

Youth as Social and Political Agents:

Issues in Post-Settlement Peace Building

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There is a growing body of literature dealing with the roles of children and young people in armed conflict and the effects of such conflict on their development (Brett & McCallin, 1996; Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1994; Klare, 1999; Machel, 1996; Wessells, 1998). This literature based on extensive field case work has provided important evidence of intensive child and youth involvement in warfare, the reasons for that involvement, the processes of induction into armed groups, the activities of children in these groups - as fighters, cooks, spies, couriers, and in providing sexual services - and their immediate-term rehabilitation needs once a war has been ended. Many of these studies make recommendations about demobilization, reintegration and prevention with an emphasis on economic, social, and psychological measures and the effective implementation of relevant international law. Although much has been discovered and is actively utilized in the domain of advocacy, most studies recognize that much more needs to be done to develop research and good practice particularly in the area of healing war-torn societies across a range of social, psychological, economic and security interests and needs and using indigenous beliefs and rituals as peace building resources (Wessells 2000).

Understandably, the distinct problems, needs and dynamics of the post-accord phases of conflicts are only beginning to be systematically studied. But as this literature develops a noticeable gap appears. Neither children nor youth appear as important variables in the literature on peace processes. Nor, authors of important UN reports admit, have adolescents been separately or well considered even in studies of waraffected children (Winnipeg 2000, International Tribunal 2000). A neglect of adolescents and older young people is shortsighted and counterproductive in terms of

peace building particularly in the crucial post-agreement phase with its twin challenges of violence prevention/agreement maintenance and societal reconciliation and reconstruction. Youth embody essential elements of both challenges: posing at once potential threats to peace and peace building resources.

Post agreement peace building refers to a crucial and distinct phase in a conflict when both conflict management and conflict transformation challenges co-exist and overlap. The definition here is adapted from Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse (1999) who define post-settlement (arguably not the same as agreement) peace building as involving ‘(a) the ‘negative’ task of preventing a relapse into overt violence and (b) the ‘positive’ tasks of aiding national recovery and expediting the eventual removal of underlying causes of internal war’ (187-8, my emphasis). This definition deftly focuses us on parallel, and mutually supporting (but also sometimes antagonistic) challenges of violence prevention and societal reconstruction. The merit of this definition is that it recognizes that in reality peace processes are not clean, linear and able to be characterized solely in terms of a series of negotiation steps involving political parties and armies but requires wider attention to root causes of conflict such as, ‘inequity, poverty, racism, ineffective governance and impunity’ (Winnipeg 2000), and involving many more actors in civil society. As Lederach argues genuine conflict transformation requires more than attention to ‘the technical task of transition’ (1998, 186) but a shift ‘away from a concern with the resolution of issues and toward a frame of reference that focuses on the restoration and rebuilding of relationships’ (1996, 24). The ‘positive’ task of peace building then involves the changing of relationships effecting a shift from identities based on resistance and defense to those based on cooperation and

reconciliation. This is especially a challenge in regard to youth that have been at the forefront of an armed struggle.

Yet even the 'negative' task (violence prevention) is rarely fully achieved in practice. The signing of an agreement while in the best case scenarios preventing a return to the macro war, does not eliminate all overt violence; for example, so-called 'spoiler' or dissident violence (Stedman 1997), criminal violence, politically-motivated or sectarian/racial street fighting, assault and intimidation, as well as detainment, harassment and excessive use of force and power by police and militaries continue and may even be exacerbated (Darby and McGinty 2000). In addition, the prevention of overt violence is necessary but not sufficient to create sustainable just peace which requires attention to the memories, attitudes and values that support and sustain or justify violence and the impoverishment, discrimination, institutionalized inequality and militarization of society that are inherently violent but also support, sustain and provide legitimization for use of physical force. Young people (and women) tend to be the shock absorbers of social change and are profoundly affected by the different forms of violence - direct, cultural and structural (Galtung 1969) - that persist and evolve in the post-accord period.

Whether the focus of concern is with technical conflict management or broader conflict transformation, youth are important. Youth feature as dissidents/rejectionists during peace processes, (the Young Unionists in Northern Ireland are one example, the youth of the second Palestinian *Intifada* another); youth may shift identities and social roles from political activism to criminal activity and vigilantism (as is most noticeable in South Africa) which while not fatal to a peace process can create an unstable and/or

unjust peace; youth may be key actors in terms of negotiation and mediation (the youth of the political leadership of the KLA in Kosova is one example, the various roles played by youth as marshals at demonstrations in South Africa and elsewhere are another); youth are key actors in relation to (new) justice mechanisms and security forces (whether or not they are consulted in the new arrangements and usually they are not); they are significant actors in the kinds of socio-political violence that continues after accords: such as confrontations at interfaces and marches in Northern Ireland or the activities of communal defense organizations in South Africa. They also play multiple peacemaker roles. The role of the nonviolent youth movement 'OPTOR' (Resistance) in Serbia in helping to undermine the Milosevic regime is just one celebrated contemporary case of such influence (NYT 2000; USIP 2000). But in all conflicts one might examine, youth may be found working at the grassroots in community and peace groups of various types. In the longer-term, a peace agreement's endurance depends on whether the next generations accept or reject it, how they are socialized during the peace process, and their perceptions of what that peace process has achieved. Child and youth dimensions are central to the structural issues of peace building – such as inequality, poverty, and unemployment.

