Bridget Moix

CONF 900

May 9, 2014

Choosing Peace:

An Exploration of Motivations and Means of Peace Agency

Foundations

> *- Why did you do it?*

> *- I'm not sure really. I just thought someone had to say something. I didn't want the war to consume our community. I just didn't believe it had to be that way.*

As war in the former Yugoslavia threatened to engulf her community, a young girl of 15 makes an impassioned plea for peace at the funeral of a teenage friend killed because of his ethnicity. She is not sure of her own motivations behind taking a stand when others were not. She remembers feelings of anger, grief and determination during the war, as well as times of joy and laughter with her family as they hide from shelling in her grandparents' basement. She recognizes the mixed ethnicity of her parents as an asset, not a risk. She is clearly a woman of deep values and conscience. She is humble, hard-working, thoughtful. Her plea for peace does not stop the war. It may not have had any traceable effect at all. But somehow her town does pull back from the brink and avoid a collapse into the kind of ethnic killing that surrounded it. It reknits itself together after the war. The girl grows up, graduates, and goes on to earn her PhD in peace and conflict studies, focusing her life on supporting her own society and others recovering from mass violence.

This simple yet extraordinary story sparks important questions. What motivated the girl to take a stand, to speak out against the violence rising in her community, when doing so would surely place her at risk too? What personal characteristics, cognitive processes, values, beliefs, or experiences compelled her to choose peace when so many

1

others around her were being swept into an expanding system of violence? And how did she make that choice? What means – internal or external resources – did she draw on in moving herself from feeling motivated to act for peace, to actually engaging in that action and sustaining that commitment years after?

This story, and many others like it, are at the heart of my dissertation study. I ask the seemingly simple, yet remarkably complex question: *Why and how do people choose peace in the midst of violence?* I am led – or perhaps returning - to this question after nearly 20 years working on issues of peace and conflict, because of my deep admiration for, and curiosity about, those individuals with whom I've interacted along the way who have made this choice. I approach it from a bias toward two fundamental lessons that others have taught me and which have been confirmed by my own experiences thus far. The first, an insight first offered to me by Andrea Bartoli some 15 years ago, is the simple but powerful recognition that in every situation of violence, war, and human suffering, no matter how wide and how deep, no matter how entrenched and systemic, there are always people acting for peace. This may seem like a naïve hope more than an evidence-based insight, but I believe, and empirical evidence is beginning to show, that this is a human reality. It does not negate or overpower the dual, simultaneous, and sometimes more powerful reality that many people also choose violence; but it does affirm that active peacemaking does live along side and in the midst of the violence.

The second lesson that undergirds my approach to the question of why and how people choose peace, comes from Elise and Kenneth Boulding, Quaker scholar-activists who helped found the modern field of peace studies. Elise and Kenneth often remarked

that "*What exists is possible.*" In other words, what happens, no matter how rarely it

happens, even if it exists just once in time and space, represents a wider possibility of

reality. People choosing peace in the midst of violence does happen. Many of us have our

own experiences of it, and we have a growing body of scholarly and practitioner evidence

documenting it.   And so, according to the Boulding theory, choosing peace represents not

just a reality in some situations, but also a hidden possibility in all situations, even where it

does not appear to be happening or we do not yet have the evidence of its existence. If

what exists is possible, than many more of us may also be able to take risks for peace, to

choose it when others do not, if we can access the right motivations and means to help us

do so.

These two lessons, which form the foundational insights behind an exploration

toward a theory of **peace agency**, have been taught to me not only by Andrea and the

Bouldings, but by the many hundreds of people I have had the privilege to cross paths with

through the years who are actively and intentionally choosing peace, even as systems of

violence swirl around them. I am awed, inspired, and deeply grateful to all of them.

Toward a Theory of Peace Agency

Despite the many tragedies of war and violence across the globe, the majority of the

world's people, the majority of the time, in the majority of places, are interacting in

cooperative ways that prevent violence, keep communities safe, and advance shared goals.

