 1992).

We also worked in contexts such as Sierra Leone where the typologies of criminal, liberation and military violence were all eroded and where the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the government-sponsored "sobels" (combatants who were paid soldiers by day and "rebels" after hours) were looting, abducting, raping and illegally mining – all examples of the multiple dimensions of their violence. Ten years later, the West Africa team at International Alert was engaged in negotiating the release of British hostages captured by the RUF in Sierra Leone. While successful, it was to prove a highly controversial intervention, with allegations that it was pursued in competition with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and may have unnecessarily prolonged the hostages' detention (Sørbo 1997, 58-59). But it was the relations developed in preparing the Lomé Agreement peace talks that enabled this role to be played (and vice versa). As these examples demonstrate, back then the armed social and the armed conventional conflict spheres were already as entwined as were IA's peacebuilding responses.

When we were first setting up Conciliation Resources in 1994, our Chairman made a strong case that the role of hostage negotiators fell outside the competencies of a conflict resolution organisation and that we should leave calls for support in other contexts involving hostages to other professionals. While he was certainly correct about the skills of our team, there was no clear separation of competencies and in fact some of the world's most successful mediators learned their trade in training for hostage negotiations. Organisational mandates in our field have always been developing, and some have morphed significantly over time, but there is still a dominant organisational discourse that "we don't do crime", and "we can't touch terrorism". As Arévalo de León and Tager show, such borders are being breached (from both sides), and perhaps there were never such clear boundaries in the first place.

So I would claim that it is not correct that peacebuilding organisations working internationally have such "fixed operational frameworks" in their focus on armed conflict as to actively exclude responding to armed social violence (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 21). One recent example of the diversity of peacebuilding practice from Conciliation Resources is their work with the Centre for Peace Advancement in Nigeria (CEPAN) in the central Nigerian city of Jos with young gang members on drug abuse, militancy and inter-religious tensions through the Youth Platforms for Peace project (see Box 1).

Box 1: CEPAN's work on preventing youth violence in Plateau State, Nigeria
The city of Jos in the central belt of Nigeria has been the site of deep sectarian tensions, both Christian-Muslim and Berom-Fulani. These have been exacerbated by problems with youth gang violence, drug abuse, high levels of unemployment and radicalism. Since 2001, as many as 7,000 people have been killed.

CEPAN, with support from Conciliation Resources, has been running a community-based initiative called Youth Platforms for Peace since 2012. This initiative works with youth leaders, including gang and ex-gang members in "flashpoint communities" at particular risk of violence. CEPAN supports them

in developing their dialogue and advocacy skills, in order to enable them to raise their concerns with local officials, the police and army.

For more information see Conciliation Resources 2015, 11 and
https://www.insightonconflict.org/conflicts/nigeria/peacebuilding-organisations/cepan/.

The Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR) in Cape Town is the NGO which, perhaps, did the most to define our peacebuilding sector and lead the way with an exceptional balance of politics, practice and research. When I had the privilege of first seeing its work in the late 1980s, South Africa was enmeshed in multiple forms of violence, and apartheid looked to be here to stay. Even then, CCR was comfortably and quite naturally working on these different types of violence "inter-sectorally" – including the "taxi wars" between armed local taxi associations and minibus drivers plaguing township communities. These were a clear and organised form of armed social violence which was, at that time, influenced by the inter-party political (and ethnic) conflict. CCR brought its dialogic skills to working with local stakeholders, successfully helping to de-escalate tensions and prevent violence. The organisation is also well-known and ground-breaking for its work in the prison system. Its innovative work for penal reform continues to this day and is a remarkable example of bringing experiences from conflict resolution, including work on dialogue and restorative justice, into the criminal justice system (Baily/Ekiyor 2006).

Arévalo de León and Tager themselves have documented Interpeace's sustained and ground-breaking work on gang and youth violence in Latin America, and more recently the organisation has been working on a new framework for understanding and supporting resilience within communities surviving armed violence. I think, in the end, there is a strong body of evidence that this domain is not so new for the peacebuilding sector, although the authors make a powerful case that state security and criminal justice actors have yet *to take into account* what our sector can offer those working on armed social violence.

3 Working across professional sectors to prevent armed violence

While there is a longer track record of peacebuilding engagement on armed social violence than the lead authors may argue, I fully support their operational proposition that there needs to be more work across sectors and beyond professional silos. A closer look at these issues reveals areas of opportunity, gaps and pitfalls which we would do well to keep in mind.

3.1   A lot to learn from each other: policy responses to armed social violence and conventional organised violence

Internationally, and contrary to Arévalo de León and Tager's assertion (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 2), armed social violence has not been largely ignored by policy makers. Quite the contrary: organised criminals have received a far greater share of collective attention from intelligence, ministries of defence and criminal justice systems than has the older generation of self-determination and liberation groups and their unresolved and ongoing conventional conflicts. This is not to say that these sectors have not also had significant contact with armed groups in conventional conflicts. (In my experience, it is not diplomats or unofficial mediators but defence attachés, intelligence officials and representatives of the criminal justice system who lead in most national and international-level engagements with armed non-state actors.) So there is a long history of

state policy-makers addressing both social and conventional armed violence. What is still underdeveloped is exchange and learning on effective and innovative methods and models between defence, intelligence and the NGO peacebuilding communities. For many, there is an active choice not to engage across these institutional divides, although this is palpably changing with the current iteration of the "global war on Islamic extremism". The new willingness of peacebuilding NGOS to cooperate with governments in their policies and programmes aimed at "countering violent extremism" is changing the field.

We are also seeing signs of peacebuilding practice informing some domestic criminal justice policies. In the UK, the Home Office has been supporting some ground-breaking responses to preventing re-offending (UK Ministry of Justice 2014). Work such as the Circles of Support and Accountability with sex offenders (see Box 2) is squarely taking place in the context of responding to social violence, but is also informed by best restorative justice practice from the peacebuilding field.

Box 2: A restorative approach to reintegrating sex offenders

Circles of Support and Accountability is a voluntary and community-based initiative which works with sex offenders to support reintegration and thus prevent reoffending.

"Circles" in the UK was set up in 2002 by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), a group well-known for its commitment to nonviolence and involvement in peacebuilding internationally. Circles consists of a group of local volunteers and one "high-risk" sex offender, recently released from custody. The volunteers regularly meet with the offender and offer practical support, reducing the risk of social isolation. They also keep an eye on the offender's activities to ensure the local community is safe and that the offender follows through on participation in treatment programmes.

The Circles model is conceptually informed by restorative justice theory of change as there is a focus on the offenders' remorse and reconciliation with the local community. The process takes around eighteen months and ends when it is jointly decided whether the offender has developed the skills and social patterns that allow them to live in the community safely.

For more information see McCartan/Kemshall 2014.

Nevertheless, international peacebuilding practice and research are still worlds apart from national policy responses to preventing violent behaviour in the UK, although they have a great deal to learn from each other, especially when it comes to working with hard-to-reach and high-risk individuals and addressing the personal and external push and pull factors that draw individuals into armed violence and shape their pathways out of it.

3.2 Hybrid violences: overcoming oversimplified distinctions and tactics

The lead authors make a strong case that armed social violence is distinct from "conventional" armed conflict and that both are distinct from other forms of violence, including domestic abuse, sex offending, trafficking and terrorism – and that understanding these distinctions matters and is even essential for designing prevention and peacebuilding responses. While they challenge us to consider the spectrum of differences, the authors acknowledge that the violence that is experienced in the modern world may well have multiple or "hybrid" characteristics.

However, in their efforts to set apart armed social violence from conventional armed conflicts, they draw perhaps too disaggregated distinctions. Is it accurate to describe the phenomenon of armed social violence as (always?) "non-conflict-related" (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 5)? Of course it is a phenomenon that occurs in contexts that cannot be described as "in conflict", but it also takes root in many conflict and

post-war contexts. These contexts often include former combatants on a detour from the transitionary path back to a civilian life. Their links to organised armed conflict remain relevant factors in responding to these challenges.

The authors make it clear that "all instances of armed social violence are both political and systemic" (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 12). But if armed social violence is organised violence without an explicit political goal, often occurring in contexts without an ongoing war, this raises the question of whether it is significantly distinct from other forms of organised violence that has no clear political agenda or little connection with the original political roots that gave rise to the violence in the first place. I am thinking here of armed conflicts with groups like the Lord's Resistance Army or perhaps Al-Qaeda. Such groups test the adequacy and imagination of the core tools and approaches of diplomacy and peacebuilding, and their behaviours belie a clear distinction between political and social or even private spheres.

The authors point out that, while conceptualisation is important, taxonomic classifications (as seen in the UN 2000 Palermo Convention), do not, in themselves, work as an effective "grand theory" (leaving aside the question of whether any grand theory would work). Given the specificity and complexity of each context, policy-makers need to remain politically engaged, adaptable and attentive to frameworks for enquiry and responses rather than looking for toolboxes and checklists promising false solutions.

3.3 Peacebuilding through a criminal justice lens: preventing the criminalisation of engagement

The authors also write that "it has always been a fundamental tenet of peacebuilding practice to engage with spoilers, but inclusive and participatory instruments developed to this end were designed for contexts in which ... open violence had ceased" (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 20). In my experience, many practitioners operate in contexts where violence is very much ongoing, though no organisation in the current global legal framework would be quick to admit that it is currently engaging with proscribed terrorists.

While dialogic engagements may be central to peacebuilding, in themselves they are not sufficient to end violence. In most contexts they are also fraught with risks. There is rarely a "safe" middle ground. State counter-terrorism policies have constrained peacebuilding to the point of criminalising contact and expressions of understanding. For the peacebuilding community, it is no longer enough to try to operate with discretion and navigate the legal pitfalls and the criminal consequences. It now has to engage directly with policy-makers in the criminal justice system to ensure that peacebuilding contacts with conventional and unconventional armed groups are not further criminalised. We have had some successes with these kinds of inter-sectoral dialogues in changing policy in the UK (see Box 3).

Box 3: Clarifying unconstructive legal ambiguities through inter-sectoral dialogue
Here in the UK, NGOs from the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding fields engaged in a sustained dialogue with the UK Home Office and their legal advisers. This resulted in the formalisation of the exchange and led to an important clarification of the intention of major counter-terrorism legislation as it relates to these sectors' engagement with proscribed armed groups. For the peacebuilding sector, a significant clarification is that talking to such groups about negotiations and peacebuilding is not an illegal activity.

For more information see UK Home Office 2015.