The next generation of leaders, facilitators and stakeholders will emerge from among the current cohort of young people: so their engagement in the peace process/peace building and the shaping of their political attitudes and skills in the period will have important long-term implications. Pragmatism and rights provision overlap: the young have rights under the CRC that also correspond to some of the fundamental bases of sustainable peace, namely the basic human needs provisions of 'security,

identity, recognition' and space for development (Miall 1999).² So in terms of peace building, the individual and group rights of children constitute a common good. The child's right to consultation under Articles 12 and 13 of CRC should not only be considered as a legal or moral imperative but as a practical, political one. As Broome (1993) has pointed out sustainable peace is about empowering conflict participants to create and maintain a 'third culture', a situation of 'relational empathy' characterized by 'interaction in which participants are willing to open themselves to new meanings, to engage in genuine dialogue, and to constantly respond to the new demands emanating from the situation' (104). This cannot be achieved unless youth – who are often key conflict participants and always potential conflict carriers – are afforded responsibility as well as guardianship during a peace process. Unfortunately, they often receive neither.

The dilemma exists then of how to award the young special protection and status by virtue of their developmental status and preserve their rights to participation in the politics and social reconstruction process that crucially shape their futures. In part this involves raising awareness amongst the general public and international community, particularly peace process guarantors, about the roles young people have played. But often this is only too obvious and the problem is really one of how to negotiate youth needs, war-learned skills and self-images with parental and community sorrow, fear, and mistrust, in the context of local conflicts over development resources and the distributions of power which develop in the aftermath of war. In situations where negotiated agreements are products of 'pacted elites' (Marks 1999) one challenge is to break through the exclusivist momentum of talks processes to widen participation and

ownership to other agents in civil society: children and youth included. But beyond talks, the challenge remains how to integrate the young in meaningful ways into postagreement peace building. This may, in fact, be the more difficult and the most useful endeavor.

The paper seeks to make the case for a focus on youth both as dependent and independent variable in peace processes and particularly in the post-agreement phase. The paper argues that there are clear patterns of youth response to peace processes that do not sufficiently integrate their interests and do not utilize their skills and experience. The theme of that response is socio-political violence. But this does not mean such youth are 'lost' to society or irredeemably disaffected, as is often the accompanying commentary in affected societies. In its final section the paper seeks to develop the findings on resilience and political engagement as crucial pointers in the search for ways to constructively engage youth in peace building.

Contemporary demographics in many transitional situations underline the necessity of specific attention to youth issues in peace building. For example, in Kosovo half of the population is aged under 20 (Kosovar Youth Council); in Northern Ireland 40% of the population are under 24; in South Africa, 37% are under 15 (National Strategy 1999) and 19.3% aged 15-24 (UN 2000). In Gaza and the West Bank, over 50 percent of the population are under 15. And in the Middle East generally, more than 40 per cent of the population is under 15 (Khayat 1994). In Guatemala 20.3% of the population are aged between 15-24 (UN 2000). In Sierra Leone, 19% and rising are aged 15-25. Beyond this, it is essential to examine youth as distinct actors for the following reasons:

1. *Youth have in many cases been active agents during armed struggle and their agency creates special and diverse needs in the post-war period.*

The experiences of young people in warfare around the world are highly variable and mean that the different contexts and different identities of the young people in question must be considered when making plans for post-war rehabilitation. Youth are not a single, homogenous entity either globally or locally. In any given situation the youth population reproduces the divisions of the wider society but also creates new subcultures and counter discourses to prevailing norms. Youth, as a social category in the analysis of conflict and peace processes, must be analyzed in relation to variables such as ethnicity, religion, race, gender, class and exposure to violence. In post war periods different needs apply to those who were forcibly recruited and those who volunteered, those who fought in low intensity conflicts and those in genocides, those who were in a conflict minority and those in a majority, those from poor families and the wealthy, those demobilized to their home communities and those in refugee camps, and girls and boys. There is a growing recognition of 'the special situation of girls' in warzones (Machel, 1996; Brett & McCallin 1996). In El Salvador, Ethiopia and Uganda, for example, girls made up over 30% of the membership of armed groups (Coalition 2000). Girls may need to be treated for the mental and physical symptoms of sexual abuse: including sexually transmitted diseases, such as gonorrhoea and AIDS/HIV, war-rape pregnancies, feelings of worthlessness and shunning by their families and communities. Girls may be the last to be demobilized after accords because they perform useful post-war accord functions for armed groups: as cooks, clothes washers, and providing sexual services (McKay & Mazurana 2000).

As in the population in general, youth make different choices (however, socially constructed) about their modes of engagement with society – and even if they engage at all – some choose crime others political activism, some straddle both worlds, for example. Even in the most extreme cases of conflict, some choose to go into hiding or exile while others under a variety of pressures join roaming militias or slaughter their neighbors. In low intensity conflicts, in particular, youth involvement in armed struggle may be part-time or fragmentary. Examined longitudinally, the changing youth cohort of a given region may utilize different strategies and modes of involvement over time. For example, analysis of the Kosovo/a conflict finds decades-long youth activism first at the center of nonviolent and later armed struggle (Mertus 1999; Reitan 2000). This diversity necessitates conflict-specific and deeply ethnographic approaches to the study of youth in post-war situations, particularly where recommendations are to be made about rehabilitation. Nevertheless there is general consensus that despite diversity of identity and experience, in most post-war cases a focus on education and jobs training is essential (including nonviolence and conflict resolution training), along with trauma and healing facilities, recreation provisions, and the broader assurance of physical security. The available evidence also suggests that youth that have been involved in armed conflict also have political/participation needs. These are often overlooked in the transition. In some cases this is related to political expediency. In Mozambique, for example, children and youth were deliberately hidden by rebel leaders (fearing

