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The Unexplored Power and Potential of Youth as Peace-builders

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ABSTRACT

Around the world many young people are victims of cultural, direct, and structural violence and become carriers of that violence or perpetration. There is a strong tendency among politicians and researchers to see youth as a problem to be solved. However, many youth are peaceful and peace-builders. Equally affected by various forms of violence, they decide to act constructively towards building a culture of peace. Youth are underestimated as positive agents of change and key actors in peace-building, both by policy-makers and academics. This paper explores the role of youth as peace-builders, illustrating their unique power and potential to affect social change through a number of examples.

Introduction

Youth, more than ever, are at the forefront of global social, economic and political developments.[2]

Young people, as members of a dynamic group in society, play a crucial role in positively transforming conflict situations and in building the foundations of democratic and peaceful societies. This is documented in several statements and reports of governments, international inter-governmental organisations and non-governmental organizations[3]. However, there is limited data to back up these statements which are more rhetorical than substantive. Academic research has yet to focus on youth's positive role in peace-building, as Siobhan McEvoy[4] states:

> *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 war-affected children. A neglect of adolescents and older young people is short-sighted and counterproductive in terms of peace building particularly in the crucial post-accord phase with its twin challenges of violence prevention/accord maintenance and societal reconciliation and reconstruction. Youth embody essential elements of both challenges: posing at once potential threats to peace and peace building resources.*

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of youth as peace-builders through illustrating their unique power and untapped potential. Young people are typically considered a problem to peace and thus are left out or manipulated by decision-making processes especially in

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[2] The preface to the document United Nations Statistical Charts and Indicators on the Situation of Youth 1980 – 1995 www.un.org/youth

[3] See various UN Resolutions on Youth: a) http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/library.htm#resolutions, ;b) reports on the role of youth in development and peacebuilding, the "Youth and Millennium Development goals (2005), http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/youthmdgs.pdf, the World Scouting Report(2006): Youth. A force for development http://www.scout.org/en/content/download/4159/44250/file/WSR2006_EN.pdf, ;c) the "Global Youth Solidarity Fund" http://www.unoy.org/downloads/RC_060531/UNOY/2006_YouthReport.pdf (2006), ;d) Martina Fischer, "Youth Development as a Potential and Challenge for the Peace Process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Berghof Working paper 1 (2004) and Martina Fischer and Astrid Fischer "Youth Development: A contribution to the Establishment of a Civil Society and Peacebuilding. Lessons Learned from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Berghof Working Paper 2 (2004) www.berghof-center.org, ;and e) Yvonne Kemper, "Youth in War-to-Peace Transitions. Approaches of International Organisations. Berghof Report Nr. 10 (2005).

[4] Siobhan McEvoy-Levy, "Youth as Social and Political Agents: Issues in Post-Settlement Peace Building", *Kroc Institute Occasional Papers*, 21: OP2 (2001).

societies that have difficulties handling change in constructive ways. When thinking of "youth in conflict" rarely thoughts turn to the positive, preventive and transformative role of youth both in violent as well as non-violent conflicts. Thus, this paper also aims to highlight that peace and conflict research has insufficiently considered youth as relevant actors in peacebuilding processes and to indicate areas for further research.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first and second sections describe the most generalised perspectives on the role of youth in conflicts, based on a short review of existing literature. These views tend to depict youth in a negative light, either as helpless victims affected by violent conflict due to age, or as criminals or child-soldiers who are inherently violent or easily manipulated by others into becoming perpetrators. The third section challenges these views contrasting them with positive examples of youth engagement which illustrate the power and potential of youth as peace-builders, that is, as positive *agents* of non-violent change. The positive role of young people in peace-building is exemplified by four recent historical examples. The forth section suggests points for further research and exploration.

It is worth mentioning at this point that the categories presented are not mutually exclusive; in many cases, the same young people are victims, perpetrators, and peace-builders at different moments and in various situations in their lives. There are numerous examples in which young people have taken the lead in shaping the future in which they desire to live. This article refers to "youth in conflict" in its broadest sense, and not only as often used to refer to young soldiers in Liberia or Colombia. It is also important to note that rarely the term "youth in conflict" is used to refer to young soldiers in the US, Israeli or Dutch armies. The machineries of war and violence exist both in the North and the South, though at different scales and in various forms. This paper draws upon cases of peace youth organisations or groups working on different types of peace work and addressing all forms of violence.

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Conceptual approach

The purpose of this section is to present the conceptual approach of this paper, based mostly on the concepts of peacebuilding, conflict transformation, violence and youth.