This direct, policy-influencing engagement with governments is an important and new complementary domain for peacebuilding organisations. However, it needs to be acknowledged that many in our community of practice work uneasily alongside those seeking to resolve conflict through hard military and securitised tactics.

3.4 Strengthening inter-sectoral collaborations to prevent armed violence

The complex nature of conventional and social armed conflicts demands a deeper understanding and a response to the authors' call for more "inter-sectoral collaboration" and a "whole of society" approach. This transition will be uncomfortable and challenging and will not happen without real leadership that sees the benefits of working in this way and manages the new risks and consequences.

Not only are we as a field uncomfortable being seen as an extension of state-sponsored security responses to armed conflict, but many are also uncomfortable being seen as development actors, which are understood as not challenging the conflict's status quo (see, for example, Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 16).

Also, and importantly, *international* diplomats, development and aid practitioners and peacebuilders need to get more comfortable with *endogenous*, or local, peacebuilders and vice versa. We need to gain new insights on the old questions of appropriate approaches for international partnerships. We need to give more consideration to power and comparative advantages. The authors state that "external actors cannot be, in essence, builders, but they can be enablers" (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 18). While the principle of local "ownership" is hugely important, the divisions of responsibility in successful collaborative relationships are not so black-and-white, and are more internationalised and more complicated. In my experience, when international partnerships deepen, even the most disciplined externals play primary, influential and complementary roles, inseparably entwined with endogenous or local ones. The well-documented role of the Berghof Foundation in Sri Lanka is a good example (Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies 2008; Ropers 2011).

While we have yet to build a body of evidence on what ultimately works in influencing systemic and social conflict effectively (Cramer 2016), our collective task is to attempt to overcome those things that divide us.

4 In conclusion

In their recommendations, Arévalo de León and Tager point the way for our future. I would like to add to their excellent paper with these further recommendations:

≡ Policy-makers and practitioners need to find innovative and effective responses to armed conflict – not through our expertise alone, and not through a single "grand strategy", but through a commitment to embracing the diversity of stakeholders and engaging in challenging collaborations.

≡ For those working on organised crime and armed social violence, on domestic and sexual violence, and on inter- and intra-state conflicts, it is important to be mindful that we are all at the foothills of exchange and learning, and we will all be more effective as a result of learning from one another, particularly in clearing the pathways for those wishing to move out of violence and away from re-offending. International organisations may find that there are ample opportunities for this learning in their "home" countries too.

Finally, if we are going to find ways of pursuing a truly "whole of society" approach, we will need to better understand what it is that gets in the way of productive complementarities and continue to address them in new ways of working. Now that we are a more developed field, we need to remember our histories, and find collaborative, comprehensive and cumulative ways to prevent, end and transform armed conflicts (both conventional and social).

To put this into practice will require a new global consensus within ministries, departments and international organisations that are finding new and better ways to ensure effective complementarities so that our separate actions have real added and cumulative impacts on preventing violent behaviour.

This needs to be seen as a strategic priority for all organisations engaged in ending and preventing armed violence, social and conventional. Local groups will need to continue to wrestle with these challenges and encourage collaboration where they can. I believe the donors have a special role to embrace this strategic challenge and to pay attention to the unintended consequences of their market-based approaches, which tend to enable competition rather than collaborative learning. Donors should pay particular attention to how they can better support and enable coherent collective responses. International peacebuilding NGOs need to find ways to lead by example in close collaboration with their donors and governmental, multilateral and local partners working in "whole of society" networks.

While this represents a new level of ambition and way of working, the good news is that we will all be more effective if we can find ways to learn from one another. Discovering how to find these synergies and collective impacts to prevent and end organised violence is the next great global challenge of our time.

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From War-Making to Peacebuilding?

Opportunities and Pitfalls of an Integral Approach
to Armed Social Violence in Mexico

Gema Santamaría

Content

1 Introduction

The essay by Bernardo Arévalo de León and Ana Glenda Tager constitutes an important and welcome contribution to a much-needed dialogue on alternative ways to address non-conventional armed violence in Latin America. It offers a critical reference point to move away from the militarised and repressive strategies that have been privileged by most Latin American countries, towards an integral approach that aims to create the necessary conditions to build peace in a feasible and sustainable manner (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 20-21). The following response is based on my own research dealing with the sociological and historical underpinnings of armed social violence in Mexico and Central America. It also builds on my experience as a practitioner working within a citizen security framework geared towards the adoption of more integral and sustainable approaches to violence in Latin America.

In this response I argue that the peacebuilding approach suggested by Arévalo de León and Tager provides a valuable framework to think about the pertinence of adopting holistic, multi-sectoral, and participatory approaches to address the root causes of armed social violence. It represents a step up from a citizen security perspective that tends to focus on protecting individuals and their communities from violence and crime, rather than on the means to rebuild the social and institutional fabric of communities impacted by non-conventional armed violence. However, I argue that this approach is limited in terms of its capacity to provide a working roadmap to operationalise and strategise these ideas on the ground. This limitation may be both necessary and intrinsic to a peacebuilding approach that seeks to be context-specific – as opposed to generic – and that envisions itself as the end result of a participatory and dialogic process amongst different actors on the ground. It is, nonetheless, a limitation that may hinder this approach's ability to move from the theoretical to the practical, i.e. the operational level.

The operationalisation of this framework could involve delineating, as such, the different practical scenarios that can either increase or undermine this approach's viability. For instance, are some violent actors more prone than others to engage in the inclusive and participatory model envisioned by this framework? Does it depend on their level of organisation or on the character of their relationship with given communities? What are the different stages of implementation that may help us strategise this approach in a more effective manner?

Informed by these queries and based primarily on empirical evidence from Mexico, my argument is divided in two sections. In the first section I present evidence regarding the negative effects that repressive and warlike strategies have had on reducing violence and building safer communities. I also discuss Mexico's particular trajectory of state-building and the current levels of criminal co-optation and impunity faced by these country's institutions. In the second section, I argue for the relevance of a peacebuilding approach in contexts where warlike strategies have utterly failed. I then analyse the different challenges that operationalising this framework could face on the ground and call into question the desirability and feasibility of engaging with criminal actors. I refer to three types of challenges for implementing a peacebuilding approach in contemporary Mexico: institutional, social, and organisational.

2 Leaving the war on crime behind: the added value of a peacebuilding approach

At the end of 2006, Mexico's President Felipe Calderón launched a new security strategy to counteract organised crime and drug-trafficking organisations (DTOs). Announced as a "war on drugs" and a "battle against criminals", the strategy consisted mainly of militarised operations, massive incarcerations, and the targeting and neutralisation of DTOs' most important leaders (Guerrero 2012). In fact, Mexico had promoted militarised and repressive strategies to tackle DTOs intermittently since the 1990s. However, the 2006 war on drugs was distinct in at least three regards: it was implemented at a national scale, it was regarded as the government's top priority, and it involved an unprecedented level of participation by the military in public security tasks.

This strategy represented a clear departure from the "*pax mafiosa*" that had characterised the relationship between Mexican political elites and DTOs from the 1940s onwards. Under this pact, political elites offered DTOs protection and selective enforcement in exchange for payments and the promise of non-violent or less visible criminal behaviour (Snyder/Durán Martínez 2009, 262). This *pax mafiosa* manifested itself in a subdued criminal structure, as well as in a national homicide rate that remained either stable or declining throughout the twentieth century (Piccato 2002). This arrangement was above all possible due to two factors: the persistence of an undemocratic and highly centralised political system, and the presence of localised DTOs that operated with limited organisational and financial capacities.

The *pax mafiosa* revealed the structures that political elites developed to deal with illicit armed actors – from DTOs to local thugs and regional *caudillos* – throughout Mexico's twentieth century (Pansters 2012). Echoing other non-Western trajectories of state-building described in Arévalo de León and Tager's essay, Mexican political elites were not necessarily able nor were they willing to claim the legitimate monopoly of violence. Rather, they dealt with illicit armed actors and their use of violence through a selective, partial and politically motivated application of the law (Müller 2012, 32-34). These dynamics continue to inform the relationship between state actors and non-conventional armed groups in contemporary Mexico. However, as I will explain further, these dynamics operate in what is now a more democratised and decentralised scenario.

By the end of the 1990s, Mexico's increasing democratisation together with DTOs' consolidation and growing influence in the regional drug market undermined the conditions that made the *pax mafiosa* possible. Political democratisation led to the pluralisation of political competitors and the decentralisation of law enforcement, while Mexican DTOs' economic success increased competition and the incentives to use violence as a means to secure territorial control (Snyder/Durán Martínez 2009). The war on drugs represented the *pax mafiosa*'s final blow as a politically centralised arrangement. It highlighted the central government's decision to control DTOs' presence through direct confrontation, as opposed to the former practice of negotiation or co-optation. It also signalled the adoption of measures aimed at undermining criminal collusion by purging those elements of the police allegedly infiltrated by organised crime. However, criminal collusion was not eradicated. Selective enforcement and corruption on behalf of political actors and security officials remained endemic at the local level. The *pax mafiosa* now became a decentralised and unstable arrangement brokered by multiple actors.

Under Mexico's current administration, these pluralised *paces mafiosae* have not withered away. The security strategy promoted by current President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012 to the present) has not changed Mexico's focus on combating organised crime. Despite initial statements that promised to leave the war on

drugs behind, security responses continue to focus on militarised interventions and the neutralisation of DTOs' main leaders. Furthermore, journalists, academics, and civil society organisations have documented the continuing involvement of governors, mayors, police officers, and military personnel in criminal networks (Human Rights Watch 2015; Felbab Brown 2016). Perhaps one the most dramatic examples of criminal collusion was the kidnapping, disappearance and apparent massacre of 43 student protesters on 26 September 2014 in Iguala, a city located in the southern state of Guerrero. Government investigations attributed the incident to a group of municipal police officers working on the orders of the city's mayor, who himself was accused of having links to organised crime. Investigations carried out by journalists as well as by the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI) have also documented the negligence and possible participation of the military and of elements of the federal police in the massacre (Hernández/ Fisher 2015; Partlow 2015; GIEI 2016).

The war on drugs translated into political abuse, forced displacements and human rights violations (Rubio/Pérez Vázquez 2016; Magaloni/Magaloni 2016). National homicide rates more than doubled between 2007 and 2011, while crimes such as extortion, kidnapping and forced disappearances intensified significantly (INEGI 2015). The targeting of DTOs' leaders led to the atomisation of criminal organisations, their geographical diffusion, and the emergence of more volatile and predatory groups that responded to the war by escalating violence. On the part of local communities, insecurity levels contributed to the legitimisation of self-defence forces and other forms of vigilantism such as lynchings (Santamaría 2014; Schedler 2015, 214). Distrust and intra-community tensions thrived under a strategy that depicted insecurity and violence as issues that had to be fought as a battle between 'us' and 'them'.