condemnation from national publics and international agencies) during the peace process and then simply ‘forgotten in the development and rebuilding process’ (Brett & McCallin, 1996; Sultan, 2000). In South Africa, youth were central to the anti-apartheid struggle but once negotiations began and the armed struggle suspended, the young were instructed to stand-down and return if possible to more normal pursuits for their agegroup while older leaders returned from prison and exile. This was in part a recognition by leaders that youth have special needs – particularly educational ones – but the youth themselves felt cheated of decision-making power (Straker 1992, CSVN 1998, Marks 1999). In the long run this marginalization of youth during transition has posed significant challenges to the post-apartheid governments as it is linked with the development both of criminal gangs and alternative youth policing bodies. This will be discussed in more depth later. Collin’s (2001) fascinating study of members of the first Intifada generation, who in 1996/7 were refugees living in Balata Camp, found the onset of adulthood coinciding with the Middle East peace process to be a time of profound crisis for them (spiritually, morally, and collectively): ‘the recognition of shrinking economic chances and growing personal responsibilities can trigger profound feelings of betrayal and disillusion on the part of individuals who see their youth as having been spent, in large part, fighting for and anticipating social change’ (24). Since there is now some good evidence that psychological resiliency or coping ability in children may be positively linked with active participation in politics and political violence (Cairns 1996), at least in low-intensity conflicts (Jones 2000), the denial of meaningful political agency to youth in the post-accord period may be hypothesized to have substantial social implications. This idea is developed further in the next sections.

2. Youth are often the primary producers of violence in the post-agreement period – from political dissident violence to crime - and they are intrinsic to the success of new law and order measures.

Post-agreement political violence can completely derail a peace process. Criminal violence can severely reduce the quality of life for the population in question. An analysis of both kinds of violence finds youth to be important actors in each. An example of the former may be found the political activism of the youth of the second Palestinian Intifada, which has derailed the Middle East peace process. Such violence is usually reflective of wider social crisis and may reflect perceptions of unjust peace. Less severe dissident political violence and criminal violence may or may not reflect a wider societal or peace process crisis, but it does threaten sustainable, just peace by shaping the next generation's perceptions of the peace and attitudes to law and order. In Post-Agreement Northern Ireland, for example, the young continue to experience, and are major producers of, violence at the micro level - in the form of participation in random sectarian assaults, interface street fighting, mass protest and rioting at marches - all of which hold the potential for escalation and legitimize the maintenance of exclusive sectarian communities for reasons of protection (McEvoy-Levy 2001). Often there is a blurring between the political and the criminal - as in paramilitary groups engaged in drugs activities, or the existence of alternative policing forces, and illegitimate corrupt official police. The relationship between youth activism, new security structures and criminal violence in a post-agreement context is well illustrated in the South African case.

Case 1: Gangs and Politics in South Africa

In the South African case, criminal youth gangs involved in everything from petty theft, to drug dealing to rape to murder are one of the most noticeable features of the postaccord landscape. Not a new phenomena – gangs existed long prior to the negotiations – they are in their current forms created and sustained by complex cultural, economic and political forces, some peculiar to the peace process others much longerstanding and apartheid related. Structurally, they are a symptom of the deep inequality of South African society. ‘The experience of most South African households is of outright poverty or of vulnerability to being poor’ (Poverty and Inequality, PIR, Report, 1998).

South Africa is still one of the most unequal countries in the world in terms of income and wealth distribution. 61% of Africans, 38% of coloreds, 5% of Indians and 1% of whites are considered poor according to official South African estimates (PIR 1998).³ The World Bank estimates that 94.7% of the poor are Africans, 5% are colored, 0.1% are Asians, and 0.2% are whites (National Strategy 1999). Three in five children are poor.⁴ 70% of the unemployed are under age 35. Poverty and unemployment form two of the most well supported explanations for gang development and cohesion. Interviews with gang members reveal both survival needs and materialism as motivating factors. But these studies also emphasize the contributions of family dysfunction, the pressures of status and masculinism (or inferior status and emasculation), an apartheid-grown culture of violence and availability of guns, no

expectation among youth of survival into middle age, and the fact that, because of apartheid, there is no stigma to prison for black youth (CSVR 1998, Simpson 1992). Some analysts also add generational conflict and an ideology of militarism which crystallized during the mass political mobilizations of 1980s (Marks 1992). Others see the attraction of the gang as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood which replace traditional practices lost in urbanization and family breakdown (Dissel 1997, see also Van Eden 1999). Completing the explanation is the extended effect of the political transition, particularly the claim that youth who were at the forefront of the struggle against apartheid reported being marginalized from settlement negotiations and socially and economically excluded in numerous ways (Straker 1992, Marks and McKenzie 1995, Simpson 1992).

Dissel writes: 'It is ironic that the materialisation of their goals – the transition from the politics of resistance to the politics of negotiation – from the armed struggle to sophisticated dialogue – resulted in the marginalisation of these youth.

Many of the leaders of the youth movements were lost to power politics in the negotiations, and later to parliament and government, leaving a hiatus in the direction and leadership in the movements' (4-5, 1997). Youth activism was the backbone of the anti-apartheid struggle. But boycotts from schools throughout the 1980s meant that many now have negligible educational credentials and similar employment prospects. Some of the backlash came in the form of a refusal to stand-down such as in the Pan African Congress (PAC) member violence in 1993-4 (Scheper-Hughes 2000)⁵.