A starting point is the existent debates on whether human beings are inherently violent. Societies and individuals often respond to problems and conflicts using violence and force. Yet, this does not mean that human beings are by nature violent. In 1986 a group of scientists met in Sevilla, Spain and drafted a joint statement, the "Seville Statement"[5]. The purpose of the statement was to dispel the widespread belief that human beings are inevitably disposed to war as a result of innate, biologically determined aggressive traits. The statement claims that:

> "It is scientifically incorrect to say that we have inherited a tendency to make war from our animal ancestors. Although fighting occurs widely throughout animal species, only a few cases of destructive intra-species fighting between organized groups have ever been reported among naturally living species, and none of these involve the use of tools designed to be weapons (…) It is scientifically incorrect to say that war or any other violent behaviour is genetically programmed into our human nature".

This is an important starting point when studying youth who are condemned by media and society as violent and trouble makers. Against some popular beliefs young delinquents or soldiers are not born "evil" and human beings are not by nature violent or criminals.

This paper is guided by a nonviolent peacebuilding and conflict transformation approach, mostly based on the work of Johan Galtung and his "TRANSCEND" method (Galtung, 2000). The reason for this choice is that it appears to be the most apt for reflecting on the role of youth in peacebuilding and in social change processes in general. Other approaches (e.g. conflict management, peace-keeping) put more emphasis on the role of the state and also intergovernmental bodies, while the peacebuilding approach as understood here, offers more room for civil society actors and for actions addressed at changing attitudes and behaviours'

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[5] The Seville Statement on Violence was drafted by an international committee of 20 scholars at the 6th International Colloquium on Brain and Aggression held at the University of Seville, Spain, in May 1986, with support from the Spanish Commission for UNESCO. UNESCO adopted the Seville Statement at its 25th General Conference Session in Paris, October 17 to November 16, 1989. The Statement has been formally endorsed by scientific organisations and published in journals around the world. UNESCO is preparing a brochure to be used in teaching young people about the Statement.

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in the long term. The word 'peacebuilding' has also been loosely used or confused with other terms such as peacemaking and peacekeeping. For example, the UN Peacebuilding Commission established in 2005 considers peacebuilding as actions undertaken in a period of post-conflict recovery. Yet, peacebuilding involves a full range of approaches, processes, and interventions needed for the transformation of violent relationships, structures, attitudes and behaviours. It is understood in this paper as the creative and simultaneous political and social processes for finding transcendent solutions to the root causes of conflicts and efforts to change violent attitudes and behaviour. Peacebuilding is multidimensional and it includes the full range of activities from post-war reconstruction to preventive measures. Peacebuilding encompasses all activities which aim to eliminate or mitigate direct, structural and cultural violence. Peacebuilding and conflict transformation can only be possible if diverse needs, interests and expectations are addressed, and if sincere and future-oriented processes of healing and reconciliation take place.

Consequently, the role of youth becomes more relevant from this approach as the emphasis is put on addressing structural causes of violence as well as attitudes and behaviour, building on creativity and local capacities.

It is also useful to state that this approach builds on the concepts of conflict, violence and peace. Conflict is often used as a synonym for violence and thus it bears negative connotations. It can be defined negatively, as a fight or struggle, as a disagreement between people with different ideas or beliefs or as an incompatibility (or perceived incompatibility) of goals (Galtung, 2000). Conflict can also be defined positively as an opportunity for actors to express their differences, become aware of others' perceptions, interests and needs, and thus, be an opportunity for change and growth. Conflict can also be seen as a natural process, part of life and relationships (Galtung, 2000). According to the approach of Galtung, although conflict may lead to violence, it is conceptually totally different. At the core of a conflict, the root, there is always an incompatibility between goals, referred to as 'contradiction'.

While conflict means an incompatibility of goals, natural and necessary for human and social development, violence oppresses, destroys and hinders this development. Violence is only one way of dealing with a conflict; it is destructive and rarely transforms the conflict

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positively. Galtung (2005) states: "Conflict is a complex human phenomenon and should by no means be confused with violence". Violence is to harm and hurt the body, mind and/or spirit of someone, including Self; by verbal and/or physical means (including body language). Violence leaves behind trauma, those traces, very difficult to remove, often indelible of the violence, on body, mind and spirit. Violence as an expression of contempt and hatred, "lack of respect" to put it mildly, and to be violated is an experience of humiliation. The harm and hurt on the mind and the spirit may leave the most important trauma."

According to the classification of Johan Galtung, three forms of violence could be conceptualized: a) direct violence is the explicit act or behaviour which physically damages a person or object; b) structural violence refers to the violence built into political, social and economic systems which determine unfair distribution of power, resources and opportunities, leading to actors feeling oppressed and unable to meet their needs; and, c) cultural violence is violence entrenched in cultural norms, beliefs and traditions, which makes other types of violence seem legitimate, accepted, normal or natural. These distinctions are important as often only direct violence is analysed and "treated", and other forms of violence are ignored. Galtung highlights the importance and often forgotten impact of structural violence such as discriminatory institutions and practices.