3 Operationalising the framework: challenges and ways to move forward

It is against this evidence that the pertinence and urgency of adopting a peacebuilding approach become apparent. A peacebuilding approach promotes integral, participatory, context-specific, and multi-sectoral policies. It is understood as a process that can enable the development of social and political capacities for viable and sustainable peace (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 16). The notion of peacebuilding moves from an emphasis on the neutralisation of criminal organisations to the adoption of long-term strategies to rebuild the social and institutional fabric of communities ridden by armed social violence. In other words, rather than focusing on the containment of violence, it underscores the importance of transforming the conditions that render violence viable and legitimate amongst different actors.

However, when analysed in light of Mexico's institutional and political dynamics, the peacebuilding approach described by the authors presents a number of operational challenges, which are laid out in the following paragraphs.

Counterting criminal collusion and impunity with transparency and accountability

One such challenge originates in the persistence of *paces mafiosae* that promote both criminal collusion and impunity. The existence of these arrangements calls for the identification of political actors and public officials willing and able to increase accountability and transparency. Furthermore, it demands

context-specific regulatory frameworks that can serve to gradually transform the relationship between state, communities, and criminal actors. By regulatory frameworks I mean the adoption of certain codes of conduct and procedures amongst stakeholders, based on the identification of common goals and expectations that are also verifiable and independently auditable below the level of formal laws. Examples of such common goals could include lowering levels of violence, participating in disarmament campaigns, engaging in public forms of dialogue, and moving away from repressive forms of policing such as mass arrests and unreasonable searches.

One could argue that this is precisely the type of gradual transformation that a peacebuilding approach seeks to bring about. However, I would claim that this transformation constitutes a precondition for, rather than the outcome of, the operationalisation of this framework. The following discussion should illustrate my point.

Arévalo de León and Tager point to the creation of unofficial or informal communication channels to engage with violent actors and enhance dialogue and understanding. The authors also establish that "legal frameworks can make constructive engagement difficult or impossible". That is, legal frameworks may prevent state representatives or civil society actors from engaging in dialogue with violent groups involved in criminal activities (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 21). However, in contexts where *paces mafiosae* have persisted for long periods of time, the key problem is not legality as an impediment to engaging criminal actors. The problem is the partial and politicised application of the law and the way impunity and corruption facilitate the existence of state protection rackets. In this scenario, promoting informal and unofficial points of communication may contribute to the undermining of the rule of law. It may also deepen the perception – already prevalent in Mexico – that the state is unable or unwilling to control and punish crime (Zechmeister 2014, 77-88).

No doubt, fostering dialogue and agreements between violent actors, public officials, and local communities is a necessary and integral step to address armed social violence. But the peacebuilding approach should first ensure that such dialogue can take place in a transparent and accountable way. In fact, overcoming strict limitations to establish contact with criminal actors does not necessarily require action outside the law. Rather, it demands the development of context-specific regulatory frameworks that are both endorsed and fulfilled by public officials, violent actors, and local communities. In other words, rather than informal and secretive contacts with criminal groups, a peacebuilding process should build upon public and widely disseminated regulatory frameworks that can contribute to the transparency and legitimacy of the process.

Working with public perceptions and changing codes of conduct

Another operational challenge to the peacebuilding approach, particularly to the creation of communication channels with local communities, pertains to the impact that criminalisation discourses have had in public perceptions of violence and crime. In contexts of high levels of violence in which warlike strategies have promoted an 'us' versus 'them' discourse, citizens tend to perceive criminals as actors who need to be severely punished and perhaps even eradicated from society (Schedler 2015; Basombrío/Dammert 2013). In Mexico and the countries of the northern triangle of Central America, anti-drug policies and zero-tolerance measures have served to normalise the idea that engaging with criminal actors requires harsher punishments, including torture and extra-legal uses of violence (Cruz 2011; Magaloni/Magaloni 2016). In this sense, the key challenge is again not the rigidity of the law and its application, be it in the form of rules precluding communication with criminal actors or in the form of strict processes of investigation and conviction. Rather, it pertains to the existence of deep-seated public perceptions and attitudes that support confrontation and extra-legal forms of punishment over strategies of dialogue and negotiation.

In light of this challenge, a peacebuilding approach needs to address mechanisms aimed at increasing the feasibility and legitimacy of engaging with non-conventional armed actors. As suggested by Arévalo de León and Tager, identifying individuals or collective institutions with the experience and capacity to

facilitate this process is crucial. Trained mediators can contribute to changing a community's perceptions on how to respond to violence and to ensuring the commitment of armed social actors to a minimum set of rules. However, one aspect overlooked by the authors is how this mediating process can be disrupted, or rejected outright, by the organisational nature of armed social groups and by the activities they see as central to their subsistence (Planta/Dudouet 2015; Cockayne 2013). Three factors are worth discussing here:

- Is the use of violence instrumental to, or vital for, their criminal activities?
- Is the relationship between these armed actors and the community mostly predatory and extractive or does it present some form of patronage?
- Finally, is the organisation of armed actors cohesive, stable and hierarchical or is it fragmented and unstable?

Mexico is characterised by several expressions of armed social violence. These include DTOs, but also self-defence forces and criminal youth gangs (Santamaría 2014). These armed groups are organised differently and vary in their aims and in the relationship they develop with local communities. I will focus on DTOs as they continue to play a prominent role in Mexico's confrontation with armed social violence (Shirk at al. 2014, 24). DTOs have in general become more predatory and their organisation has lost stability in the wake of an ongoing targeting and neutralisation of high-level leaders (Felbab-Brown 2016, 80; Mendoza Rockwell 2012). In addition, competition and internal fragmentation have helped to undermine networks of patronage and protection that existed between DTOs and local communities. These networks enabled the existence of certain codes of conduct that prevented the use of predatory forms of violence within these localities. Furthermore, DTOs have diversified and expanded their criminal activities – from production and transhipment of drugs to kidnappings, extortion, and human trafficking. This diversification has made the use of violence a central element for these organisations' subsistence, rather than a mere instrument of intimidation and territorial control.

The operationalisation of a peacebuilding approach needs to take these recent shifts into account and identify rather granularly which organisations would be more likely to engage in a process of dialogue. Evidence suggests that DTOs such as the Sinaloa cartel have traditionally opted for networks of patronage over predatory tactics, whereas groups such as *Los Zetas* and *Los Caballeros Templarios* (Knights Templar) rely more heavily on extractive criminal activities as well as on the use of overt forms of violence (Santamaría 2014). Engaging criminal actors who depend on the use of violence for their survival poses operational challenges that may be extremely difficult to overcome. More so, focusing on violence reduction as the preferable measurable outcome of a process of dialogue may in fact create pervasive incentives for these armed groups to 'hide violence'. Regional experiences such as the pacts brokered with armed groups in Colombia at different periods of time and the more recent truce between gangs in El Salvador have centred on the aim of reducing violence. In both contexts, armed groups have tended to reduce the visibility of violence by hiding or disappearing bodies rather than by actually committing to cease aggression (Cruz/Durán Martínez 2016). These examples should serve as a cautionary reminder of why a peacebuilding approach needs to go beyond the containment of violence and incorporate, early on, a regulatory framework that facilitates accountability on behalf of all actors involved.

Finding robust interlocutors among armed social groups

Lastly, the cohesiveness and stability of armed social groups are central to determining the viability of a long-term process of dialogue and engagement. The structure of Mexican DTOs has, in general, become more volatile and fluid. The government's partial success in dismantling DTOs has increased internal rotations and has thus undermined hierarchical stability. The experience of El Salvador illustrates why stability matters. In order for the truce to work, gangs had to demonstrate cohesiveness and their leadership had to have the strength and legitimacy needed to enforce an agreement amongst gang members (Cruz/Durán Martínez 2016, 10-11). This poses an apparent paradox: in order for a process of engagement to work, we may require the existence of armed social groups with strong leadership and solid structures. However,

if these groups have strong organisational capacities, what makes a process of peacebuilding appealing and feasible in the first place?

In the case of Mexico, peacebuilding practitioners would need to work with those armed groups that show greater cohesiveness and organisational stability. In order to determine their willingness to participate in a process of dialogue, a pivotal factor may be the extent to which such groups maintain a less predatory and more protective relationship with given communities. This would guarantee a certain level of commitment and could bring to the table non-material benefits, such as the integrity and stability of the community and the restitution of codes of conduct that serve to prevent the escalation of violence. Put differently, in order to operationalise a peacebuilding approach, we need to take into account the very level of embeddedness of actors engaged in armed social violence.

4 Conclusion

In this response, I have delineated the negative consequences that warlike strategies on violence have had in contemporary Mexico. I have, furthermore, argued for the pertinence of adopting a peacebuilding approach, as presented by Arévalo de León and Tager. At the same time, I have also argued that, in order for this approach to be effective, we need to think more carefully about some of the challenges to its operationalisation. From the viewpoint of state institutions, we need to promote context-specific regulatory frameworks that shield a peacebuilding approach from feeding into *paces mafiosae* that have traditionally regulated the relationship between DTOs and the Mexican state. From a social perspective, its operationalisation demands the gradual transformation of public attitudes and perceptions of crime in order to help legitimise a peacebuilding approach in communities divided by warlike responses to violence. Lastly, with regard to armed social groups, we need to analyse and profile their organisational capacities and cohesiveness as well as their reliance on predatory activities.

As desirable as a peacebuilding approach may be as a matter of principle, its successful implementation will depend on the development of a working roadmap that operationalises it on the ground. This roadmap can be context-specific, but it should also offer some generalisable observations as to how a peacebuilding approach can become more viable and sustainable.

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The Value of Listening to Community Voices

A Peacebuilding Approach to Armed Social Violence

Karen P. Simbulan and Laurens J. Visser

Content

1 Introduction

In *Armed Social Violence and Peacebuilding: Towards an operational approach,* Bernardo Arévalo de León and Ana Glenda Tager make a timely contribution to discussions on the phenomena of armed social violence. The article successfully identifies the gaps in current policy approaches to armed social violence that focus solely on the symptoms or outward manifestations, without attempting to address structural conditions that serve as fertile ground for their emergence. This lays the foundation for the article's main argument on the value of using a peacebuilding approach to study and better understand the complex dynamics of armed social violence, thereby allowing the formulation of more effective policy responses.