The backlash also came in the shape of demands for social and economic justice rather than as opposition to the ANC government. Many of the members of anti-apartheid

movements developed alternative police forces, self defense units (SDUs) and self protection units (SPUs) to protect their communities from crime and vigilantism (even while they are accused of both themselves) (Marks and McKenzie 1995). In 1995, the relationship between unemployment, youth organizing and youth violence was apparent in demands by militarized youth (members of self/community protection units) in Gauteng that they be incorporated into the police service. The initial government response was negative but after threats of violence, youth were incorporated into the local police. This had a spiral effect with youth in other areas demanding similar treatment and threatening violence and also produced conflict between those eventually chosen and those not selected in given communities and between the youth and existing police over operating modes and command structures. 'This resulted in the death of a number of police officers, and general insecurity in the community' (Marks, 1999, 8). Also identifiable is the *comtsotsi*, or 'comrade criminal', one who uses the political organization as cover for criminal activity or is a transient between both worlds, perhaps acting in the name of the organization without being firmly located within it (Straker 1992, Dissell 1997). This is a pre-apartheid phenomenon that continues to exist.

However, the blurring of the line between political and criminal youth is increased by the patterns of political affiliation that occurred in the 1990s. As the acceptability of activism increased, and danger decreased, there were mass recruitments to political organizations of youth who previously had not been involved, had little training, discipline or focus (Dissel 1997, Marks, 1992). They were consequently much more difficult to control.

Additionally, straightforwardly criminal gangs may in their own right be perceived as political. Their activities can be seen as 'forms of resistance to the structural constraints' which youth face, 'to the hegemony of the dominant classes,' and as such, acts of self-assertion and identification (Mokwena, 1991, 17-18). But Mokwena rightly cautions that such groups mostly 'remain a menace to the poor and oppressed, and more significantly, often they serve to specifically obstruct progressive political mobilization' (Mokwena, 1991, 18-19).

In many ways it seems best to term the youth/youth/state conflict of the postaccord period as para-political. It is evident that complex relationships exist between the youth political formations, criminal gangs and new policing structures. All case studies of gang activity report close police involvement even to the extent of their directing operations. Youth political organizations that aim to counter corruption and violence are themselves plagued by disorganization and uncontrollable memberships. Those who were political activists in the mid 1980s are today in their 20s and 30s (many with children of their own). Yet their experience of transition, so difficult economically and so fraught with disillusionment and frustration may seem a rather simple and predictable predicament compared with the situation faced by children and adolescents socialized in the first post-accord decade. This in large part due to the meaning violence has in the post-apartheid period.

Findings in the US on the motivations among youth for gang involvement include the desire for physical protection, social support and solidarity or surrogate family, the need for cultural identification, moral education, self-esteem and honor, and the pursuit of economic gain (Spergel 1996). As in the US case, in the South African

situation, these motivations also blend with a complex and oppressive historical/political past (a point rarely developed in US studies), but unlike the USA, in South Africa, the experience of several-generation involvement in political violence structures the meaning of violence in the postaccord period. One report by the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in Johannesburg refers to the 'reparative' power of violence for the young and marginalised: 'violence [...] is a way of building up and fortifying the self rather than a regressive breaking down. Violence is enlivening, restitutive and meaningful in the face of subjective experiences of smallness and vulnerability' (CSVR 1998). In South Africa, these meanings of violence have historically been linked with liberation politics. Straker (1992) makes the point that common adolescent fantasies of 'saving the world' are in peacetime or non-war situations channeled into occupational choices, volunteerism, games or politics. In war, and particularly in a protracted, anti-authoritarian movement, they are channeled into 'the struggle'. This raises the obvious question of what happens in a post-war situation where youth who have developed strong identities based around protection of their communities and resistance of state oppression find few contexts – vocational, political or otherwise - within which to exert and expand these identities? The South African case provides an answer. The lesson in terms of peace building with and for youth in postaccord situations is that the development of opportunities for work and meaningful political and/or community-building activity must be a priority. Yet an even more subtle challenge exists in the case of the adolescents of the 1990s (not the 1980s activists), for in their cases, the relationship to be mediated is that between childhood witnessing

(rather than action), indistinct or non-existent political education, and an unforgiving environment of economic shortage and competition.

3. Youth are also the victims of much post-accord violence – direct assaults and displacement as well as structural violence - which while it may not fatally impact the peace process will shape attitudes and behavior over the long-term.

As the last point makes clear, the violence productivity of youth is linked with their victimhood in terms both of direct violence and structural violence. In South Africa, most of the victims of youth violence are also youth. Between 1992 and 1996 there was a 35% increase in firearms injuries among under 19s. By 1996, firearms had become one of the top four causes of death among children and youth in the Cape Town Region (Meeks 2000, Colchester)⁶. And as shown in the previous short case study, poverty and unemployment (structural violence) affect more children and youth than any other age group.

In post-accord situations, much state to youth violence also continues. In Israel /Palestine, for example, after the 1993 accords children continued to be arrested and detained by the Israeli army for security offences. In 1998, 490 were arrested, 340 injured and 14 killed according to Defence for Children International – Palestine Section . Children have also been subject to rights violations from the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) (Quzmar 2000). Similarly, in Northern Ireland, police harassment and

assault and use of plastic bullets continues to affect young people. Children in Northern Ireland also continue to be victims of paramilitary punishment attacks after accords. On a global scale, young people also feature amongst those displaced and those made homeless by warfare: half of 30 million refugees and displaced people in the world are believed to be children (Ladd and Cairns 1996 via Jones 2000). The socialization of a new generation in refugee camps or in exile contributes to the development of war-supporting Diaspora. Studies of young people in different conflict settings show that when consulted, young people across the board prioritize 'security' in the post-agreement period. But 'security' is found to have different meanings in different contexts: in some this means landmine clearing, in others gun control (in Kosovo/a, for example, it means both); in others the emphasis is on protection from interface street fighting or personal assaults, and freedom of movement and belief are most often mentioned (Northern Ireland); in others the effect of poverty/survivalism, police impunity, mob lynching and vigilante justice may be most tangible (Guatemala, South Africa); in a refugee camp, security may mean clean water and food and/or freedom from violence by camp militias. But in all cases, the prioritization of 'security' is closely seconded with concerns for future welfare, particularly the issue of employment (see, Kosovar Youth Council 2000, McEvoy-Levy 2000, CSVR 1998, HRW: Guatemala 1997).