Finally, the concept of youth is particularly elusive. Youth is a very heterogeneous group encompassing people of various ethnicity, religion, race, gender, and class. The concept of youth is itself debated and being redefined by various social and demographic changes in the recent decades. Some authors favour biological markers and suggest youth as the period between puberty and parenthood, while others use cultural markers to define youth as a distinct social status with accompanying roles, rituals, and relationships.[6] According to the State of the World report released in 2003, one-fifth of the world's population is between the ages of 10 and 19. Country specific data is also vital to understand recent demographics trends. For example, in Kosovo, one-half of the population is aged under 20; in Northern Ireland, 40% of the population is under 24; 37% in South Africa is under 15 and 19.3% is

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6 *Youth and Conflict, A toolkit for Intervention*, US Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation. (2004)
http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/crosscutting_programs/conflict/publications/docs/CMM_Youth_and_Conflict_Toolkit_April_2005.pdf

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aged 15-24). In Gaza and the West Bank, over 50% of the population is under 15. And in the Middle East generally, more than 40% of the population is under 15. In Guatemala 20.3% of the population is aged 15-24 and in Sierra Leone 19% is aged 15-25, and the percentage is on the rise[7]. If they are so numerous, what are the reasons why research on their power and potential as agents has been so limited and scattered? In the next two sections, the most common understanding of youth in conflict, both in the work of international organizations and academic research, will be briefly described.

Youth as victims

One of the most generalised ways of perceiving youth is as victims. It is recognised that violent conflict situations have devastating effects on any human being and can be particularly shattering for young people. Youth is "an important period of physical, mental and social maturation, where young people are actively forming identities and determining acceptable roles for themselves within their community and society as a whole. They are increasingly capable of abstract thought and decision-making in new ways. Their sexuality is also emerging, as their bodies continue to change, and they are presented with new physical and emotional feelings, social expectations and challenges."[8] Violence disrupts this process of maturation and affects young people's physical and psychological health.

In war situations, many are subjected to forced labour, recruitment into armies or militias, and child prostitution. Many more are displaced, separated from their families, or orphaned, and must undertake a long, painstaking processes to rebuild their lives after war. Because of violent conflict, young people find themselves heading households, unemployed, their traditional livelihoods are disrupted. Not only are their daily lives affected, but their futures are also jeopardized; many youth grow up with the weight of hopelessness that influences their adult life choices. In this sense, most academic literature on children, adolescents and youth has been undertaken from a psychology or public health perspective, studying how a violent family environment or up-bringing affects youth and adult behaviour and life choices.

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[7] Statistics quoted in McEvoy, Youth as Social and Political Agents: Issues in Post-Settlement Peace Building., p. 7-8.
8 World Youth Report 2005, http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wyr05book.pdf

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Direct, cultural and structural forms of violence present worldwide affect youth indiscriminately independent of a country's economic or political prosperity, however these aspects are under-researched. Research on how more macro structures and trends of a culture of violence affect youth from cultural anthropology or social communication perspectives has not been sufficiently linked to conflict and peace research. This link should be further analysed as youth are fundamentally affected by this culture of violence transferred, and sometimes popularised, across national borders through print, media and information technology[9]. Yet, most studies focus on the physical and psychological violence from armed conflict that children and youth suffer and few emphasize the impact of violent media and cultures of violence on the behaviour and attitudes of youth. Further, the studies that *have* unveiled the various forms of violence suffered by youth, relegate the group's to victimhood. For example, the "UN Secretary General Study of Violence Against Children"[10] edited by Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro and published in 2006 is the first comprehensive, global study on all forms of violence against children. It builds on the model of the study on the impact of armed conflict on children, prepared by Graça Machel and presented to the General Assembly in 1996, and follows the World Health Organization's 2002 "World Report on Violence and Health." This study describes in detail all forms of violence and issues recommendations for governments and civil society. In this study, children and youth are only considered victims; responsibilities for actions are placed on the state and its various relevant agencies, non-governmental organisations, schools and families. The roles of children and youth organisations are not mentioned as part of the solution or as relevant positive *actors* in the conflict. The lack of children and youth participation in decision-making processes at all levels is also a form of structural violence. Decisions are often made *for* them, but not *with* them, loosing their valuable perspectives and insights.

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9 Higgins, Jane, Martin, Olivia, "Violence and Young People's Security", Chapter 7 of *Highly Affected, Rarely Considered*, The International Youth Parliament Commission's Report on the Impacts of Globalization on Young People, Oxfam International Youth Parliament, edited by James Arvanitakis. (2003) http://www.iyp.oxfam.org/campaign/documents/youth_commission_report/Violence_Young_Peoples_Security.pdf
[10] http://www.violencestudy.org/

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Youth as perpetrators

The second most generalised view of youth in conflict is the one who sees youth as violent actors. It has been argued and observed that youth who are reared in and into a culture of violence and especially those who have been direct victims of violence will likely use violence as way of dealing with conflict. This is sadly illustrated in the movie "Arna's Children." [11] This documentary retells the story of a group of Palestinian children who participated in a theatre group in the refugee camp of Jenin. One child's home is bombed by Israeli forces but the theatre offered children a space to express their anger through games and paint. However, years later, the only options perceived by these youth seem to either become a suicide bomber or to fight violently.