We respond to the lead article from the point of view of conflict transformation practitioners from the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS), a non-governmental organisation based in Siem Reap, Cambodia, which focuses on strengthening and supporting the peace processes in the Philippines and Myanmar and peacebuilding efforts in Sri Lanka. We thus operate within contexts involving state and non-state armed groups engaging or previously engaged in political conflict, and any exposure we have to armed social violence emerges from this context.

This response will briefly discuss our understanding of conflict transformation before we propose the application of Listening Methodology (LM), one of the conflict transformation tools we use at CPCS to inform our interventions in armed political conflicts. In evaluating how CPCS has used LM through the years in various violent conflict settings, we find that it intersects directly with the discussion in the lead article (Section 3.2) on the critical ways that a peacebuilding approach can improve interventions addressing armed social violence by: (a) allowing for a disaggregated understanding of the conflict dynamics and contextual variations of the violence, which lays the foundation for the formulation of more strategic/targeted policy interventions; (b) encouraging stakeholders to learn about the different perspectives of the conflict that exist, based on how these stakeholders interact with and are affected by the conflict; and (c) empowering community stakeholders by recognising the importance of their perspectives and opinions. We then go on to discuss our experience of identifying issues of armed social violence within an active political conflict situation through the use of LM.

2 Establishing commonalities between violent conflicts

A probable critique to the lead article's proposition to operationalise a peacebuilding approach to armed social violence is the issue of fit – can peacebuilding, an approach meant to address violent conflict cycles within a country between state and non-state actors generally motivated by political aims, be applied to non-conventional violence that involves quite different agents of violence with vastly different motivations and intended targets?

The article addresses this challenge by noting the blurred lines between different categories of violent phenomena, whether in the form of war, large-scale violations of human rights, organised crime, or urban violence. If only to strengthen the lead article's proposition, we would posit that the value of using a peacebuilding lens to understand all violent conflicts, including armed social violence, lies in the three main underlying assumptions this approach makes about conflict, which are as follows:

(a) conflict is a natural part of all societies and will naturally arise in the course of human interactions;

(b) although some conflicts may resemble others, each conflict is unique and driven by different causal factors;

(c) all conflicts are dynamic – as they go on, they evolve and change by responding to the social, political, and economic contexts within which they operate, but in the process, also affect these contexts.

Essentially, then, taking a peacebuilding approach to any conflict would require, from the start of engagement, an acknowledgement of the need to carefully study the different conflict actors, as well as the causes and factors driving a conflict, and how these elements interact with each other and the contexts within which they operate.

By recognising the complexity and nuance of each violent conflict, peacebuilding approaches can provide a conceptual and operational framework that could take into account not only the symptoms of armed social violence, but also the structural factors that lie at the heart of violent conflict. As the lead article notes, "the dialogue and research methodologies of peacebuilding allow the development of a highly granular, context-specific understanding of the social dynamics of each phenomenon and mobilise stakeholders to take collaborative and complementary action across the state-society divide" (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 2). Taking this approach not only helps those seeking to intervene in the conflict to better understand the complexities of armed social violence: it also identifies avenues for interventions that not only treat symptoms but also contribute to systemic change.

3 Conflict transformation: systemic change grounded in inclusivity

Taking the lead article's proposition a step further, we would posit that not only a peacebuilding approach but more specifically a conflict transformation approach would be an innovative lens to apply. At CPCS, we have explicitly chosen to characterise our work as being in line with conflict transformation theory. We make specific reference to conflict transformation, if only to differentiate it from other approaches traditionally associated with peacebuilding, such as conflict management or conflict resolution.

From our understanding, conflict transformation views violent conflict as being caused not just by incompatible goals but by the fundamental problems of inequality and injustice, as embedded in social, cultural, and economic frameworks. It is therefore the aim of conflict transformation to prevent the physical manifestations of violence (direct violence) by addressing the underlying context and attitudes that give rise to these expressions. By promoting systemic changes that address the wider social and political contexts which serve as the breeding ground for violent conflict, conflict transformation seeks not to suppress but to transform any negative energy produced by these competing needs, interests, and motivations into positive social and political change (Fisher et al. 2000).

This requires a theory of social change that aims to alter not only the structures but also the behaviours and attitudes underlying these structures, bringing people and relationships to the fore. Interventions thus need to be formulated, keeping in mind that transforming relationships between different stakeholders are crucial. We do this by presenting the different perspectives, interests, and positions of the various stakeholders, with the overall goal of deepening understanding based on empathy.

To illustrate the merits of operationalising a peacebuilding approach to armed social violence, Arévalo de León and Tager identify two of the most prominent expressions of this phenomenon, namely, organised crime and urban violence. In the course of their discussion, they recognise that the underlying condition linked to the emergence of this phenomenon is exclusion, whether in a political, social or economic sense,

of sections of society, resulting in their marginalisation. They also note the failings of common policy approaches to armed social violence, which focus almost exclusively on development cooperation and security measures.

Similar to most peace processes, state responses to criminality and armed social violence commonly take a top-down approach, with experts and top-level government officials taking the lead in formulating policy responses. This generally means that policy discussions often fail to take into account the views, perceptions, and opinions of communities who are the most affected, not only by the consequences of armed social violence, but also by the coercive responses taken by the state in seeking to quell or suppress the violence. Despite the direct impact that national policy discussions on responses to armed social violence will have on their lives, communities often remain voiceless and their perspectives are given little consideration in these discussions.

Inclusivity and wide local ownership are necessary to ensure the effective implementation of many policy decisions, particularly where communities are not only affected by these decisions but also have the means to affect them. Where policy responses and programmes are formulated without valuable community perspectives, they generally fail to address root causes of violence, and can even exacerbate the situation by furthering the perception of social exclusion felt by groups/actors who resort to violent expression. This is particularly true in cases where the underlying issue to be resolved is based on the erosion of social cohesion. This erosion is identified in the lead article as being one of the main consequences, as well as perpetuating causes of both urban violence and organised crime. For those wanting to intervene, creating a mechanism that allows inclusive engagement of all actors in addressing armed social violence and that ensures local ownership and public support is therefore essential to sustainably reduce violence in society.

4 Listening Methodology: CPCS research methodology and intervention tool

At CPCS, we believe that listening to the diverse voices of communities and considering their experiences with violence is crucial to finding solutions to address the longstanding problems that are at the heart of political conflict. These conflicts generally develop in response to the perception that state institutions have institutionalised discrimination, leading to marginalisation of certain groups, as manifested by the effective stunting of their economic and social development. This context provides fertile ground for armed social violence, as marginalisation is one of the key elements in eroding social cohesion.

CPCS has utilised *Listening Methodology (LM)*[1] since 2009 in various violent conflict contexts across Asia in order to conduct a comprehensive and systematic exploration of the ideas and insights of people living in and affected by a particular situation. Originally starting out as a qualitative, subject-orientated research approach, LM has come to be viewed by CPCS as a conflict transformation tool in itself. We believe that such a methodology can also be a useful tool in addressing armed social violence.

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[1] Listening Methodology as utilised by CPCS is derived from Collaborate for Development Action (CDA) – Collaborative Learning, which developed listening as a method of learning from communities about humanitarian aid. CDA identified the need for sharing and learning about the experiences and feedback from communities receiving humanitarian aid. As a result, CDA was able to illustrate the effect of humanitarian aid across communities in order to promote new ideas about ways of making the distribution and utilisation of humanitarian aid more effective (see CDA's Listening Program 2014).

Since the main purpose of LM is to create opportunities for individuals or groups whose voices often go unheard, we generally use it to speak with communities. One of the main challenges of eliciting information in violent conflict settings is that people are usually reluctant to share information. To address this, CPCS enlists the help of people (called "listeners") who are from the same or similar communities, speak the same language and are familiar with any context sensitivities. As no CPCS staff are present during these conversations, listeners are able to hold conversations, not interviews, in a more relaxed environment. This, we believe, facilitates more honest and organic, unscripted exchanges.

The process of LM in communities, we have found, also creates transformational dialogue spaces. The conversations that occur between our listeners and the participants become a tool to empower communities by the mere action of asking their opinions about current situations and their thoughts on how to address the violence. It is also an occasion for people to take the time to critically reflect on their situation. Giving diverse and, at times, opposing groups or actors in a conflict setting spaces to interact and share their perceptions provides participants with opportunities to better understand each other, allowing them to think about their situation in a new light. This opens up possibilities of transforming relationships by challenging the dominant, often conflict-reinforcing, narratives, providing scope for further dialogue and collaboration.

To retain the transformative aspects of LM, CPCS has gradually set itself outside the process by recognising the critical contribution that local partner organisations make. It is through these local partners that we are able to enlist listeners, individuals from target areas who are familiar with local contexts and can conduct conversations in the local language. This, we believe, is key to facilitating trust and openness between the community members who participate in the conversations and the listeners who seek to elicit candid responses. This also guards against the research process being purely extractive, as a key element of LM is to strengthen local listeners' capacities to engage in qualitative research and participate in the analytical processing of data.

5 Applying Listening Methodology to armed social violence contexts

In the area of armed social violence, LM can make a valuable contribution to the formulation of more effective policy responses. Because information is elicited from the actual experiences of communities living with the effects of violence and the consequences of policy interventions meant to address the violence, LM can capture multiple facets of the specific manifestations of armed social violence occurring in their area. Since this analysis is based on a bottom-up approach to understanding the conflict, different actors can use it to identify points of entry for collaborative efforts at various levels (community, state, regional, or national) and among various stakeholders such as communities, national and local civil society groups, churches, and the like.

Beyond this, the effects of LM on local stakeholders within violent conflicts also need to be acknowledged. As those primarily engaged in LM, listeners and participants are asked to engage in conversations about how violent conflict affects them and how they would propose to address the conflict. They are encouraged to reflect on their own place within the conflict. Having to engage with people who have different experiences and perceptions exposes them to new ideas and helps dispel prejudices, contributing to dialogue and understanding on both sides. In conducting LM for one CPCS publication, *Listening to Voices – Perspectives from the Tatmadaw's Rank and File,* listeners were asked to engage with

soldiers in the Tatmadaw (the Myanmar army) and have conversations with them about their perceptions of the peace process. Most listeners reacted negatively to this as Tatmadaw soldiers are thought to regularly commit human rights abuses against civilian populations. After conducting their conversations with Tatmadaw soldiers, many listeners reported changes in their perception of the soldiers, whom they saw as being "just like us", with similar concerns, fears, and challenges. By exposing them to the similarities in their experiences, LM had the effect of "humanising" Tatmadaw soldiers to the listeners, creating space for them to empathise.