Do we understand why and how this happens? The field of conflict analysis and resolution

has made significant progress in understanding the causes and consequences of human

3

violence and war. The development of theories around basic human needs, psycho-social

processes, inter- and intragroup relations, structural violence, identity, and narrative all

lend important insight into the motivations and means that drive people to engage in often

horrific, "unthinkable" acts against other human beings. We are beginning to better

recognize and understand the dark side of who we are, Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil"

(Arendt, 1963). That understanding is critical for our efforts to prevent, mitigate, and

resolve human violence, and has led to important practical efforts as well. Programs

working at the community, national, and international level to build capacities to help

prevent and mitigate violence and rebuild after wars have mushroomed over the past two

decades. Policymakers are investing more dollars in efforts for conflict analysis, early

warning and response, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and reconstruction. Most of these

investments, unfortunately, still come after wars, when lives and societies have been torn

apart and must be rewoven again.

At the same time, much less work has been done to rigorously research and

understand the motivations and means employed by individuals who choose peace instead

of violence. We recognize conflict is an inherent part of human society, but we do not

examine peace with the same assumption. Conflict is the norm, peace the exception.

Conflict the focus of study and analysis, even though peace is the ultimate goal. In large

part, our theories and strategies begin from the recognition that violent conflict exists and

so we seek to move toward peace. That the opposite is also true – peace exists alongside

and even in the midst of violence –somehow is less apparent to us, or at least less

thoroughly examined. The same linear thinking from negative to positive also tends to

dominate the practices and policies of the peacebuilding community, including governmental and non-governmental actors.   Aside from the still relatively small dedicated field of peace studies, as a broader community we have yet to develop a strong theoretical foundation or build a strong body of evidence to explain why and how individuals and communities are motivated to opt for peace over violence, and, notably, why they do so even in the midst of war and violent conflict.

    If, as Elise and Kenneth Boulding propose, "what exists is possible," (Portilla, 2006) then why and how people choose to actively pursue peace, particularly amid ongoing systems of active violence, represents a critically understudied area of human possibility for better understanding and perhaps transforming our world. As the challenges (and failures) of linear, externally driven approaches to addressing conflict are increasingly evident, and more attention is given to locally-led approaches that support those actors in situations of conflict who are working for peace, our field is ripe for a fundamental re-examination of core questions. Improving our understanding of how and why people choose peace, even in the midst of violence, is critical for advancing the field of peace and conflict resolution toward a more holistic approach, and one which supports and empowers people to make peace a daily and ongoing choice in their lives (not only a technical field that must be studied and funded).   If we can better understand and recognize the realities of peace that already exist, often expressed through individual choices and actions, we may be better able to support and expand those realities in the future.

My study explores the question of *why and how people choose peace in the midst of violence*, with hopes of gaining insight into the **motivations** and **means** that drive individuals to make and sustain those choices. It strives toward the development of a theory of what I call ***peace agency***, defined as the intentional capacity to act for positive, nonviolent change, even within systems of violence. Through the stories and words of people who have demonstrated peace agency, I will examine the *motivations* that lead individuals and sometimes whole communities to take risks for peace, and the *means* they employ to realize and sustain those efforts, often at notable risk to themselves. By better understanding those motivations and means, I hope to shed light on how such choices might be better supported and multiplied. As part of this theory-building exercise, I will also touch on questions of how choices at the micro level affect broader societal transformation, or systems change. While recognizing this will be just one small contribution to an ongoing dialogue, my hope is that this study can help our field begin to transform its understanding, relationships, and resource-sharing in ways that strengthen the ability of local communities and individuals – that is, all of us in our own spaces - to choose peace in transformative ways.

In developing the theoretical grounding for this study, I draw from three primary streams of literature: 1) locally-led peacebuilding theory and practice, 2) post-liberal, post-structuralist peacebuilding critique, and e) social agency theory, with a focus on positive deviance. This literature review examines key lines of debate within these three streams of debate that relate to my question and suggests why the field is ripe for a theory of peace agency. It considers what we already know about peace agency and where key gaps in our

understanding still lie. It concludes with a preliminary discussion of potential hypotheses

that could help explain peace agency, and that form starting points for development and

testing of a theory on peace agency. For the purpose of this literature review, I use the

working definition of peace agency as *the capacity of individuals or communities to act in*

ways which seek to positively and nonviolently transform conflict situations toward more

peaceful and just realities, even in the midst of violence.

