Berghof Foundation

Armed Social Violence and Peacebuilding

Towards an operational approach

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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 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 (Moser/McIlwaine 2014, 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 in essence (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 intercommunal 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 (TLVA 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 politico-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
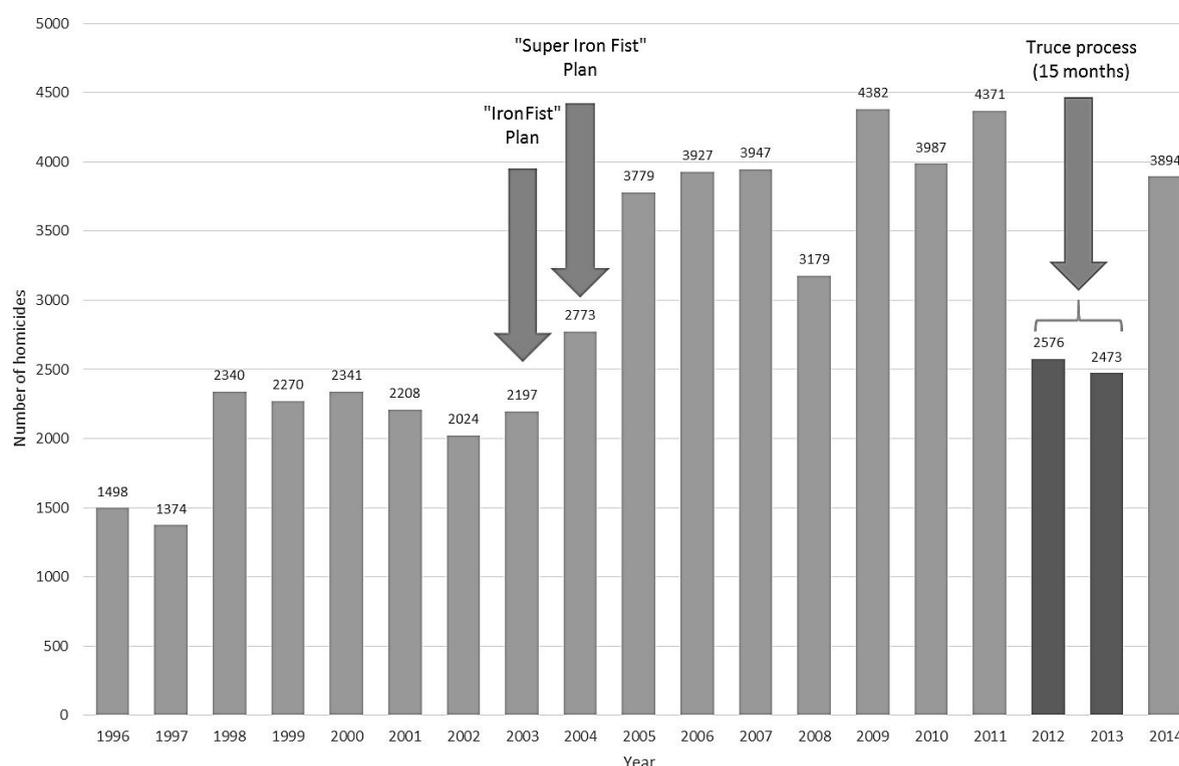
Total homicides per year 1996–2014. Source: Civil National Police, El Salvador

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 so doing. 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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Bernardo Arévalo de León is Senior Peacebuilding Advisor in Interpeace's International Peacebuilding Advisory Team (IPAT). Bernardo has been involved and working with Interpeace since 1996. Between 1996 and 1998 he was involved in managing a consensus building process in his native Guatemala, following the signature of the Peace Accords. Between 1999 and 2005 Bernardo coordinated a series of joint UNDP-Interpeace initiatives that applied participatory strategies to Security Sector Reform goals, first as Director of one of the projects and later as the head of Interpeace's regional office for Latin America. Between 2005 and 2011, he was the Director of the Joint Program Unit for UN/Interpeace Initiatives of UNOPS, a joint program established by the UN and Interpeace as a way to support UN field operations in the use of research-based dialogue strategies for the consolidation of peace and prevention of conflict, and supervised operations in Israel, Palestine, Cyprus and Liberia. Between 2011 and 2013, he served as Deputy Director-General, Research and Development, for Interpeace. Prior to his involvement with Interpeace, Bernardo served in Guatemala's Foreign Service for over 12 years, including as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and as Ambassador to Spain.

Bernardo holds a Ph.D. from Utrecht University (2015) and did graduate and post-graduate studies at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He is the author of several articles and books on issues such as democratization, civil-military relations and peacebuilding. His latest publication is *De la Milicia Colonial al Ejército Contrainsurgente: violencia, formación estatal y ejército en Guatemala, 1500-1963* (F&G Editores, Guatemala 2016).

Ana Glenda Tager Rosado is the Regional Director of Interpeace (Latin American Office). She did graduate and post-graduate studies in sociology at the University of Pontificia de Salamanca, Spain, and has almost 15 years of experience in managing multi-stakeholder dialogue processes for the consolidation of peace, security sector reform, resilience and peacebuilding and the elaboration of public policy proposals on youth related violence in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panamá and Belize.

In the Central America region she facilitated a process to support the Central America Integration System (SICA) in designing its "Regional Strategy on Prevention, Reduction, and Rehabilitation of children and youth at Risk or in Conflict with the Law". She has also been involved in processes of violence reduction in El Salvador and Honduras with actors directly related to violence like youth gangs (*maras and pandillas*) and sport clubs (*barras*).

She was also involved in the exploration of initiatives that applied participatory strategies for peacebuilding in Chiapas, Mexico, Peru, Haiti, and currently in Colombia. She has published articles about private security, security sector reform, citizenship security, intelligence, violence prevention, youth gangs, conflict transformation, dialogue and peacebuilding. Her latest articles incude: *Transformación de conflictos y prevención de la violencia en el Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica,* co-authored with Otto Argueta (Universidad de Jalisco, México, in press).

Recent joint publications of both authors are: *From Project to Process: POLSEDE, Civil Society and Security Sector Reform in Guatemala,* in David Cortright (ed.) Strengthening Peacebuilding Policy through Civil Society Empowerment (Kroc Institute for International Studies. Notre Dame University 2016); *El Salvador: negotiating with gangs,* co-authored with Isabel Aguilar Umaña (Accord, Conciliation Resources, 2014); and *Central America: a Peacebuilding Agenda beyond Post-Conflict* (Geneva Peacebuilding Platform 2015).