There is a growing body of literature on the roles of youth in participating as combatants in armed conflict and the effects of their involvement on development. This literature, based on extensive field work, provides important evidence of wide 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 forced sexual services—and their immediate-term rehabilitation needs once the fighting has ceased. These studies offer recommendations about demobilization, reintegration and prevention with an emphasis on economic, educational, social, and psychological measures and the effective implementation of relevant international law [12] . One common interpretation of the phenomenon of youth involvement in warfare suggests that exceptionally large youth cohorts, referred to as "youth bulges" make countries more susceptible to political violence[13]. Studies suggest that when young people—particularly young men—are uprooted, unemployed, and with few opportunities for positive engagement, they represent a ready pool of recruits for groups seeking to activate violence. This interpretation has enormous consequences for policies in conflict-prone countries. For example, the World Bank, the International Labour

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[11] http://www.arna.info
[12] McEvoy, "Youth as Social and Political Agents: Issues in Post-Settlement Peace Building"
13 For example, see Henrik Urdal, "The Devil in the Demographics. The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict" (1950-2000), World Bank Social Development Papers, 14 (2004). Krohnert, S.Emmanuel Y. Jimenez and Mamta Murthi, "Investing in the Youth Bulge", Finance and Development IMF, 43-3 (2006), World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation (Washington: World Bank, 2006), Daniel Hart, Robert Atkins, James Youniss "Knowledge, Youth Bulges, and Rebellion", Psychological Science 16 (8), 661–662. (2005).

Organisation (ILO), and USAid have started youth employment and educational programmes probably influenced by these studies[14].

In countries where there is not wide-scale armed conflict but which experience high unemployment rates and inequality, research has found that urban gangs appear.[15] Young people group themselves to protect each other from the police, from other groups and to create sources of income, in most cases through illegal activities. The gang's identity is clearly defined and its members express that they feel a sense of "family" who would do anything to protect the group. The birth of urban youth gangs or "neo-tribes" is often attributed to young people's opposition to the individualism that has come to dominate modern civilisation[16].

Further, structural inequalities are at the root of violence-prone youth gangs. The forces of the market economy have encouraged floods of rural migrants to crowd the already overpopulated urban centres, and it is here that youth gangs and urban violence flourish. For example, in South Africa, traditional rural society provided a sense of direction and support for young people in their transition to adulthood. In the urban context, young people created new structures and rituals that worked for them. Carving their identity into the walls of the ghettos and arming themselves with fearsome weapons, they "demand at gun-point what they cannot win with individual respect."[17] To date, authorities have failed to adequately respond to this trend except to favour longer prison sentences. The South African government resorted to toughening its criminal justice system and sending an increasing number of young people to prison. Meanwhile in Central America, evidence has emerged of "social cleansing" carried

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[14] The UN, ILO and World Bank have developed the "Youth Employment Network". Also USAid report writes the presence of a demographic bulge is neither a necessary or sufficient condition for violence. A large number of young people can be a tremendous asset to developing societies. However if young people find that opportunities for employment are absent or blocked, that families cannot offer support, that authorities cannot protect them or offer justice, and that hard work and education offer no rewards, some may turn to extremist groups or rebel leaders who promise a brighter future or immediate rewards.
15 Jan Abbink, Wilhelmina Kessel, *Vanguard or Vandals: Youth, Politics and Conflict in Africa* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2005); Clive Glaser, Bo-tsotsi, *The Youth Gangs of Soweto* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000); Malcom W. Klein, Barbara G. Myerhoff: "*Juvenile Gangs in Context: Theory, Research and Action*" (Los Angeles: Englewood Cliffs, 1967.)
16 O'Higgins and Martin, "Violence and Young People's Security." (2003).
17 Amanda Dissel "Youth, Street Gangs and Violence in South Africa". In Youth, Street Culture and Urban Violence in Africa, proceedings of the international symposium held in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, pp. 405-411, 5-7 May 1997. http://www.csvr.org.za/papers/papganga.htm

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out by the police in the streets of its largest cities. From 1998 to December 2000, extrajudicial killings of at least 1,000 minors at the hands of death squads were documented in Honduras alone: "If society labels them and kills them, of course they are going to respond with violence….For many of them, it is easier to learn to kill than to learn to write.'[18]

The emergence of youth gangs and youth-led armed groups has been the answer to a system that excludes young people. They have organised themselves for protection, survival and to conduct illegal activities, all of them with varying degrees of sophistication. They feel powerful and claim to have found their identity in these groups. Research should look into these processes of exclusion and inclusion and reflect on the reasons why young people only find protection, feeling of belonging and power "outside" society.