The "So What?" Question, or, Why Study Peace Agency?

Peacebuilding, as a field, is failing. On May 2, 2014, the director of United Nations

humanitarian operations declared publicly that the international community had "failed"

the people of the Central African Republic. Similar declarations have been made by high-

level international officials in relation to wars in Rwanda, Syria, the Democratic Republic of

Congo, South Sudan, and most other of the world's trouble spots, usually after thousands if

not hundreds of thousands are already dead. Despite decades of active interventions by

the UN, many national governments, civil society, and the growing field of peace and

conflict resolution practitioners to help prevent, halt, and recover after violent conflicts, the

record of success is disturbingly limited. That is not to say the international community's

efforts to improve its capacities in this regard are not improving. Indeed, the mere growth

in number, scale, and variety of peacekeeping and peacebuilding interventions undertaken

by the international community signals important progress in strengthening the world's

commitment, approaches, and tools to reducing human violence and war. Research over

recent years indicates that the international community is improving its ability to end wars

through mediation and negotiated settlement, even if its ability to prevent new wars still lags behind (Woocher, 2009). "Peacebuilding" as a field has seen significant expansion in its development of strong theory, research, and practice, and it continues to innovate at a rapid pace. No doubt many lives have been saved and improved by the growing panoply of actors engaged and efforts underway.

Growing concern over the poor cost-benefit ratio, or even measurable impact of international interventions to prevent, respond, and rebuild after conflicts is, however, raising serious questions. Recognition that despite the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in post-conflict peacebuilding efforts, nearly half of conflicts re-emerge within five years is challenging the way the world does peacebuilding (Collier, 2003). For 2014, the UN peacekeeping budget stands at $7.83 billion, a cost which has been growing over the past two decades as the international community expands the number and size of its interventions to restore and rebuild peace in war-torn societies. Peacekeeping missions, while vitally important, are often more a costly band-aid than a lasting solution to the problems societies face. More recent investments in peacebuilding programs as part of UN or other international interventions, or by external non-governmental organizations, struggle to demonstrate impact and sustainability. Important flaws in current approaches are being revealed through a growing number of case studies and evaluations of peacebuilding programs among practitioner organizations, while scholars of peace and conflict studies are beginning to debate the very nature of peacebuilding approaches. In the process, fundamental questions are being raised about how the world will work to end violence and build peace in the future.

One emerging area of significant debate revolves around how the international community engages with local actors in peacebuilding efforts. Critics point to a liberal interventionist bias that dominates the field and assumes solutions to conflict need to be driven from the outside, represented largely by Western ideology and undertaken by actors and resources from the global North directed into the global South (Funk 2012, Jabri 2013, Liden 2013). Interventions designed and directed by external actors are then superimposed upon local contexts for which they may not be appropriate, leading to failure to improve peace, or worse, increased harm (Funk 2012, Donais 2011, Macginty and Richmond 2013). As Nathan Funk points out, "Activities undertaken in the name of peacebuilding have often marginalized local actors, proceeded in ways that did not adequately respond to local expectations, and at times replaced one set of problems with another" (Funk, 2012, p. 392).

In his in-depth study of the UN's peace operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 2002-2006, Severine Autesserer points to a "dominant peacebuilding culture" embedded in the international system that ignores the importance of local violence and in turn marginalizes local peacebuilders. Instead, his study reveals how the international community's focus on liberal peace (achieved largely through elections) and national and international issues (addressed at macro policy levels) ultimately failed to address the key drivers of violence and undermined much-needed local peacebuilding efforts (Autesserre, 2012). Growing evidence demonstrates how failures to deliver peace through external interventions often derive from problems such as a lack of recognition or understanding of local knowledge and capacities; cookie-cutter technical solutions that do not fit specific

contexts; and, the creation of parallel economies and systems of actors that undermine local capacities for peace (Donais 2011).