The next case study illustrates how structural and direct violence intersect in the experience of the young in Northern Ireland and how this may be related to the development of sectarian attitudes. Northern Ireland (like South Africa) belongs at one end of the spectrum of armed conflict involving youth. As a low intensity conflict,

involving several generations, it is not comparable in terms of casualties or intensity to say, Rwanda or Sierra Leone. But as Kelly has argued in low intensity conflicts of long duration: 'the impact [on children] may be harder to name and the damage, consequently, harder to repair' (Kelly, 2000).

Case 2: Violence and political socialization in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland approximately 40% of the population are under the age of 24 (NISRA, 1998, 1996 figures).⁷ Their roles in the conflict and the toll it has taken on them have been varied. Like their elders, all young people do not have the same experiences of the conflict; their involvement and the severity of their experiences in large part depend on where they live, their socio-economic status, and the religious group with which they are identified (Darby & Williamson, 1978, Boal & Douglas, 1982, Whyte, 1990, Cairns, 1987, Fay, Morrissey, Smyth 1997, and Fay, Morrissey, Smyth 1998, Smyth & Wong 1999).⁸ While there is relief from the war in the postagreement period, direct violence (political and para-political in nature) is still a common experience of children and young people in traditionally high- violence areas, while it has become even more distant to those in traditionally low violence areas. Nevertheless, just as even the most sheltered experienced the conflict via the media, or through the experience of less fortunate peers and relatives, there is no escaping the peace process. Most young people are familiar with its crises.⁹ And all children and youth in Northern Ireland are still growing up in heavily militarized and highly

segregated ecologies. 50% of all people live in areas that are 90% Catholic or Protestant. Even the most sheltered also have experienced the conflict through education in the legally segregated school system. Over 90% of schools are either predominately Catholic or Protestant.

Along with violence and concomitant social distancing by relatively more powerful/influential stakeholders, there are further social and economic barriers to the long-term viability of any peace agreement that cannot be quickly ameliorated by a peace process and that deeply affect the young. For example, a third of Northern Ireland's children live in poverty¹⁰ (Democratic Dialogue, 1996-97). Northern Ireland has one of the highest levels of unemployment in the United Kingdom (ONS, 1999) and 27% of all unemployed people in Northern Ireland are under 25 (Democratic Dialogue, 1996-97). And Catholics are still disproportionately affected (McVicker 2000). There are two broad elements, then, of a long-enduring conflict which is socially pervasive, yet impact-heavy in extremely localized ways, which need to be considered in peace building strategies with/for youth. The first involves attention to a wide culture of violence (which includes tacit approval or distancing behavior/attitudes among less or unaffected populations). Second, it entails targeting in socio-culturally appropriate and holistic ways the needs of youth in high violence and high deprivation areas.

It is this context, which has changed little despite an end to the macro war, that the young learn the default stances of their ethnopolitical communities. By the age of three children in Northern Ireland are able to identify and attribute positive or negative characteristics to a Catholic or Protestant person (Connolly and McGinn 1999). These perceptions are vitally important in terms of long-term peace building for they legitimize

hardline political attitudes and structure everyday behavior. Nevertheless findings by Byrne (1997) and Connolly and McGinn (1999) also suggest that children shape and negotiate these attitudes and their identities, that they play with and adjust sectarian stereotypes. The multiple sub-cultures to which youth may belong could be as influential as the dominant cultural bipolarism. This is an area in which work can and is being done particularly in terms of inter-ethnic dialogue and community relations activities but it is hampered by the reality of continuing ethnopolitical tension and violence.

The formal paramilitary ceasefires and peace process in Northern Ireland have been accompanied by a shift back to 'confrontational violence' in the form of protests and public disorder at the neighborhood level and some indication of increases in ordinary crime. In the period, April 10, 1998 to February 10 2000, 'security related' injuries numbered 2422, according to official figures. The vast majority of these injuries were as a result of either punishment beatings or serious public disorder (1811).¹¹ Young people have been central participants and victims in these kinds of violence. In the Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey (NILT 1998) the extent of sectarian attitudes and experience of sectarian violence amongst the young was revealed. In answer to the question 'do you think religion will always make a difference to the way people feel about each other in NI?', 76% of 12-17 year olds said yes.

Optimistically, however, this figure was down to 66% in 1999 - an all the more hopeful development when compared with 80% of respondents in the adult survey who answer yes to this question. ¹² However, it is probably premature to attribute significant generation-related attitudinal change in this area because tangible experiences of

violence remain the norm for a significant minority of the young population. When asked, 'Do you avoid going to particular places because of risk of verbal abuse or threats because of your religion?' almost half, 47% answered yes.¹³ While a quarter has been directly threatened, almost half of all the 12-17 year olds surveyed understand that religion can be the basis for assault (NILT 1998). Similar results are recorded in the Youthquest 2000 (Smyth & Scott 2000). This understanding is important. Wright (1987) has hypothesized that regardless of the levels of actual support for sectarian violence, the maintenance of a sectarian conflict is assured if people 'understand' that their ethnic identities make them potential targets and that communal deterrence is a safety mechanism (11-12).