Lastly, the recognition by community members that they have a voice and that their opinions and perspectives matter has an empowering effect by reminding them of the roles they play within conflict dynamics – that they are not merely affected by the violence but also have an effect on it.

Political conflict as fertile ground for armed social violence: Kachin State

While CPCS works primarily in politically motivated armed violence contexts, we have observed how these contexts provide fertile ground for armed social violence, such as the emergence of non-political militia or vigilante groups.

In the course of providing support to the peace process in Myanmar, we have embarked on a multi-year project to monitor the effects of the ceasefire agreements on communities.[2] This project was conceptualised in cooperation with local civil society organisations based in the different states/ areas in Myanmar where the research was conducted. These organisations recognised the need to strengthen inclusivity in the peace process by integrating the collective perceptions and experiences of communities in policy discussions relating to the peace process.

In the resulting publication, *We Want Genuine Peace: Voices of Communities from Myanmar's Ceasefire Areas in 2015*, one of the key findings was the alarming pervasiveness of illegal drugs in the country. Communities in all the states covered by the study spoke of the increase in the availability of illegal drugs, resulting in rising drug use and drug addiction across the country. Communities recognised the highly fluid interactions between illegal drug production and trade and the violent political conflict; in some areas, community members shared their belief that various individuals – from the state security forces (at both the national and the local levels) to government officials and members of the ethnic armed groups – were profiting from the drug trade. Notably, communities in northern Myanmar (Northern Shan State and Kachin State), which are most affected by drug addiction and where drug production and trade are believed to be most prevalent, actually considered drug eradication to be an integral component of the peace process.

With community members in Kachin State growing all the more frustrated at what they perceive to be a lack of any government measures to effectively address the drug problem, which they see destroying their families, communities, and their culture, the communities decided to organise against the production, trade, and use of drugs. This led to the formation of the *Patjasan*, a community group made up of civilians from across the state that conducts anti-drug activities such as destroying opium fields and detaining suspected drug dealers and drug users. The emergence of this group can be traced to the conditions sustained by the ongoing political conflict, which made authorities either unwilling or unable to address the problem. On their last march in Kachin State, suspected militants protecting opium producers attacked *Patjasan* members despite a police presence, leading to a number of casualties.[3]

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2 The project encompassed 772 different conversations with 1072 participants across communities from six ceasefire states in Myanmar throughout 2015. The main findings from these conversations helped to create a map of community perspectives and expectations from the Myanmar peace process, which also identified the main challenges faced by communities.

3 See: http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/several-anti-poppy-activists-injured-in-attack-in-waingmaw-township.html.

If this situation is not properly addressed, we anticipate the possibility of more instances of violent expression as this conflict evolves in response to the competing demands of the communities and those involved in drug production and trade.

While most Myanmar observers are aware of extensive drug production, trade, and use in northern Myanmar, LM was able to reveal that this is not a community or state but a national problem. Furthermore, the findings from LM revealed the perception amongst communities that the increase in drug trade was an unintended consequence of the various bilateral ceasefire agreements; as these truces translated into greater freedom of movement between villages and states, it became easier to transport larger quantities of drugs throughout the country. These details add nuance to the national drug issue by revealing unknown or overlooked connections that are essential to formulating holistic and context-sensitive interventions.

As these findings have just been released, and in light of the fluidity of the newly formed Myanmar government's plans for the peace process, there has been limited scope to use the findings for advocacy efforts. The publication has been translated into Burmese and shared with local partner organisations, which are now collaborating with CPCS to design different interventions based on the information revealed by the LM research.

6 Conclusion

We believe that Listening Methodology can be a powerful tool for international as well as national actors in developing interventions to address grievances that lie at the heart of any violent conflict, whether manifesting as political or armed social violence. LM serves to remind high-level decision-makers of the importance of considering community experiences in designing effective and sustainable policy responses to these grievances.

But more than this, the value of LM lies in the act of giving communities the space to be heard and to realise that their voices are important. Given that one of the drivers of political and armed social violence is grievance, which is caused when the perception of non-inclusion and marginalisation leads to disintegration of social cohesion, providing opportunities for the voiceless to speak helps to prevent frustrations from bubbling over and exploding into violent expression.

LM also opens up avenues to reach out and engage agents of violence. This is particularly important in contexts of armed social violence, where these agents are generally not engaged with because they are not recognised as having legitimate grievances or genuine aims. LM provides the possibility of working within the in-between space to elicit the perceptions, needs, and motivations of these agents as participants in the conflict. This can potentially help to develop a holistic and highly nuanced analysis that would allow the formulation of practical rather than theoretical approaches to prevent violence.

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Countering Armed Social Violence in Guinea-Bissau

The Case of the Model Police Station in Bairro Militar

Marco Carmignani and Fernando Cavalcante

Content

1 Introduction*

Bernardo Arévalo de León and Ana Glenda Tager argue that peacebuilding's inclusive and participatory methodologies may offer stakeholders a better basis for effectively addressing armed social violence than standard security and development approaches. These traditional approaches are rather limited, according to the authors: while security approaches tend to rely on "technical" law enforcement measures that fall short of addressing the structural causes of societal violence (e.g. policing, prosecution and incarceration), development approaches yield, at best, "pockets of stability and peace" that fail to connect and produce a broader societal impact.

The authors thus suggest that peacebuilding methodologies, which focus on "long-term, endogenous and holistic processes of conflict transformation" (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 16), may help to overcome these limitations by allowing "a highly granular, context-specific understanding" (ibid., 2) of violence and the collaborative mobilisation of stakeholders, both in state structures and in civil society. This granular understanding, according to the authors, can only be attained by factoring in the perspectives of all actors involved at the national level (victims, perpetrators, state officials, civil society) and international level (bilateral and multilateral agencies, international non-governmental organisations). They suggest that participatory methods which combine research and dialogue, e.g. participatory research, can produce insightful understandings of complex realities and map systemic linkages.

Our response explores the application of these participatory and community-informed approaches in the context of Guinea-Bissau, where a community-based policing model, the Model Police Stations (MPS), had its genesis in participatory research. Participatory research has also informed activities in other areas, such as the prevention of gender violence. In 2011, for example, a comprehensive portrayal of the violence against women in the country resulted from the combination of quantitative data with qualitative research on perceptions (see Roque 2011).

In our response, we focus on the MPS in Bairro Militar as it is more connected to the fight against organised crime, explored by Arévalo de León and Tager in the lead article. The design and implementation of the MPS followed the identification of issues such as lack of policing, low public trust in the police and access to drugs as key problems affecting Bairro Militar, a neighbourhood in Bissau. The identification of these problems, as well as the proposed solution (namely the MPS, which is rooted in a community policing approach) involved national authorities, community representatives of Bairro Militar and external partners.

In the following section, we provide an overview of the Bissau-Guinean context, which has been marked by constant fragility in its political, socio-economic and institutional structures. We subsequently focus on the connections between the structural forms of violence[1] in Guinea-Bissau in the context of organised crime. We then review the Model Police Station as an initiative designed on the basis of participatory research. While this example is small in scale, we believe it can be instructive for designing more inclusive participatory institutions as called for in the lead article by Arévalo de León and Tager. It also points to potential stumbling blocks in the political environment.

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1 Structural violence refers to the social and systemic conditions leading to injustice and exploitation, with unequal distribution of power and resources across society (Galtung 1996).

2 Fragility in Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau's political and institutional fragility is persistent: four coups d'état have taken place since 1974, the latest one in April 2012. The dismissal of three governments in less than one year (between August 2015 and May 2016) is just one recent example of its continuing instability. According to socio-economic indicators, the country is one of the least developed in the world, ranking 178th out of 188 countries surveyed in the latest Human Development Report (UNDP 2015).

According to a strategic assessment mission dispatched to Guinea-Bissau by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2014, the root causes of its instability lie in four interrelated factors. First, there are the *political-military dynamics* in the country, where, since the end of the independence struggle, the armed forces have had a disproportionate influence on civilian and political life by shifting alliances, influencing decision-making and toppling democratically elected governments. Divisions within Bissau-Guinean society have been exacerbated by these longstanding dynamics. The second factor is the *ineffectiveness of state institutions and the lack of rule of law*, which results from the monopolisation of the state by the political-military elite and has led to the de facto abolition of the separation of powers and a huge gap between state and society. The third factor is *poverty and lack of access to basic state services*, particularly for women and youth, stemming from the weakness of state institutions that are unable to deliver services to the public. Finally, the fourth factor relates to *impunity and human rights violations*, consequences of the country's weak security and justice institutions and the lack of public trust in the justice system (UN 2015, paragraphs 42-53). Combined, these factors create the conditions for continued instability and lack of socio-economic development in Guinea-Bissau.

Against this backdrop, public perceptions of safety and security continue to decline, along with the capacities of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary to protect human rights and combat impunity. According to the latest figures from the Global Peace Index, for example, the country displayed high indicators relating to the perception of criminality, homicide rate and violent crime, all ranking 4 on a scale of 1 to 5.[2]

3 Organised crime as an expression of armed social violence

When summarising the common trends emerging from two empirical expressions of armed social violence, namely urban violence and organised crime, Arévalo de León and Tager referred to Guinea-Bissau (Box 3 in the lead article on page 12) to illustrate their discussion on where "stabilisation and development efforts … are endangered by international drug gangs encroaching on [the country's] security apparatus" (ibid., 7) and posing risks to human development and post-conflict reconstruction goals. In this section, we briefly outline the challenge posed by organised crime, particularly drug trafficking, in Guinea-Bissau.

Criminal activities associated with illicit drug trafficking started to thrive in Guinea-Bissau in the early 2000s. At that time, as the European market for cocaine gradually expanded and the North American market started to slow down, criminal networks took advantage of the country's political and institutional fragility to illegally transport drugs from South America to Europe (Van Riper 2014). It has been reported

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2   Global Peace Index, see: www.visionofhumanity.org/#/page/indexes/global-peace-index [accessed 31 May 2016]. On Guinea-Bissau, see: www.visionofhumanity.org/#/page/indexes/global-peace-index/2016/GNB/OVER.

that Bissau-Guinean politicians, businessmen and military leaders alike reached out to international criminal networks as a source of funding for their own patronage networks, allowing international drug traffickers to use military facilities and the largely uninhabited islands of the Bijagós archipelago for undetected criminal activities (Kemp et al. 2013; Ellis/Shaw 2015). This has created an intricate web of relationships between some politicians and elements of the military and security forces that benefited all those involved to the detriment of the population at large, which continued to receive little or no basic assistance from the state.