As debate grows within the field itself and pressure mounts from donors and policymakers to demonstrate clearer impact and better returns on peacebuilding investments, calls are growing for reorienting the peacebuilding field away from externally driven interventions toward more effective locally-led approaches that are less costly and more sustainable. Increasingly, foundations are shifting funding toward more direct support to local initiatives, practitioners are seeking to improve their own ways of engaging local actors, and policy discussions are engaging local peacebuilding questions. In this context, some peace and conflict scholars and practitioners are already advancing important theory and practice related to locally-led approaches to peacebuilding. John Paul Lederach (1997, 2003, 2005) and Mary Anderson (2013) have spent years developing intentional theory and practice focused on supporting community-based actors in their efforts for peace. They have continually reminded the field of the need to understand, support, and engage local people and approaches to building peace if the field hopes to reduce unintentional harm and ensure sustainable processes for peace and reconciliation become embedded in societies. As David Chandler (2013) has recently argued, a "fundamental shift" is needed in the field to recognizing "the primary source of agency for peacebuilding as the local actors themselves, who often must work against the problematic approaches brought by outsiders" (2013, p. 92).

A theory of peace agency could help us make that shift and would build on the emerging literature related to peace agency. In her most recent work, Opting Out of War,

Anderson examines 14 communities that chose not to engage in violence, and in some instances to actively work to spread peace, within civil war contexts. Her book provides a critical jumping off point and inspiration for seeking to develop a theory of peace agency, concluding:

> *The experiences of these nonwar communities remind us that oppositions exist. They remind us that capacities exist. They teach us that communities of people have the agency to shape things, even in the face of seemingly awful odds, to preserve the values they share and their ways of life. These lessons are not trivial. (2013, p. 176)*

Other emerging scholars like Oliver Kaplan of Denver University are also taking up related studies. Examining communities in Colombia and the Philippines that remained peaceful amid war, Kaplan is adding to the field's understanding that local actors can and do demonstrate agency even within war situations, acting for peace on their own, often without external support or intervention (Kaplan 2013). While new studies like these are making important contributions to the field, there is still not a clear understanding of what motivates and sustains locally-led peacebuilding, which might in turn help us understand how to support and strengthen it. Nor are there established theories to fully explain peace agency as a foundation for the increasing attention, resources, and practice devoted to local approaches.

At the crux of the debate and search for locally-led solutions remain unanswered questions about the core nature of locally-led peacebuilding. Who are the local peace agents at work in situations of conflict? How do we recognize them? Why do they do what they do? What sustains them in taking risks for peace? What kinds of support do they need to continue and strengthen their efforts? How can others be motivated and supported to join them? While this study cannot possibly find answers to all these questions, it does

hope to continue and add to the dialogue around locally led solutions to peacebuilding, and to in turn improve relational processes and practices of our field.   Deepening our understanding of why and how individuals choose peace is important for improving how the field shifts toward greater focus and support to locally-led approaches. My ultimate hope is to not only shed light on the interior contours of individual peace agency, but also, in some small way, help reshape relationships between local and external actors as we work collectively to reveal and expand the peace that may already exist around, and within, us.

What We Know

To propose that peace agency exists is not novel. In fact, we understand, from theory, practice, and research, a number of important aspects of why and how people act for peace. Here we examine how the fields of locally-led peacebuilding and social agency, including positive deviance theory, inform what we already know about peace agency.

As Anderson, Bartoli, Boulding, Lederach, Richmond and others have written in different ways, people are acting for peace even in the worst situations of violence and human strife, and these community-led efforts are fundamental to initiating and sustaining processes toward greater peace. Lederach's theoretical framing of peacebuilding as a process linking community, local leadership, and elites in society has shaped the way we understand what the field encompasses (1997), while his decades of work with and documentation of local peacebuilding efforts shines a spotlight on the capacities of communities in the midst of conflict to find creative solutions for sustaining or advancing

peaceful transformation (2005). Boulding's work on understanding the existence of peace cultures and the role of civil society through history affirms the perpetual existence of individuals working for peace (2006). Anderson's far-reaching research to identify and document communities that have chosen peace provides practical case study evidence of peace agency (2010). At a more specific level, growing literature on zones of peace, infrastructures for peace, peace committees, and other indigenously-designed initiatives to create community-level mechanisms for preventing and mitigating violence demonstrate the reality that peace agency is alive and well in societies across the world (Mitchell and Hancock 2012, Van Tongeran, 2013). Case studies from Colombia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, South Africa, the Philippines, and elsewhere that illuminate strategies communities employ in seeking to keep or advance the peace provide further evidence that peace agency is a common phenomena across cultures and geography.