Youth as peace-builders

Similar to that of youth being violent, there is extensive evidence of youth not only being peaceful but of being agents of positive social change. However, this phenomenon has not been analysed by academic research. How many young people are violent and how many young people are peace-builders? Social research using quantitative and qualitative methods can help to answer this question. Our experiences as youth workers and educators in several contexts suggest that there are many youth who are peace-builders. They are pro-active agents in their communities, in their schools, work places, sports teams, youth groups and universities. Their stories have yet to be told. McEvoy[19] writes:

> 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 analysis of peace processes than key elites.

One of McEvoy's final propositions is that "youth are the primary actors in grassroots community development/relations work; they are at the frontlines of peace building." Along

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18 Ian Harris and Linda R. Forcey (Eds.), *Peacebuilding for Adolescents*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).
[19] Mc Evoy, "Youth as Social and Political Agents: Issues in Post-Settlement Peace Building", p. 25.

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this line, Ardizzone[20] studied the activities and motivation of youth organisations in New York City. She highlights *Global Kids*, an organization which conducts student-run conferences on children's rights; *Youth Force* which teaches teens to how to respond when stopped by the police; and *Youth Peace/Roots* which tries to counter the active role military recruiters take with inner-city youth by educating about alternatives to militarism. She emphasizes that young people whom she interviewed show a commitment to changing the situation of their peers and the image adults have of youth: "The youth in this study have witnessed injustice and, rather than becoming hopeless and apathetic, or perpetrators of direct violence, have chosen to work for social change." Further studies should be undertaken to document similar and no so visible initiatives in other geographical and cultural contexts, linked to studies of civil society strengthening.

Another aspect to highlight from the conclusions of Ardizzone is that there seem to be parallels with the emancipating function that war sometimes has on women. Women are compelled to take on roles left vacant by men—typically soldiers—during times of war. In this case, youth take up the role of a generation of adults who are either hopeless, too comfortable to change or incapable of implementing transformation. The experiences of agencies working with youth support this idea. The Oxfam International Youth Parliament Report "Highly affected, rarely considered", cited earlier, states:

> The experience of the International Youth Parliament (IYP) is that an increasing number of young people are rejecting violence and becoming involved in peace-building efforts at the grassroots, national and international level. How are young people changing their societies? What is their specific power? How can their unique potential be harnessed? Extensive research is needed on innovative and spreading youth initiatives.

The following section presents a number of examples in which young people proved to be positive agents of change in order to illustrate the main trends and challenges of these youth-based and youth-led efforts. The cases were selected to illustrate different types of youth work and different types of peace work, addressing the various forms of violence (direct,

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[20] Ardizzone, Leonisa (2003) "Generating Peace: A Study of Nonformal Youth Organisations", Peace and Change Journal, 28-3, pp. 420-445(26).

structural and cultural). They also reflect the diversity of organisational forms, strategies and methods. Finally, the selection of examples strived to include organisations working at local, national, regional and international levels and for some geographical balance, as there are numerous examples and an updated and complete data-base of the population of youth peace organisations does not exist.

For the purpose of this paper a basic framework to categorise youth peace work has been developed. This framework uses the concept of peacebuilding in its broad sense based on Johan Galtung's approach as explained above. It also adapts Mark Smith's categorization of different types of youth work[21]. The following table is constructed combining Smith's categorisation of youth work and Galtung's categorisation of the different types of violence. The table aims to classify and understand different types of youth peace activities. One category added is "Global trends" as there are youth activities which can not be allocated to any of Smith's proposed categories due to the trans-national nature of networks, alliances, international forums and associations. This new category refers to associations of youth organisations which gather a number of initiatives with diverse approaches working globally or in several continents and geographical spaces. Although networks are formed by members (individuals or organisations) sharing a common goal or vision working locally, they are linked regionally or globally for dissemination of information, dialogue or exchange of experiences.

Table I: An attempt to categorise youth peace work

Type of violence addressed ↓		Direct violence	Structural violence	Cultural violence
Type of youth work				
Movement-based	Politicizing	Example 1: Conscious Objectors in Israel	Example 2: OTPOR, Serbia	
	Character-building		Example 5: Scouts (global)	

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[21] Mark Smith, *Developing Youth Work. Informal education, mutual aid and popular practice* (Milton: Keynes: Open University Press, 1988).

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	Global trends	Example 6: Youth Networks – United Network of Young Peace-builders (Netherlands – global) [22]
	Social and leisure	Example 5: Peace Links Sierra Leone (sports and music activities)
Professional	Social personal development/ Welfare	Youth information services, counselling, support and training. Example 3: Youth Participatory Budgeting - Rosario's Youth Center (Argentina)[23]

The following examples provide details of how youth organisations are addressing creatively and courageously various forms of violence in different contexts. They also illustrate various organisational forms and strategies from which lessons and specific aspects of the power of youth can be drawn.