Researchers have characterised a mutually beneficial relationship between international criminal networks and the political-military elites of Guinea-Bissau as a "bargain" in which "incumbent politicians close their eyes to the illicit activities that the security establishment uses to fund itself, while the security establishment agrees to limit its political interventions in the shape of coups and the like" (Ellis/Shaw 2015, 524). This bargain was made possible by the persistence of the root causes of instability outlined above, particularly the ineffectiveness and dire conditions of state institutions and the lack of rule of law.

These conditions included a dilapidated police infrastructure, unregulated police recruitment practices, weak police presence outside the capital Bissau, and low levels of training and wages for police officers (Kohl 2015). In this context, poorly paid civil servants and law enforcement agents became easily susceptible to bribery and corruption by growing networks of patronage that profited from international drug trafficking in the 2000s. Public trust in the administration in general and the police institutions in particular remained understandably low.

4 UN peacebuilding efforts in Guinea-Bissau: the Model Police Station in Bairro Militar

Efforts by national and international stakeholders to address the root causes of instability in Guinea-Bissau are ongoing. As part of these efforts, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) has been mandated to support inclusive national dialogue and national reconciliation, assist in the implementation of security sector reform, and support national authorities in the mobilisation, harmonisation and coordination of international assistance (UN Security Council Resolution 2267, paragraph 2). As part of its activities in the area of security sector reform, UNIOGBIS assists national authorities in modernising security institutions and in strengthening the rule of law. This includes providing strategic and technical advice to Bissau-Guinean stakeholders in implementing national security sector reform and rule of law strategies, for example through support and advice on the review of national laws, internal policies and standard operating procedures of law enforcement agencies and through training and mentoring for law enforcement agents.

One of the initiatives supported by UNIOGBIS in the area of security sector reform and rule of law was the establishment of a Model Police Station (MPS) in Bairro Militar, a neighbourhood in the country's capital. We believe that the establishment of the MPS is a real-world example of the application of aspects of the peacebuilding methodologies proposed by Arévalo de León and Tager, focusing on actions based on communities' needs. The MPS in Bairro Militar was the first of 12 stations planned for strategic locations across the country, both in urban and in rural areas. An initial urban setting enabled a larger range of

stakeholders to participate than would have been possible in rural areas. The model would require further adaptation in border areas due to the need for transnational commitments on security.

The MPS model had its genesis in participatory research that assessed the perceptions of security/insecurity of a wide cross-section of the community residing in Bairro Militar (see Sani/Nunes 2013). The community involvement was a response to the government's request for international support in building police stations throughout the country. Previous international contributions lacked a participatory assessment process ahead of funding commitments. The research was undertaken by a team based at a Portuguese university in response to a request from national authorities and UNIOGBIS. The location for the research was chosen due to its relatively large and diverse population and reported high crime rates. While the results of the survey carried out by the research team in Bairro Militar showed a sharp polarisation of participants' perceptions of security and insecurity (49.5 per cent and 50.5 per cent, respectively), the arguments expressed by respondents who felt safe and by those who felt insecure focused largely on policing issues. For example, 24.5 per cent of respondents noted that the presence of the police was reassuring and 22.8 per cent of respondents identified scarce or insufficient policing as the main cause of insecurity in the neighbourhood (Sani/Nunes 2013). As a result, and based on the community's inputs, the researchers recommended the adoption of measures aimed at empowering citizens and at training law enforcement agents (ibid., 59). Beyond the initial survey, the training itself was to be carried out and customised with the involvement of the community.

To address the public's concerns, and based on the findings of the research, UNIOGBIS and national authorities jointly developed a proposal for the establishment of Model Police Stations across the country. The MPS were rooted in the community policing paradigm, which combines "*consultation* with community members, *responsiveness* to their security needs, collective *problem solving* to identify the most appropriate means of meeting these needs, and the *mobilization* of the public to make all this happen" (Grabosky 2009a, 1). Having achieved positive results in other post-conflict scenarios (see Grabosky 2009b, covering Papua New Guinea, Cambodia and South Africa, among others), the application of the community policing paradigm in Guinea-Bissau was thought to bridge the perceived wide gap between law enforcement agents and the public. The change sought was to introduce national law enforcement agents to a philosophy of policing *with* and *for* the community, based on a more preventive than reactive approach.

The MPS in Bairro Militar opened in September 2011. The participatory approach was extended to the training on community policing, not only to enhance the capacities of police officers but also to establish partnerships between the Bairro Militar community, non-governmental organisations and the business sector. During participatory training, residents of Bairro Militar were invited to participate and discuss with trainees (national law enforcement agents) issues affecting the security of their community.

The exchange between residents and the police was intended to create the space for solutions to address the needs of the former within the limited resources of the latter, including the fight against drug trafficking. In the city of Bissau, the Bairro Militar has the second largest population (14%) of drug consumers between the ages of 15 and 25. Of the entire population surveyed in a 2013 study in that age group, 17% stated that they obtained funds from trafficking drugs (Có Jr 2013, 53-55).

The government of Guinea-Bissau has recognised the need to involve civil society organisations working on crime prevention to reach a common understanding on cooperative activities (Republic of Guinea-Bissau 2011). From that perspective, it was hoped that the MPS would not only benefit the communities where they were established but would also serve as an entry point for and as an example of the larger process of security sector reform in the country (Kohl 2015).

According to data obtained from interviews with officers at the Model Police Station in Bairro Militar in July 2016, crime statistics covering the period between 2013 and mid-2015 do not allow a straightforward correlation to be established between the effectiveness of this approach and a reduction in drug trafficking or social violence. The number of reported drug-related offences was constant in 2013 and 2014, and fell by half by mid-2015. However, there was then a fourfold increase by mid-2016. The difficulty in establishing

a correlation stems from two factors. First, the increase in reported crimes coincides with a transitional period following a coup d'état in April 2012, which formally ended with general elections in May 2014. However, the new government which came to power in July 2014 was dismissed in August 2015, and political instability has returned to the country to date. Given the constant replacement of decision-makers on the side of the government, including police commanders, it becomes difficult to determine, with any degree of accuracy, the extent to which the MPS approach to community policing may have affected crime rates in Bairro Militar. The second factor is the difficulty in attributing the increase in crime reporting to the participatory approach as creating a greater willingness on the part of the community to report crime (Truman/Langton 2015, 7) or to a greater ability, through training of police officers, to document those crimes effectively.

It is beyond the scope of this response to juxtapose the participatory model advocated by Arévalo de León and Tager against the timeline of Guinea-Bissau's instability and the dynamics of drug trafficking in the same period. However, according to an external assessment, the MPS in Bairro Militar and the training provided to law enforcement agents have so far had only a limited impact owing to their "too abstract and superficial" nature and their inability to accurately reflect local dynamics and attract sufficient attention from beneficiaries (Kohl 2015, 27). While the training provided was quite specific in some areas (such as investigation techniques and reporting), it also covered matters of broad interest, such as human rights and gender mainstreaming which may be perceived by some trainees as somehow lofty concepts. It is, however, important to recall that the MPS's potential as part of larger security sector reform efforts in the country is still to be realised, particularly considering that the establishment of 11 other police stations across the country was suspended following the coup d'état in April 2012. Despite a return to constitutional order in 2014, the non-replication of this model until recently (a new MPS for the south of the country received international funding in May 2016) illustrates the challenges in translating a community-based approach to a nationwide policy commitment to address social violence.

5 Outlook: model replication

We have discussed the application of participatory and inclusive peacebuilding methodologies, as advocated by Arévalo de León and Tager, by focusing on the establishment of an MPS in a neighbourhood of Bissau as one element of UNIOGBIS's larger strategy to support national authorities in strengthening state institutions, including in the security sector. The MPS represents just one instance in which national authorities, international stakeholders and civil society participated jointly in designing an initiative to address the fragility of rule of law and security institutions and thus improve the prospects for stability and development in the country.

The impact of this multi-stakeholder approach was influenced by successive changes of government since the MPS came into operation (2011 to date), accompanied by interruptions or delays in international support. The MPS's results in addressing drug trafficking in the city of Bissau remain embryonic and the replication of this model would require a controlled qualitative and quantitative assessment of the contribution it can make in the Bissau-Guinean context. For the time being, the MPS illustrates an application of the peacebuilding approach in Guinea-Bissau's security sector reform, but has yet to connect and produce a broader societal impact. The connection between community-oriented problem solving and the formulation of national security policies, however, remains dependent on factors beyond the community itself, including political stability and economic development.

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Armed Social Violence and Peacebuilding
A Response

Bernardo Arévalo de León and
Ana Glenda Tager

Content

In our article about armed social violence, we intended to reflect on both the challenges and the opportunities that the use of a peacebuilding approach holds for the effective transformation of phenomena such as organised crime and urban violence. Our fellow researchers and practitioners have provided insightful, thoughtful and thought-provoking commentary that enriches and deepens what we hope will be an ongoing debate on developing new operational frameworks for (peacebuilding) engagement with issues of violence in society.

It is in this vein that we have formulated this response. These are initial thoughts in a dialogic engagement between policy-makers, researchers and practitioners in search of more effective strategies for what we see as the ultimate goal of our field: supporting and enabling non-violent state-formation processes. It would be impossible to follow each and every strand in the rich commentary we have received, and we are sure that readers of our article and the comments will expand and deepen this reflection. In so doing, they will help all of us improve our capacity to understand these issues, and to operationalise effective strategies and interventions for addressing them.

"This problem is that of violence itself"

We are quoting a phrase used by Jenny Pearce in her response to our article (Pearce 2016) to underline the fundamental nature of the peacebuilding challenge: the overt expressions of violence that emerge in society under certain circumstances – moments, issues and places – are the result of deeper factors – values, norms, patterns of interpersonal and social interaction – that reproduce along time and place in society. This is what we referred to when we pointed to the systemic, complex, fluid and ubiquitous nature of violence in society (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 12-14), a phenomenon that she refers to as the "plurality of violences": under the surface of the observable manifestations of violence – social or political – lie others that affect the different members of society in different ways. They often escape our attention, sometimes because they are harder to identify (such as deep-seated cultural values that legitimise 'hurting the Other'), sometimes because our own perspectives on the problem ignore them, as Pearce exemplifies with the case of rape and gender violence. We highlighted in our lead article how important it is not to lose sight of such underlying or less visible aspects of violence (Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 13).