In her study of 14 communities that opted out of war, Anderson explains, "They make abundantly clear that the ability to stay out of war is not an issue of scale: rather, it is indeed the result of conscious, collective decision and choices" (2013, p. 6) From his in-depth research into strategies of the nonviolent Peasant Worker Community of the Carare River in Colombia to maintain peace during decades of war, Kaplan concludes, "civilians are not powerless and can effectively organize against repression to make life in lawless wartime settings a little more predictable and ordered" (2013, p. 366). The work of Peace Direct, a UK-based organization that finds, funds, and supports local peacebuilders, affirms these findings. Through its Insight on Conflict project, Peace Direct has identified over 750 locally-led peacebuilding organizations in 14 countries, of which many are small

associations established and sustained through hundreds of volunteer hours and the

leadership of visionary peace entrepreneurs (see www.peacedirect.org).

This growing body of evidence affirms the early insights of Boulding and others,

who believe that peace is, at its core, the work of everyone. It is not, in fact, a specialized

field requiring extensive study and professional training, but a choice that can be made by

anyone. It is, in this sense, extraordinarily ordinary. It is "local" not by geography but

because, as Richmond and Mitchell argue, it belongs to the realm of everyday activity: "the

local is the site of various forms of power, resources, and agency" that can be applied

toward peace (2013, p. 11). It has taken time for the simple fact that people everywhere

can and do act for peace, even when their larger societies are embroiled in war, to settle in

to the field of peace and conflict resolution, but the growing evidence base provided by

these and other scholars and practitioners is making it a near undeniable fact.

At the same time, the field of social agency also contributes important theory and

case research to our understanding of the reality of peace agency. Social agency is defined

generally as the capacity of individuals to act independently. It touches on issues of free

will, control, intentionality, and choice. The concept of independent agency dates back to

the Enlightenment, Descartes, and Immanuel Kant, but was overshadowed by the rise of

structural theories positing that broader forces – normative, political, economic, social, and

environmental – shaped individual behavior. A more recent return to social agency theory

has again challenged the concept that individual behavior derives from external forces and

expanded our understanding of individual action. The field is only beginning to develop

theoretical foundations and empirical evidence to explain the sources of intentional action

that comprise agency, spanning cognitive and psychosocial explanations as well as socio-psychological and inter-relational approaches. (Bandura 1989, Van Lange et al 2012)

While debates continue as to whether agency is real or perceived, its internal sources and external motivators, and questions of individual versus collective action, the concept that human beings do have agency to act independently is instrumental for forming a theory of peace agency. Conflict resolution scholars have begun to examine issues of agency within the context of peacebuilding. Oliver Richmond has argued for a reconceptualization of peace through the lens of "bottom up" action derived from the propensity of nonstate actors within situations of conflict to actively strive to halt and prevent violence and construct more cooperative future relations (Richmond, 2005). In *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism,* he and Audra Mitchell examine 16 case studies through the lens of agency of local actors, concluding the need for a transformational shift in the field away from a liberally interventionist agenda toward a focus on supporting peacebuilding efforts that acknowledge and empower the ability of local actors to resolve their own disputes and construct their own futures (Richmond and Mitchell, 2012).

Related to social agency theory, and also helpful for our purposes, are Jerry Sternin's studies of *positive deviance*. A public health practitioner working in the developing world to implement programs that sought to shift behaviors to promote better health, Sternin realized that in nearly every situation in which he worked there were some individuals already demonstrating healthy behaviors. They were usually the minority given that his work brought him to places where public health issues were a problem, but they existed.