There is also a general lack of confidence in the police among the young (Democratic Dialogue, 1996; Smyth, 1998).¹⁴ However, Allison's (2000) study of youth attitudes to policing and policing reform found that while both Protestants and Catholics were critical of the police, for Protestants criticism was related to specific policing issues: such as parades rerouting. For Catholics, across classes and conflict experience, Nationalists and Republicans, a more general dissatisfaction was recorded. Allison concluded that 'young people's engagement with the police is as much ideological and normative as anything to do with experiential contact'. In addition, there is evidence from surveys over some time that many of the young feel alienated from politics (Democratic Dialogue, 1996-97; Dowds & Devine, 1997; McNamee & Lovett, 1987). Those who are engaged, are those with 'national' interests', who have strong Irish or British identifications, family traditions of interest/involvement, and sharpened perceptions of the fairness/unfairness of the

political system (Whyte, 1998). Surveys aimed at discovering intended voting patterns, and recent electoral results (2001), suggest that the young favor the parties which many would view as the most militant and/or intransigent or polarized: Sinn Fein (SF) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) (NILT 1998). Yet, there is also evidence that apathy and disinterest is also higher amongst the young than other age groups. In the Youthquest 2000 survey only 21% stated they had 'quite a lot' or a 'great deal' of interest in politics (Smyth & Scott, 2000). And 'there was a high degree of negativity towards the prospects for peace in Northern Ireland, particularly amongst Protestants, with only a very small minority believing that the current peace process will work' (Smyth & Scott, 2000).

No definitive conclusions can be drawn about the significance of this. But it is intriguing to look at this evidence in the light of the South African example. On the one hand, attachment to community and politics – suggested by youth support of SF for example – is a potential social good. It suggests engagement and investment in the political future (even if that may be conceived in ethnospecific terms and many Republicans would argue the opposite) and also interest in social justice more generally. But even in this best case scenario the South African experience looms ominously in the background. Increase in support for radical political groups in Northern Ireland inevitably includes many of the same constituency witnessed in the South African case, youth without political experience or education, less discipline and focus than their predecessors, and likely much more difficult to control. In any case, children and adolescents are in large part politically voiceless pre-enfranchisement. And it remains the most odd case that

24.

under 18s may be recruited into armed groups (and into the British army), and certainly are involved in disorganized street-level political violence, long before they are afforded the privilege of genuine involvement in politics. As Smyth has pointed out ‘children are both visible and invisible. At the level of street conflict activity they are visible and have their own strategies. But they are also invisible in public life and their voices are not heard’ (Smyth 2000b). This underlines the point – so well seen the South African case – that when mainstream or establishment politics are barred, children will still engage in political activity, often violent and structured by confrontation and brinkmanship rather than dialogue and cooperation. Nevertheless, as in the South African case, intriguing connections are suggested between attachment to (if not involvement in) the local struggle and social awareness and engagement generally. These are the roots of genuine peace building. The challenge remains of how to nurture them and it is noticeable that in Northern Ireland the political education of youth affiliated with parties such as the PUP or Sinn Fein has mostly been undertaken in the peace process period by young community activists.

4. Youth are the primary actors in grassroots community development/relations work – they are at the frontlines of peace building.

As well as the producers and victims of violence, youth also feature in the production of peace. In any conflict context one examines, the dominant presence of the

young in youth work, in community development, and in inter-ethnic and dialogue and peace groups is clear. Many have direct experience of violence, conflict, and imprisonment themselves. They are not well paid, their projects are under-funded, often stressful and can be life threatening. Like other civil society actors they are less visible in analyses of peace process than key elites. And their effectiveness in peace building is hard to measure. Yet despite their relative invisibility they exist organically and need to be supported and fostered rather than created anew. However, it would be a mistake to exaggerate the strength of their presence in the face of youth apathy, low self-esteem and sense of powerlessness.

Much less scholarly attention has been awarded to the peace building activities of youth than to their violence. This is in part because youth social movements are rarely unambiguously 'peace' oriented, at least as it is defined in the mainstream literature. Two developments are necessary: first, there is a need to document much more closely the work of children and youth in advocacy for human rights and anti-militarism activities; second there is a need to reinterpret the meaning of peace activism, particularly as it applied to youth in protracted ethnopolitical conflicts. Rather than seeking for youth that campaign for peace, one might look to those who are involved in social development, capacity building, and political education for youth members of political groups. Examples of this can be found in interface projects in Belfast such as those run by Intercomm that involves engaging ex-combatants and ex-prisoners in inter-community dialogue and development projects, or the Youth Against Crime project in Soweto, or in a Kosovar Youth Council project that involved an adolescent research team

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working with adult advisors to interview youth and make recommendations on youth needs and means for capacity building (Kosovar Youth Council, 2000). The appearances of youth as witnesses at the United Nations or tribunals of inquiry, such as the Northern Ireland youth delegation to International Tribunal for Children's Rights in Colchester, UK, in 2000 are other constructive examples of youth utilizing and developing their skills in meaningful peace building activity: in this case awareness-raising advocacy. This does not mean that peace education as conventionally defined to include causes of war, traditions of nonviolence, peer mediation and violence prevention/anger management education (Harris, 1999) – is not also valuable. But it is argued that programs that emphasize youth design and implementation and that are community development focused have much wider peace building implications given the benefits in terms of power and self-esteem that are accrued to youth who are engaged and active and the spin-off effects for a larger social group than the peer group or school; that is, they affect whole communities.