Pearce points to the danger of losing sight of this plurality in the process of operationalising strategies that address specific expressions of violence: "How do we reconcile operationally the need to factor the way violences interact over space and time with the need to focus on feasible and effective peacebuilding?" (Pearce 2016, 36). This is a critical question, pointing to a fundamental challenge in our field: how to foster transformations of systemic, societal and historical scope, which are required for an effective 'pacification' of society,[1] through interventions that are bound by the limited (and sometimes limiting) international conceptual, financial and operational frameworks under which they operate?

We fully share her concern, and support her suggestion that the first step in this direction will be to recognise that peacebuilding interventions need to understand and address the multiple faces of violence in society – visible and invisible, armed and unarmed, social, political and individual. Those intervening need to engage those who experience everyday violences in identifying these multiple facets. Pearce formulates this as an addition to the policy recommendations presented in our lead article: to start "building security agendas capable of responding to the differentiated experience of the plural violences of everyday life" (Pearce 2016, 37).

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[1] 'Pacification' is understood as the process of making violence and coercion dysfunctional in social and political life (for the full argument, see Arévalo de León/Tager 2016, 4/5).

Indeed, participatory stakeholder definition of agendas for effective transformation – what are the problems, what needs to change, what mechanisms should be used to pursue such change – is a fundamental tenet of peacebuilding, and one that anchors our own organisation's peacebuilding work. Pearce's emphasis on the need to develop sensitivity to the plurality of violences suggests an expanded framing for the conversations that take place in such participatory engagements. Facilitating discussions that identify and map the different ways in which violence is experienced in a community, beyond the more evident expressions that motivate the intervention in the first place, will facilitate the identification of the complex interactions between the different violences and the systemic loops that enable their systemic reproduction. Interventions that focus on a specific manifestation of violence in a context can then become an entry point into the wider problem of violence in a society, enabling the development of holistic strategies that address multiple factors through the mobilisation of separate but coordinated interventions, focusing on the different components of the problem.

Box 1 – Using a 'bottom-up' approach to address violences

Mainstreaming a violence-sensitive approach to peacebuilding work would provide an expanded framework for guiding practitioners in more astutely facilitating discussions in order to 'unearth' dimensions of violence that stakeholders are not normally aware of or willing to discuss. It would allow participants to openly express what normally remains unsaid and operationalise more integral responses.

Based on the participatory action research (PAR) methodology used by Interpeace, the process would include the following steps:

    a. Conduct stakeholder mapping, identifying all those concerned and involved with violence in a given context.

    b. Consult with stakeholders, exploring purposefully but carefully the different ways in which violences and their impacts are experienced – including the less evident and explicit dimensions, public and private – not only of those who suffer the brunt of violence but also those that 'deal' with it and, if possible, those that practise it.

    c. Revise and complete, if necessary, the stakeholder mapping on the basis of the information flowing from the consultation process itself.

    d. Gather stakeholders and present back to them the systematised results of the first round of consultations, confronting them with the various definitions of the problem and the different ways in which the problem is experienced by every actor. If gathering all stakeholders into one room is not possible at the outset, engage them through sector/actor-specific settings, 'shuttling' between them and gradually developing the common ground – and will – that would enable convergence.

    e. Foster the development of a common definition of the problem that recognises and integrates everybody's perspectives; chart the different dimensions of the phenomenon.

    f. Discuss possible solutions addressing these different dimensions, and foster agreement – consensus if possible – on solutions.

    g. Forge partnerships between the stakeholders of relevance to each solution, in order to facilitate implementation.

Joint action: "The next great global challenge of our time"

Andy Carl (Carl 2016) closes his response to our article with this phrase, urging international mobilisation towards effective action in addressing violences. We couldn't agree more. We have approached the problem of social armed violence in our article precisely from the perspective of the need to understand and support the development of long-term, systemic and non-violent 'pacification' processes. We have suggested that multi-stakeholder, collaborative approaches that synergise, strengthen and allow complementarity between the usually fragmented and disconnected capacities for peace existing at the national and local level can make an important contribution in terms of understanding and addressing the context-specific challenges, and mobilising social agency across the state-society divide for an effective and sustained transformation. Most of our policy recommendations refer to this challenge.

But although we also identified the "siloed", fractured and uncoordinated way in which international stakeholders operate in these contexts as one of the obstacles to more effective international support for home-grown peacebuilding, we failed to derive the corresponding policy recommendation: addressing the problem of fragmentation and disarticulation among international actors themselves. Noting this gap, Carl proposes additional policy recommendations that we wholeheartedly embrace: the need to recognise that there is a variety of stakeholders across institutional and disciplinary domains at the international level and in donor countries that need to be engaged in a collective process of sharing and learning, in order to develop "a new global consensus" that leads to "innovative and effective responses to armed conflict" (Carl 2016, 47).

Of course, this is a challenge for international action in support of development, political and humanitarian challenges in general. 'Whole of government' approaches – applied in donor or recipient countries – offer only a partial and insufficient response to this problem. 'Whole of society' approaches (Carl 2016, 47) need to be applied as well, and at the international level, recognising that local, national and international civil society organisations, such as academia, NGOs and religious institutions, are valuable partners who have much to contribute towards the development of effective peacebuilding strategies. *All* the stakeholders have much to share with and learn from each other. As Carl further reminds us, partnership is the key concept here: partnerships which bring actors across state-society and national-international divides into networks of collaborative action and which recognise and build upon the specific added value each partner brings.

Box 2 – Local-level Covenants for Life and Peace in El Salvador

The reduction of violence generated by the gang truce in El Salvador enabled the implementation of a participatory strategy aimed at establishing "violence-free zones" in 11 of the most violent municipalities, through the development of covenants between different stakeholders in the communities.

The steps include:

1. Working with municipal authorities, local government delegates, community and faith leaders and civil society organisations, sensitising them to the need to develop holistic solutions to the problem, generating consensus on the 'terms of engagement' between the community and the youth gangs and including:

   a. Agreeing on the need for a community development strategy enabling productive reintegration of youths, led by the municipal authorities in partnership with the private sector

   b. Developing, with the local police forces, a community policing model that makes limited use of mass and night arrests

2. Developing local-level 'cease-fire' arrangements among the violent gangs in the locality. This included the creation of a group of community facilitators that sustained regular communication with the local gangs, intervening as 'mediators' to reduce tensions and defuse violence between the different groups, while simultaneously liaising with the local police stations to prevent the escalation of violence between youths and police forces.

3. Developing with the youth gangs the terms for their engagement in the covenant through specific commitments to stop aggression, enable free movement, curb criminal activity, surrender arms, and participate in community development programmes.

Once these three elements are in place,

4. The Covenants for Life and Peace, with specific commitments by every participant/stakeholder, are signed in a public ceremony, signifying transcendence and informing the community, followed up by monthly assessment meetings for stakeholders.

5. A municipal-level action plan for productive reintegration of youths through employment and small entrepreneurship is agreed upon between local authorities, private sector, community and gangs, on the basis of a participatory needs assessment. The plan includes a range of complementary activities, such as capacity-building workshops on conflict transformation and culture of peace for youths involved in violence, arts and cultural activities, and rehabilitation and improvement of public spaces.

6. A municipal-level religious platform is established to coordinate the churches' support for the process at the grassroots level.

7. Development of strategic partnerships with regional (Organization of American States) and international (Interpeace) organisations to provide political support and backstopping to local-level efforts.

8. Development of a communications strategy to foster transparency and prevent public mis-information.

This strategy was implemented in the municipalities of Ilopango, Santa Tecla, Quetzaltepeque, Sonsonate, Puerto La Libertad, Apopa, San Vicente, Nueva Concepción, Puerto El Triunfo, Ciudad Delgado and Zacatecoluca, led by authorities from different political parties: FMLN, ARENA and DC. Although in every case the covenants led to a reduction in gang violence and improvements on insecurity, the unravelling of the truce at the national level and the hardening of the *mano dura* approach by national authorities, and political changes in the municipalities due to the electoral process, made the effort unsustainable in most of these cities. Only in Ilopango and Santa Tecla do municipal authorities continue to use multi-stakeholder approaches effectively to address social armed violence.[2]

It is important, however, to emphasise again that such partners need to recognise that sustainable impact will be achieved only to the extent that the peacebuilding process is actually owned and *led* by local stakeholders (Interpeace 2015b). The self-regulation that is necessary for sustainable peace can result only from the development of "robust and resilient capacities for self-organisation", which international actors can easily erode through the implementation of overbearing interventions that leave critical definitions of peacebuilding gaps, goals and strategies in their hands (de Coning 2015). Carl takes exception to our reference to the role of international actors as "enablers" and not "builders", and points to the fact that externals "play primary, influential and complementary roles, inseparably entwined with endogenous or local ones" (Carl 2016, 47). That is, indeed, the nature of partnerships, in which collaborative action is the result of, and results in, reciprocal influencing and enriching among participants. But the complementarity of roles he indicates suggests precisely a differentiation in responsibilities within the partnership. For the

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2   For a participatory systematisation of best practices and lessons identified by stakeholders from the eleven municipalities, see Interpeace 2013.

development of sustainable socio-political dynamics, this requires leadership to remain in the hands of the local stakeholders (ibid.). In the end, this nuance might be more of a discrepancy in terminology than in essence: the example he uses – the Berghof Foundation's work in Sri Lanka – is precisely the type of enabling intervention in which international actors partner with locals, aiming to "create an inclusive, broad-based critical mass of organisations and individuals who are empowered to play an active, informed and influential role in the Sri Lankan peace process" (Ropers 2011, 110). This is, specifically, strengthening the capacities of local actors to become the builders of their own peace.

Thinking "… carefully about … the challenges to … operationalisation"

We are using Gema Santamaría's urgent call (2016, 57) to be mindful of the opportunities, challenges and pitfalls surrounding the operationalisation of a peacebuilding approach to social armed violence, to underline a shared concern in all the comments on our article. Referring to the extensive experience of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) in the use of Listening Methodology (LM) in Myanmar, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, Karen Simbulan and Laurens Visser (2016, 67) point to the added value of listening approaches: they "elicit the perceptions, needs and motivations" of stakeholders about violence in their context. This observation echoes Pearce's call for an experientially-based mapping of the plurality of violences (Pearce 2016, 38). We agree that such an approach is necessary not only for the granular understanding of a problem but also for the mobilisation of social agency through stakeholder empowerment.