Example 1: Conscious objectors in Israel, Shministim

Shministim was created to resist compulsory conscription in Israel. In principle, all Israeli citizens and residents are required to perform military service. Men are required to perform three years and women two years of "regular service." Thereafter, the law requires both men and women to perform a period of "reserve service" each year. There is no alternative civilian service in Israel[24]. The new High-school Refuseniks movement was originated in October of 2004. More than 300 Israeli high-school students signed a letter declaring that they will refuse to take part in the occupation. On March 13th, 2005, the letter was sent to the Prime-Minister, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Education and the Military Chief of Staff. In their words their aims were "We are here to end to the occupation and bring freedom, security and peace to all Israelis and Palestinians. We refuse to take part of the

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22 The United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY Peacebuilders) is a global network of young people and youth organizations active in the field of peacebuilding and conflict transformation established in 1989. For more information, visit: www.unoy.org

[23] Rosario's youth center is a youth-led project of the Municipality of Rosario, Argentina. is www.centrodelajuventud.gov.ar

24 http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE150671999?open&of=ENG-345

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occupation, which is against our basic values. In order to keep working against the occupation and in favour of peace, we need your help, either by donating money or taking part in our activities. We believe there is another way."[25] The methods they used were imprisonment, letter writing and media outreach as ways to inform society about their choice. For example, Alex Cohn told reports on April 2005: "I will spend time in prison so that society will be a better place and so that there will be greater awareness about the Occupation and its repercussions for the Israeli and Palestinian societies. The Occupation is the cause of all the terrorist acts and the frustration directed against Israel. All resources are invested in the [Jewish] settlements [in the Occupied Territories], and this comes at the expense of social security, welfare and education. We want to tell the youth – think for yourselves, be independent and free."[26] Alex as well as other conscious objectors realised their power as soldiers when needed to continue an unjust occupation. They decided to refuse following the non-violent principle of non-cooperation. Their specific power was also that they could reach out to many high school students and get media attention due to their numbers. They express themselves non-violently and link up with other international networks.

Example 2: OTPOR (Resistance), Serbia

Otpor was founded by a handful of young people in October 1998 to oppose Milosevic's regime; it counted 4,000 members by the end of 1999. Otpor structured itself avoiding hierarchy. Ana Vuksanovic stated: "It's a free-wheeling, anything-goes protest movement (…) What got me excited was that there weren't any leaders, so there was no risk of being betrayed."[27] Within a year, the movement took root in four Belgrade universities, mostly with first and second-year students. The hard core consisted of three small groups: Democratic Students, the Students' Union and the Students' Federation. Otpor forged relationships with *Nezavisnost* (Independence), Serbia's only free trade union, as well as with the defence workers' union and the pensioners' organization. There were no ulterior political motives for these choices. It was built in some places around clubhouses where young people could go and hang out, exercise, and party on the weekends, or more often it was run out of dining rooms and bedrooms in activists' homes. The overall method was non-violence: Srdjan

[25] Ibid.
[26] http://www.afsc.org/israel-palestine/activism/Alex-Update.htm
[27] http://www.unesco.org/courier/2001_03/uk/droits.htm

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Milivojevic said "Our agreement was that all of our actions should be non-violent—because we were a non-violent organization. I also liked that because I already had had an experience when violent actions did not bring the expected results. On the contrary, they give a bad image to the entire organization. (…) I saw some really good qualities in Otpor. They enforced planning, they had the autonomous idea of resistance. This idea was not imposed on them from the outside, it was not imported from the West. The idea of Otpor was conceived in Serbia, it was our indigenous and independent idea."[28] Secondly, combined with the use of non-violent methods, Otpor used marketing strategies: "we just got some books and found out that only non-violent movements or non-violent fights are good for the whole country. People can say to you on the street that they will fight with arms, with bombs. But in the end, you only have 20 of them. So, we decided to be non-violent. (…) But we didn't use guns, we used marketing. We used leaflets, posters, graffiti, and all different and various kinds to spread our message."[29] Thirdly, the underlying method was to create space for expression and exchange: "Otpor offered these kids a place to gather, a place where they could express their creative ideas." In a word, it showed them how to empower themselves.[30] Special features of this movement were the absence of hierarchy, shared leadership and the ability to spread a message clearly and effectively. Their special power was managing to make young people feel they owned the activities and were building a better future, with a sense of transcendence.