Often their positive behaviors were not the ones developed and being implemented by the

external health programs Sternin was implementing, but rather innovative approaches that

drew from local traditions, experience, and culture. Sternin began studying these "positive

deviants" for insights to improving his programs and became and advocate for redesigning

development approaches to identify and expand upon the positive behavioral practices

that could be found already present within societies (Sternin 2002).

It is important to note that those who exhibit positive deviance are not, as far as we

understand so far, particularly special or unique in any way. They are "normal" people who

compare in most every way with their neighbors, except they have chosen to act

differently. This "normalcy" parallels the conclusions of Anderson, Lederach, and Boulding

that while the actions people take for peace are often extraordinary, the people who take

them are not out of the ordinary. Clearly they exhibit different behavior than many of their

peers that must be stimulated by particular motivations, but what they do is not something

others are incapable of doing. It is just something that they haven't chosen to do yet.

Applied to the field of conflict resolution, positive deviance as a form of social

agency, provides a helpful theoretical foundation for exploring the question why and how

people choose peace in the midst of violence. Traditional conflict theories posit that

conflict arises from the individual pursuit of differing interests or needs, that is, by

struggles over agency between individuals or groups. Positive deviance adds texture to the

picture by suggesting that within conflict systems, peaceful interests, needs, and behaviors

also exist. People choosing peace in the midst of violence may be deviating from the

choices the broad majority around them are making, but they are doing so in a positive

16

manner. The Positive Deviance Initiative (www.positivedeviance.org) explains: "Positive Deviance is based on the observation that in every community there are certain individuals or groups whose uncommon behaviors and strategies enable them to find better solutions to problems than their peers, while having access to the same resources and facing similar or worse challenges." Even more intriguing, research by the Initiative, Sternin, and a growing field of study related to positive deviance, is showing that focusing attention and resources on expanding those behaviors – as opposed to just working to stop bad behaviors – can have a significant transformational change and "spreading" effect in organizations and communities.

This is not all that surprising. We know by experience and instinct that some people find positive solutions to problems even when others do not, and we know good examples help others improve. What is particularly additive in thinking about the application of positive deviance theory and approaches to the field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, is that it helps us examine and understand the acts of individuals choosing peace against the odds within a broader societal context of potential positive change. In other words, it helps address the challenge that Mary Anderson has expressed of how we link "peace writ small" efforts to enacting "peace writ large." It moves us from thinking of the individual choices a few may make to act for peace as simply an individual deviance to examining peace agency as a social, as well as individual, phenomena. It does not yet answer critical questions of why and how some individuals exhibit positively deviant behavior, but it does suggest that those choices can have broader societal impact.

Together, then, these two streams of theory and practice - locally-led peacebuilding and social agency, including in particular positive deviance theory – provide a useful foundation for an exploration of the motivations and means of peace agency. We know peace agency exists. We know it is extraordinarily ordinary. And we know, if conditions are right, it can spread.

What We Are Still Learning and Initial Hypotheses

Having introduced the idea of peace agency as an important theory in need of development and examined initial theoretical foundations that may serve as a basis for a study on the motivations and means of peace agency, I now turn to considering the key questions such a study would seek to answer and some potential hypotheses that could be tested.

As discussed, emerging scholarship in the areas of locally-led peacebuilding, post-liberal peacebuilding critique, and social agency is helping improve our attention and understanding to what I call peace agency. Still, critical questions related to grasping the inner workings and external implications of people choosing peace in the midst of violence have not been fully answered or systematically studied. While case studies like those undertaken by Anderson, Lederach, Kaplan, and others illuminate some of the methods and strategies that communities employ in choosing peace over war, explanations of individual motivations and means to lead or engage in those efforts are still wanting. While psycho-social conflict resolution theories seek to explain individual behavior motivations and

cognitive processes, they have focused heavily on negative and violent behaviors, not the kind of positive deviance behaviors that peace agency often represents.

Thus my study will seek to focus in on some of the current gaps in our understanding as a path toward developing a theory of peace agency. These include:

1) **Motivations:** What beliefs, attitudes, or experiences motivate some individuals to act for peace, while many around them are engaging in violence?