In their discussion of the development of a community policing model for Guinea-Bissau, Marco Carmignani and Fernando Cavalcante point to the challenge of connecting "community-oriented problem solving … (with) … the formulation of national security policies" (Cavalcante/Carmignani 2016, 74). This is especially the case in unstable and fragile environments, due to the number of factors that lie outside the control of the 'pilot' intervention implemented in one of Bissau's neighbourhoods. Their call for effective evaluation of 'pilot' experiences is critical for scaling up a local experiment into a national strategy.

Gema Santamaría's article (2016) focuses on the challenges of operationalising a peacebuilding strategy and process. She examines these on the basis of her extensive and insightful knowledge of the violence unleashed in Mexico as a result of the demise of the '*pax mafiosa*' which underpinned relations between criminal organisations and state institutions for several decades (Santamaría 2016, 53). Reflecting on the critical challenges that line the road towards the implementation of peacebuilding approaches in such contexts, Santamaría regrets that in our lead article we did not "provide a working roadmap to operationalise and strategise" the approach (ibid., 52). She is correct: we have not provided any such roadmap, but this omission is deliberate. As practitioners, we remain highly sceptical of peacebuilding roadmaps and blueprints, as they normally represent 'prêt-a-porter' strategies that view a problem in terms of predefined issues, entry points and categories, often obscuring rather than illuminating the challenges and opportunities each specific context presents. We believe that the complexity inherent in peacebuilding contexts requires "a new approach to planning that goes beyond the old problem-solving 'assessment/design/apply' approach … (and)… can recognise the need for continuous iterative processes and that (can) enable interventions to evolve along with the surrounding system" (de Coning 2015).

Participatory approaches such as Listening Methodology (LM) used by CPCS or Participatory Action Research (PAR) often used by Interpeace (Interpeace 2015a) and other practitioners can be used to harness the information and insight that, in peacebuilding contexts, often lie fragmented in the different spaces

of society and its institutions. It is only after such bottom-up, participatory analysis of a problem that options for an intervention – goals, actors, framing, methods – can be considered and translated by local actors themselves into an effective strategy which operationalises the approach. And indeed, the onus on peacebuilding practitioners – international and national – is to facilitate the process through which stakeholders translate insightful analysis into effective operations, overcoming the challenges inherent in their specific context.

From this perspective, we would like to address two critical issues raised by Santamaría in her thought-provoking piece: the first is the desirability and feasibility of, and conditions for, engaging certain violent actors in collaborative efforts; the second is the risk of unintended negative outcomes of strategic and operational choices.

Santamaría raises several very significant challenges regarding Mexican drug-trafficking organisations, serving to remind us that peacebuilding as an operational approach is not a panacea that can be used to address each and every state-formation problem. Not every 'spoiler' would or could be engaged in the type of collaborative interaction presupposed in multi-stakeholder scenarios, and dialogue approaches might need to be combined with more traditional law enforcement interventions. Such challenges and opportunities for engagement need to be defined case-by-case, and it may well be that, in some cases, certain violent actors would remain beyond engagement. At the same time, this does not mean that transformative efforts in the socio-economic and institutional frameworks in which such violence emerges cannot take place: violent actors should not hold veto power over peacebuilding efforts.

It is in this sense that we have made references to the need to reach out to violent actors and pointed to the legal impediments that sometimes exist. In her comments regarding the need for "robust interlocutors among armed social groups" for processes of "dialogue and engagement", Santamaría (2016, 56) implies a synonymy between peacebuilding and mediation which we have not intended to affirm (see also Box 3 below). We cannot recommend *a priori* engaging spoilers through negotiation/mediation efforts, nor do we recommend the use of any specific legal strategy, as issues of desirability and feasibility can only be determined through ad hoc analysis. We find Santamaría's concern with unintended negative effects of peacebuilding approaches apposite and important. But we do echo Katrin Planta and Véronique Dudouet (2015, 9), who call for an approach which, "instead of blacklisting actors on the basis of their 'criminal', 'apolitical' or 'non-conflict' nature, … should be encouraged to consider with all due care the options and building blocks for engagement", and which introduces the legal modifications necessary to enable such engagement.

As a matter of fact, a comprehensive peacebuilding strategy would include a range of actions and approaches, including – if relevant – mediation efforts of the type Santamaría alludes to, as well as traditional law enforcement approaches. But it is worth underlining that not every mediation process constitutes a peacebuilding effort (for example those forming part of 'stabilisation' strategies). It is the integration of diverse actions and approaches into holistic, context-sensitive strategies that aim not at containment, stabilisation or mitigation of violence but at the effective transformation of the conditions that breed and enable it in society, which makes them part of a peacebuilding strategy. This was, by the way, the intention of the Salvadorian truce between youth gangs: to be one step on the path to effective transformation of violence (see Box 3; see also Interpeace 2016c). For peacebuilding, "lowering levels of violence, … disarmament campaigns, … public forms of dialogue, and moving away from repressive forms of policing such mass arrests and unreasonable searches" (Santamaría 2016, 55) are neither outcomes of nor preconditions for the operationalisation of a negotiation or mediation effort. They are, instead, part of a comprehensive strategy which – where relevant and viable – integrates mediation tools with complementary interventions (disarmament campaigns, public dialogue, etc.) and which uses mid-term goals, such as reducing violence rates or reformed police practices, as milestones towards comprehensive transformation.

Box 3 – The truce among youth gangs in El Salvador: beyond the reduction of homicides
The truce as a pact between rival gangs to stop murderous violence was never considered a 'stand-alone' intervention with violence reduction as the final outcome. Gang leaders, the governmental authorities that supported the pact and the mediators of the process all understood that the truce was an initial step, a confidence-building measure intended to enable other interventions which would address the social roots and conditions of violent gangs as a social phenomenon. Such a strategy became viable once the will of the gangs to find alternatives to the brutal violence of their every-day life was verified (Lemus/Martinez 2012). But contradictions within governmental authorities in the security and justice sector and low levels of public support led to the implosion of the truce, preventing other interventions from coming to fruition that would have addressed the conditions in which youth violence breeds – such as engaging the private sector, local authorities and communities in the development of local-level plans for alternative income generation sources for youths. This also precluded any transformation of social perceptions of violence (Interpeace 2015c).

The low level of public support for the truce was clearly expressed in speculation that the reduced murder rate was the result of the gangs' effort to 'disappear' the bodies, and not an actual reduction of their homicidal violence. Public officials came forward indicating that if such was the case it would be reflected in an equivalent increase in the rate of disappearances reported to official bodies, pointing to official statistics that would suggest not only that such an increase had *not* taken place, but that the disappearances were decreasing (Diario1.com 2016). Although inconsistency in official statistics and imprecise comparisons somewhat obscured the debate, an effort to eliminate inconsistency and incoherence from the official records of disappearances for the first year of the truce established that "the truth is that in 2012 reports to the Legal Medicine Institute not only showed an inter-annual reduction, but … a month-to-month reduction throughout the year" (Valencia Caravantes 2013; Stone 2013).

A final word and a revised list of policy recommendations

We want to express our sincere gratitude to Jenny, Karen and Laurens, Gema, Marco and Fernando, and Andy for their insightful and enriching commentary. We know that we have not done justice to their contributions, but hope that we have addressed the key points of their message. And we cannot think of a better testimony to the importance of their contributions than our need to incorporate into the policy recommendations key considerations they brought forward, albeit with some language modifications that we hope do not misrepresent their intention.

Box 4 – A revised list of policy recommendations
　1. **Prepare to stay put long-term … and invest:** Peacebuilding is about accompaniment, not intervention, and there are no shortcuts to state-formation processes. Effectively addressing the systemic nature of armed social violence will require multiple interventions at different levels and moments of the socio-political process. The international community needs to be ready to commit for the long haul and accompany local stakeholders as their strategies and actions evolve along time.
　2. **Allow local leadership to emerge:** Local ownership is about facilitating the emergence of local commitment and the capacity to address the problems of violence in society, not about convincing local actors to adopt externally defined policies. The particular interests of international actors

with regard to issues of armed social violence should be put on the table and openly discussed with local stakeholders. External input in the form of specialised know-how, comparative experiences and policy frameworks should be shared without inhibiting the development of locally defined and designed strategies.

3. **Foster the development of state-society coalitions:** The development of concerted action between state and society is critical in terms of the need to tap into capacities available on both sides of the state-society divide and address the deficits of trust and social cohesion that lie at the root of social violence problems. Anchoring peacebuilding strategies in wide social coalitions will enhance the viability and sustainability of the effort.

4. **Foster the development of a new global consensus on countering violence in society:** The type of change required for the development of effective strategies of international support for sustainable transformation of violent and polarised contexts requires the formation of an international coalition capable of transforming international conceptual, policy and operational frameworks. Such a coalition needs to include a variety of stakeholders across institutional and disciplinary domains at the international level and in donor countries that engage in a collective process of sharing and learning.

5. **Invest in strengthening local analytical capacity:** The most important capacity required to address armed social violence problems effectively resides not at the level of the international community, but within the societies facing these challenges. Strengthening research capacities in academic centres, think tanks, NGOs and governmental institutions, and fostering collaborative engagement among them and with external capacities, will be critical in sustaining the will and the capacity of local stakeholders to assume leadership of such efforts.

6. **Encourage the development of violence-sensitive approaches:** The sustainable transformation of violence in society will only happen if the pluralist and systemic nature of violence is recognised, using interventions addressing specific expressions of violence as entry points into wider, holistic strategies that aim for systemic transformation.

7. **Invest in the strengthening of local facilitation/mediation capacity:** The success of peacebuilding strategies which aim to engage violent actors in violence mitigation and transformation processes requires local expertise in the design and implementation of action research and dialogue processes. Fostering the development of such capacities in practitioners' networks will render these capacities more readily accessible.

8. **Foster and reward experimentation:** Peacebuilding engagement in armed social violence challenges is only just beginning, and there is a need to explore, adapt and develop new strategies and methodologies to improve their effectiveness. The international community should encourage practitioners to leave their "comfort zone" and be responsibly daring in the development of strategies and instruments that better respond to the particular complexities of problems of armed social violence.

9. **Review legal/operational frameworks:** Traditional law-and-order and international security frameworks impose legal limitations on the type of contacts that are possible with violent actors involved in criminal activity. These limitations can inhibit the development of alternative strategies aimed at engaging these actors in violence mitigation and transformation. Whenever and wherever relevant, strict prohibitions criminalising contact with criminal actors should be made flexible and new normative frameworks should be developed to enable engagements that protect peacebuilding practitioners and avoid reinforcing negative loops in social dynamics.

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