Example 3: Rosario's Youth Center, Argentina

The Municipal Youth Centre and its programmes were established by the Municipality of Rosario in 1998. It aims to develop the recognition of the rights of young people; to stimulate their participation in community life; to promote spaces of expression, communication and dialogue that help prevent social risks that affect young people and finally, to coordinate with other departments of the Municipality the involvement of young people in their programmes and offering accurate information about themes of interest and the needs of young people. The main activity of the Centre is to provide information and support to young people about

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[28] Excerpted from an interview with Steve York: Belgrade, November 30, 2000.
http://www.canvasopedia.org/content/serbian_case/otpor_strategy.htm
[29] Excerpted from an interview with Steve York: Belgrade, November 30, 2000.
[30] Ibid.

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employment, education and health, especially HIV/AIDS prevention and testing. Furthermore, the Centre organises workshops, training seminars on identity and human rights, especially dealing with Argentina's past history of dictatorship and human rights violations, in cooperation with other areas of the Municipality such as the Museum of Memory. Finally, it has developed the Youth Participatory Budget since 2004. The latter consists of a participatory process to involve young people in deciding the use of part of the municipal budget for youth issues. Presently, it is a formal space of participation, discussion and decision-making organized by and for youth in which 1,496 youth participated in 2005. The project is aimed at young people of 13-18 years of age. They are invited to attend meetings organized in schools per district. During these meetings municipal youth workers organise trust-building exercises and present the aims of the project to the participants. As a second step, youth workers facilitate discussions through which young people identify the main problems in their neighbourhood and design together solutions for those problems. The PYB is a space for young people to identify common goals and re-discover previously perceived incompatible goals. Youth know a new reality and become actors in changing those aspects that bother them or that they believe are unfair. Needs and problems are analysed and solutions are planned as a group. Discussions often start with sharing of negative experiences but projects to change reality have to be developed. Youth understand that they are contributing to avoiding negative experiences for other youth in the future, and develop socially responsible attitudes. As the coordinators of the project explain (Berreta et al., 2006), this initiative is innovative as it differs from others in various ways: a) Most of the spaces of participation use an "adult-centric" frame. The PYB respects youth's ideas, concerns, ways of communication and participation, b) Often youth public policies define an asymmetric power relationship between adults and youth, youth are beneficiaries of projects. In the PYB, youth are protagonists and partners of the local government in the design and implementation of the projects, c) Often youth are considered the "future", in the PYB young people have to make decisions and implement projects in the present. They become actors here and now, d) The PYB aims at integrating a youth perspective into all public policies.

The PYB is an excellent example of how public space and policy can become spaces for conflict transformation, especially in a urban setting where large amounts of the youth population are unemployed and more young people become involved in gangs. Youth have

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an opportunity to identify the problems in their neighbourhood and in their city in a way relevant for them. Youth are not manipulated, they are consulted and mobilized, but most importantly they are in charge and participate meaningfully and exercise their citizenship rights. In this way, youth public policy promotes spaces where social conflicts become opportunities for constructive change.

Example 4: Peace Links, Sierra Leone

Peacelinks is a non-governmental youth-led organization founded in 1990 in Sierra Leone with the aim of empowering marginalized young people to step forward for positive change in their communities. Their programmes reach approximately 500 young people per year. Peace-links works to ensure that young people, especially those in extremely difficult circumstances, acquire the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to make positive contributions to society. Their activities include: music and dance workshops, peace education, sports, awareness raising campaigns, vocational skills training, youth leadership training seminars and camps. One of the keys to the success of Peace-links is the use of music and dance drama as a vehicle of expression and as a means of healing the wounds of war. Their songs' lyrics and messages challenge a culture of violence and propose a culture of peace. Their special power is reaching out to marginalised youth and ex-child soldiers using arts and sports as tool. Through music young people can express not only their pain but also their hope for a better future. Songs and group activities help reconcile communities, built trust among participants and boost the personal self-esteem of young people.

Example 5: World Organisation of the Scout Movement[31] (international)

The Scouts movement was founded by Lord Baden Powel of Gilwel in 1907. He was a commissioned officer in the British Army and retired as a Major General after a distinguish career. His aim was to teach young boys to become good citizens through outdoor activities. By 1921 the Scouts Movement has spread all over world. Even tough the Scouts movement has been criticised for its militarist origin and symbols, the Scouts Movement has made in

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31 http://www.scout.org/wsrc/ll/docs/EssChar_E.pdf

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recent years a clear shift towards peacebuilding. The Scout Movement aims to contribute to the development of children and youth, to help them to develop their physical, intellectual, social and spiritual capabilities, as a person, as a responsible citizen and as a member of the local, national and international community. National Scout Associations are gathered into an International Association with headquarters in Geneva. Each National Association is divided in districts, and sub-districts. The organisation is very hierarchical and pyramidal. Their methodology combines games, singing, acting, group activities, leadership training, camping, and community-service. Their power lies in numbers[32] and the level of organisation. They are also an inter-faith organisation which combines the concern for the environment, education for a new way of life close to nature, team work.