5. Youth have rights of participation (under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, articles 12 and 13)

Not only is there a pragmatic case to be made for consulting youth during peace processes, there are also youth rights to such consultation. The CRC states that:

Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views

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the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or

(b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

<http://www.unicef.org/crc/fulltext.htm>

In fact, there is a developing norm of youth participation in peace processes. The United Nations and several other children's rights advocating agencies recognize that 'war affected children, particularly adolescents, should be involved in peace processes and in developing policy and programming for their own rehabilitation, reintegration and education, as well as in the development of their communities' (International

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Tribunal 2000). Representing the UN's Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict at the International Tribunal, Chetan Kumar listed one of the Office's three core areas of attention as 'systematically making children the priority in peace processes', seeing children as 'subjects of rights and potential citizens, rather than objects of concern and victims' (Kumar 2000). In its recommendations the Tribunal emphasized children's rights to be consulted and the potential usefulness of their 'skills in danger management' as well as 'their own knowledge and opinions about war and peace' which children acquire in warzones. While this is still a developing norm it is more than simply rhetorical as the example of the youth delegation discussed above illustrates and the representations of young people at this year's UN special session on children (September 2001). As this norm develops it seems that the key stage of inclusion for youth, however, will of necessity be after Accord signing and not during negotiations itself. This stage still remains male-dominated and seniority-driven.

Conclusion

Each of these points illustrates different reasons why youth should be considered as distinct actors during peace building. But a common thread weaves across them all. In each, the question of the political status and agency of youth emerges as a crucial factor in shaping their relationship to violence in the post-accord period. Important in this regard are the findings on the links between childhood and adolescent political activism and resiliency (Cairns, 1996; Ziv, 1974; Straker, 1992 Quota et. al. 1995). Several studies suggest that active engagement in political struggle and/or ideological

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commitment are believed to augment resilience in young people. Among youth who experienced and participated in political violence in South Africa, for example, psychological resiliency and ability to cope and be constructive citizens in the post-apartheid period was higher for those who had leadership roles in anti-apartheid militant groups (Straker 1992). Similarly, an Israeli study's findings suggest that 'political commitment' inoculates children against trauma (Ziv 1974). McWhirter's 1990 study in Northern Ireland found that being an 'active protagonist' enhanced self-esteem for some young people. Cairns (1996) writes: 'As conflicts come to an end the fear is often expressed that members of groups trained to kill or maim young people will not be able to be resocialized. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is not necessarily true. One possible explanation that is yet to be tested empirically, is that a key element in membership of paramilitary groups may be the development of a morality of loyalty which in turn is related to the development of a relevant situated social identity' (137).

But caution is necessary. In her study of young people in Bosnia Hercegovina, Lynne Jones finds that 'there is a connection between the way children make sense of a conflict and their mental health'. But Jones finds that 'both subjective understanding and political context [...] mediate the impact of political violence' and in her study disengagement was associated with greater resiliency or mental health. Disengagement in the adolescents studied involved the tendency to distance themselves from the conflict and engage in 'blaming' behavior which in the end will likely undermine inter-ethnic reconciliation. On the other hand, 'political sensitivity' – awareness and interest in the causes of war and substance of the peace and a related search for meaning - was linked

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with less mental health and more insecurity in the youth studied. The contrast with the other studies may be explained by the fact that none of the children in her study had actively participated in violence. Jones' research suggests that it is only in low-level political conflicts where the possibility for active engagement exists that a search for meaning translates into resiliency. Straker's (1992) study of township youth in South Africa finds a similar combination of traits in youth who had been actively involved in violence but did not take leadership roles: political sensitivity, ambiguous feelings about violence and their involvement, and relatively less mental wellness and resiliency (compared with activist youth leaders who had strong, unwavering sense of their sociopolitical roles). But she concluded that the presence of compassion and moral confusion in such youth was a positive for society in the long-term, if not for the individual who suffered in the present. Jones reports in her study that young people's recollection that political activism in Bosnia was a forerunner to war was a barrier to their association of politics with constructive change (2000).

These findings offer intriguing avenues of investigation for those seeking to understand and prescribe appropriate peace building strategies with and for youth. A perception of a positive outcome to the conflict for one's self and one's group is important and an association of political activity as an important means to this end seem to be necessary to create the post-war effect of youth appreciation for and interest in politics. The findings on resiliency emerge from periods of youth involvement in struggle when deep commitment, training and discipline were the norm. As the Straker study illustrates, the select few, particularly those in leadership roles, exhibit this

resiliency. In post-accord periods then, when certain forms of political violence may continue and memberships in political/militant organizations may become less selective (as in the South African case), the resiliency-activism link is highly uncertain. Yet a better understanding and theorizing of the links between participation in political violence and peace building is essential.

One question that requires investigation is whether or not there is a difference in coping among youth involved in ethnospecific, national or militant organizations, and those engaged in cross community or peace organizations during a conflict. One could hypothesize that there may be less resiliency among those in peace groups because of the nature of communal or national loyalty and belonging (cf. Cairns above). There is strength to be gained through communal solidarity which is physically protective and also psychologically protective because of the essential introspectiveness of that engagement. Such groups are also, and perhaps most importantly, action- and goal-orientated.

In 'peace' groups, on the other hand, the stance is one of outreach and vulnerability engendered by interaction with 'the other'. Resiliency may not be served by the ambiguity of the cause: apart from 'peace', what end is to be achieved. 'Peace' is a notoriously vague and under-theorized concept; one with much less concrete meaning for children than war, as findings on their perceptions of war and peace suggest (Hakvoort and Oppenheimer 1993, Hall, 1993) And 'peace' groups are usually less goal-oriented and more process-oriented. Active strategic nonviolence is not the norm but rather dialogue and relationship-building activities. This may create a seemingly relatively passive organization for which it is more difficult to maintain membership and

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enthusiasm. However, one potential model for engaging youth that utilizes strengths inherent to both militant and peace organizations exists in the crossover organizations, such as ex-prisoner organizations working for peace, that, in the best situations, develop in post-agreement climates.