While seemingly simple, this question requires more than a strictly psychoanalysis approach for it demands attention to both the internal drives and motivating factors within the external context of opposing intragroup and structural forces. I propose that understanding motivations for peace agency should ideally link analysis of the micro- and the macro-, while also teasing apart the relative influencing roles of varying internal and external drivers of behavior. This is an ambitious goal and one not easily achieved, but it recognizes that peace agency is not a result of individual or group or structural processes, but rather a complex and ongoing process of interaction across levels of human experience. It is, as Elise Boulding suggests, a *developmental* process over time.

2) **Means:** What strategies do such individuals employ in opting for peaceful approaches, and what sustains them in their efforts?

The term "means" is an imperfect word to capture the reality of peace agency as a development process. It is not simply the one act of witnessing for peace that we should seek to understand, but also the internal and external cognitive, experiential, material, and

relational resources upon which people who exercise peace agency draw in order to continue their efforts through difficulties. Studying such means of peace agency should help us make the link between its personal, group, and societal aspects.

Flowing from these questions, I hope to also explore, or draw recommendations about, a third question: How can others, particularly those outside a conflict context (ie, the international community), best support and collaborate with those individuals exerting peace agency? Ultimately, it is this question which the study seeks to address to move beyond my personal curiosity and interest to useful contribution and impact to how the peacebuilding field develops in the future. In many ways, policymakers and practitioners are already asking this question and constructing answers that inform changes underway. I hope my study can contribute to ensuring the answers developed are grounded in the voices, experiences, and insights of those individuals who are already actively choosing peace amid violence.

Current theory and practice does point to some useful hypotheses for exploring these questions, though. These include:

Hypothesis 1: Peace agency represents a natural occurrence of positive deviance by a minority group. This hypothesis derives from Sternin's work on positive deviance and might be considered a naturalist theory, that is, peace agency is simply another genetic or behavioral pattern that occurs in some people but not many.

Hypothesis 2: Religious or spiritual-based values compel individuals to act for peace and helps sustain those efforts. Scholars like Lederach, Gopin, Boulding, and Curle, all of whom

come from their own faith-based traditions that include a focus on peacemaking have

written about the role of spirituality in motivating people toward peace. This theory could

test and build on their work.

Hypothesis 3: Personally transformative experiences – negative or positive – motivate and

sustain peace agency. Leaning more toward behavioral theory, this hypothesis suggests that

individuals who have gone through either a traumatic experience of violence that turns

them away from war, or a positive experience of the possibilities of peace can compel peace

agency. Ongoing experiences with successful, or at least perceived successful, peace efforts

might be needed to sustain peace agency.

Hypothesis 4: Relational processes of interaction with the others – intergroup or intragroup –

motivate and sustain peace agency. This hypothesis might draw on work on the role of

relational processes between individuals and across groups that shape behavior. Conflict

resolution practice based on contact theory or people-to-people approaches are related to

this hypothesis, but there is not strong empirical evidence tracing the relational processes

involved or demonstrating proof of concept.

Hypothesis 5: The ability to imagine or vision a more peaceful future stimulates and sustains

peace agency. This hypothesis draws directly from Elise Boulding's work and belief in the

power to "image" a different reality than one experiences. She believed that capacity for

hope and visioning of a new future was critical for engendering action for peace.

While difficult to test conclusively, these hypotheses may offer starting points for developing questions or conducting content analysis of exploratory qualitative interviews with individuals who have chosen peace across different conflict contexts. As a next step in the development of my study, I will consider them in more depth and clarify their contribution to the development of my theory-building and research methodology.

Conclusion

Increasingly the field of peacebuilding is recognizing the problematic nature of externally-driven interventions that may undermine, rather than enhance, the ability for individuals within situations of violence to act independently for a more peaceful future. Increasingly, the international community of peacebuilding actors are looking toward local solutions to problems of entrenched conflict and violence, and asking how those most affected can become most involved in reshaping their societies. This shift toward recognizing and empowering what I call peace agency is a welcome and important evolution. However, it also requires careful study, attentive listening, and collaborative learning. As we seek to open the field to greater understanding and support for local approaches, accompanied, I hope, by a re-figuring of power relations and resource allocations between internal and external actors, I believe a deeper recognition and understanding of how and why people choose peace in the midst of violence may contribute to unleashing a bit more of the possible in what already exists.