The child or youth's interpretation of the events, processes, participants and outcomes in a conflict is the relevant variable in terms of psychological resilience. One can hypothesize, therefore, that in terms of peace building potential and ability, young people's interpretations of, or the meaning they give to, the peace process will be immensely clarifying for those concerned to deliver a peace that is genuine and multigenerational. Yet, the child/youth perspective, how and what they think about peace processes and the task of reconstructing their societies after war, remains almost completely unstudied.

One of the questions that must be asked by the shapers and guarantors of peace processes is do youth represent a politically relevant social category that they must recognize and engage? The evidence presented here suggests that they do. Context dictates the specific details of their real and potential interaction. And civil society organization may be best means of their integration into peace building. But one thing is certain: the transition from violence to politics is no straightforward shift, but a continuum of feedback loops, missed opportunities and massive leaps of faith. The challenge for all actors with power in post-war situations is to open the way for youth into the hard politics of peace otherwise they will have missed one of the most crucial opportunities.

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Finally, a set of next generation challenges emerges in the crucial post-accord phase that illustrate the need for macro and micro policy initiatives, conflict management and conflict transformation praxis. The first dimension of the challenge is to reintegrate and resocialize/heal *youth who have been victims and perpetrators* of violence and involves dealing with trauma and memory (individual, local and national) as both symptoms of conflict and the vehicle for its endurance. The second is to properly integrate *politically active and pro-peace youth* into the peace process and provide them with 'ownership' of the process. Some of these youth are former militants/paramilitaries, others active in community organizations and churches, official reconciliation projects and local victims groups. The third is to bring on board *young people opposed to the peace process* which includes those in dissident political parties and paramilitary organizations but also those, the larger and more crucial body, who congregate in destabilizing ways on the rejectionist fringes of the pro-peace parties. The fourth is to incorporate and engage in the process *youth that are apathetic, socially alienated and distrustful of politics and authority*. The fifth and supporting dimension is to effect *wider societal reconstruction* – particularly in the areas of social and economic opportunity for youth, attention to education needs and protection of human rights. These dimensions suggest the importance of mapping and analyzing the connections between the politicization of youth, the transformation or reinscription of divisive attitudes, and state violence; the connections between these and new forms of violence in the post-accord period such as spoiler or vigilante violence; and the links between these and the presence or lack of processes of remembering, recording and atoning for the past at local and national levels.

Endnotes:

¹ The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as anyone under 18. However, this paper focuses on adolescents (12-17) and young people up to age 30 and uses the term youth to cover both groups.

² See Articles 6, 8, 12 of the CRC in particular.

³ 'Poverty is characterized by the inability of individuals, households or communities to command sufficient resources to satisfy a socially acceptable minimum standard of living. Poverty is perceived by poor South Africans themselves to include alienation from community, food insecurity, crowded homes, usage of unsafe and inefficient forms of energy, lack of jobs that are adequately paid and/or secure, and fragmentation of the family. In contrast wealth is perceived to be characterized by good housing, the use of gas or electricity, and ownership of a major durable good such as a television set or fridge.

[...]Vulnerability to poverty is [...] characterized by an inability to devise an appropriate coping or management strategy in times of crisis. Poverty may also involve social exclusion in either an economic dimension (exclusion from the labour market and opportunities to earn income) or purely social dimension (exclusion from decision-making, social services, and access to community and family support'. (PIR 1998)

⁴ Most of the South Africa's poor are rural and poverty is unevenly distributed across the country's nine provinces: highest and deepest in the Eastern Cape, Free State: and 78% of children in the Eastern Cape are poor while only 20% are poor in Guateng. (PIR 1998)

⁵ Even in 1999, the PAC youth who had appeared at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and received amnesty for the killing of Amy Biehl still expressed their distrust of the ANC and the TRC while at the same time stating that they had given testimony because of the psychological toll of their involvement in the killing (Scheper-Hughes 2000).

⁶ Africans are 20 times more at risk from homicide than whites and violent sexual assaults against young women disproportionately affect blacks. In 1995, for example, 95% of reported rapes were of African women (PIR 1998).

⁷ The proportion of the population under 15 is significantly higher at 24.2% than in the UK (19.4) and the

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European average (17.9%); (Barometer 1997).

8 A small no. of urban wards in Belfast and Derry have experienced the worst of the political violence, they tend to be the most socio-economically deprived areas and are predominately Catholic (Fay et al. 1999). Catholic men, particularly the young and working-class, are consistently more likely to be unemployed than Protestants (Duffy & Evans, 1997).

10 That is they live in families with incomes in the bottom 50% of average earnings after housing costs.

11 There have been 49 'security related' deaths since the GFA. In the same period there have been 2901 attacks on police, according to official UK government figures. Source: figures released in the House of Commons by Minister of State Adam Ingram, reported in '49 Killed Since the Agreement', *Irish News*, February 18, 2000.

12 25% of 12-17 year olds reported that they have felt compelled to hide their religion in case people held it against them; although half of these said this only happened 'a little'. Of those who answered yes, 13% said they had to hide their religion 'a lot', 54% 'a little' and 32% hardly at all.

13 In a survey by the same agency of 18-24 year olds, similar but not identical questions were asked.

Young people in the 18-24 range were more likely than any of the older age groups to say that in recent years (since the peace process) it was either 'harder' to go into strongly Nationalist or Unionist areas or that they experienced no change for better or worse in this regard.

14 International standards on police and law enforcement found in the UN General Assembly Resolution 34/169 (December 17, 1979) require that 'every law enforcement agency should be representative of and responsive to the community as a whole'. There are numerous ways in which children in NI are treated in clear breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; for example, 17 year olds are treated as adults and emergency legislation means that a child as young as 10 years old can be detained for up to 7 days without charge (Geraghty/Law Centre, 1999).

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