References

Anderson, Mary B. *Opting out of War: Strategies to Prevent Violent Conflict.* Boulder; London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013.

Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.* Penguin Books Publishers, 1963.

Autesserre, Severine. *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding.* Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Bandura, Albert. "Human Agency in Social Cognitive Theory." *American Psychologist.* September 1989. p. 1175-1184.

Barrs, Casey. "How Civilians Survive Violence: A Preliminary Inventory." The Cuny Center, November 2010.

Boulding, Elise. *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History.* Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000.

Chandler, David. "Peacebuilding and the Politics of Non-Linearity: Rethinking 'hidden' Agency and 'resistance.'" *Peacebuilding* 1, no. 1 (2013): 17–32.

Collier, Paul. *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy.* World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003.

Donais, Timothy. "¿Empoderamiento O Imposición? Dilemas Sobre La Apropiación Local En Los Procesos de Construcción de Paz Posconflictos | Empowerment or Imposition? Dilemmas of Local Ownership in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Processes." *Relaciones Internacionales* 0, no. 16 (February 28, 2011).

Funk, Nathan C. "Building on What's Already There: Valuing the Local in International Peacebuilding." *International Journal* 67 (2012 2011): 391.

Hattingh de Coning, Cedric. "Complexity, Peacebuilding and Coherence: Implications of Complexity for the Peacebuilding Coherence Dilemma." Dissertation Paper, presented for defense to Stellenbosch University, December 2012.

Jabri, Vivienne. "Peacebuilding, the Local and the International: A Colonial or a Postcolonial Rationality?" *Peacebuilding* 1, no. 1 (2013): 3–16.

Kaplan, Oliver. "Protecting Civilians in Civil War: The Institution of the ATCC in Colombia." *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (May 16, 2013): 351–367.

Lederach, John Paul. *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies.* Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997.

Lederach, John Paul. *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Lidén, Kristoffer. "In Love with a Lie? On the Social and Political Preconditions for Global Peacebuilding Governance." *Peacebuilding* 1, no. 1 (2013): 73–90.

Local Peacebuilding and National Peace: Interaction between Grassroots and Elite Processes. Edited by Christopher R. Mitchell and Landon E. Hancock. London ; New York: Continuum, 2012.

MacGinty, Roger, and Oliver P Richmond. "The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace." *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5 (2013): 763–783.

Portilla, Julian. *What Exists Is Possible: Stories from Conflict Resolution Professionals.* Conflict Resolution Quarterly, vol. 24, no. 2, Winter 2006, p. 241-248.

Richmond, Oliver. *A Post-Liberal Peace.* Routledege Publishers. 2011.

Richmond, Oliver. *Transforming Peace (The Transformation of Peace and Conflict Studies).* Palgrave McMillan Publishers, 2005.

Richmond, Oliver P. "Beyond Local Ownership in the Architecture of International Peacebuilding." *Ethnopolitics* 11, no. 4 (2012): 354–375.

Richmond, Oliver P, and Audra Mitchell. *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Social Cognitive Theory. Eds. Van Lange, Paul and Kruglanski, Arie. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd., 2012. (Chapter by Bandura, Alberto on social agency theory, p 349-373).

Sternin, Jerry. "Practice Positive Deviance for Extraordinary Social and Organizational Change," Chapter 3 of *The Change Champion's Fieldguide.* Best Practice Publications, 2002.

Van Tongeren, Paul. "Potential Cornerstone of Infrastructures for Peace? How Local Peace Committees Can Make a Difference." *Peacebuilding* 1, no. 1 (2013): 39–60.

Wiseman, Robert and Cuevas-Rodriguez, Gloria. "Towards a Social Theory of Agency," *Journal of Management Studies.* Vol 49. January 2012. p. 202-222.

Woocher, Lawrence. *Preventing Violent Conflict: Assessing Progress, Meeting Challenges.* Special Report by the United States Institute of Peace, September 2009.