Example 6: United Network of Young Peacebuilders (international)

The United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY Peacebuilders) is a global network of young people and youth organisations active in the field of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. It was founded in 1989 in the Netherlands after a meeting of approximately 40 idealistic young people from various parts of the world. The UNOY Peacebuilders as a network organization contributes to the work of its 29 member organisations in 17 countries and hundreds of affiliates worldwide in two fundamental ways: Capacity building and Advocacy. It works to enhance the capacities of young people as peacebuilders through regional training seminars and to advocate for the role of youth in peacebuilding before institutions such as the United Nations and its agencies and the European Union. It also engages in a range of additional activities such as networking, sharing of information via e-groups and publications, peer-to-peer support through a pool of resource persons, fundraising and administrative support for small youth peace organisations. This network shows the capacity of youth to organise in a trans-national network, both to help each other to improve their peacebuilding skills through peer-to-peer learning and exchange as well as to advocate for the inclusion of youth in peace processes.

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32 The World Scout Association counted 28 million members (youth and adults) in 155 countries.

What do these examples suggest?

What all these examples have in common is that they are all youth-led and that they have developed creative responses to violence which take into special consideration the needs and preferences of youth. They all also show a great outreach capacity to youth, especially those marginalised. These examples show that peer-to-peer activities can be effective and reach young people that government or adult-oriented NGOs cannot reach. One of their strengths lies in numbers and mobilisation power. This is clear in the case of conscious objectors in Israel who communicated rapidly via networks of friends and class-mates, in the case of OTPOR and Peace Links. While in Israel and Serbia the school was a meeting place, in Sierra Leone, the networks of friends and the social leisure time were used as resources. All examples show aspects of creativity in terms of methodology. OTPOR's use of media, graffiti and informal education proved to be effective. Peace Links' use of media and art in non-formal education facilitated expression, dialogue and healing. Rosario's Youth Center dared to give power to youth and make them directly responsible for the use of public resources for youth issues. UNOY Peacebuilders profited from ICTs to build an international network of peacebuilders and friends.

In terms of type of work, these examples show a combination of educational work on attitudes and skills, with advocacy and youth participation, both at local, national and international levels. All of these youth initiatives show links to other organisations and international networks. Conscious objectors received encouragement and solidarity from abroad, OTPOR received training on non-violent methods, Peace-Links received financial support and international exposure which inspired others. The Scouts Movement is per-se an international association and UNOY Peacebuilders also builds on international exchanges and solidarity.

Ways forward and suggestions for future research

The power of youth as peacebuilders

Although the role of youth is recognized in various forums, academic research on the role of youth as peacebuilders and their impact in peacebuilding processes is lacking. Useful parallels can be drawn between the women's movements and the youth movement; as women's role has been further recognized and women's movements went through somehow similar processes to the ones that youth movements are undergoing now. What they have in common is that both demand participation using the argument that they constitute considerable percentages of the population and that both women and youth are affected by the decisions which were and are made without consulting them. In general, most decisions are made by adult males, and thus they—women and youth— both work to deconstruct patriarchal oppressive structures. Both find alternative ways of organizing as well as different kinds of power to influence the course of their lives.

However, significant differences exist. In a way, the youth movement is walking on the steps of the women's movements, and the path to empowerment and equality is neither easy nor short. After long struggles, women's movements have organized in strong networks and built support infrastructures and they have managed to put women and gender issues on the social development and the peacebuilding agenda. These successes have been supported by alternative knowledge developed by women and alternative research frameworks within the flourishing discipline of gender studies. These paths and achievements are of inspiration to the youth movement.

More specifically, parallels between the role of women in peacebuilding and the role of youth in peacebuilding could be drawn. When there is almost no research on the role of youth, there is some research on the role of women in peacebuilding. For example, in response to the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (October 2000), an Independent Expert's Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's role in Peacebuilding was formed, led by Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The experts' work resulted in the book

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"War Women Peace".[33] The authors suggest a connection between the status of women in a society and its level of conflict. They observed that violent conflict is more common in countries with a low representation of women in parliament and where domestic violence against women is more widespread than in more gender equal societies. However, they explain that "this report does not claim the universal innocence of women, nor does it argue that women are inherently more peaceful, or that men are more warlike." The authors witnessed that "Women were taking risks in every place we visited. They were putting communities and families back together, providing healing and recovery services and organizing solidarity networks across ethnic, class and cultural chasms. Though women we saw alternative ways of organizing security and of building peace".

Although more research is still needed to relate the level of gender equity to the levels of violent conflict, these efforts represent valuable starting points. It also represents an example for the youth movement and the field of youth studies, where extensive research backed up by empirical data is also still needed to arrive to similar conclusions in the field of youth participation and peacebuilding. The overall hypothesis that needs further exploration is that a society which gives a significant role to all of its generations and which is sensitive to different generations' needs should be a more peaceful society.

The examples presented in this paper suggest reasons why this hypothesis could be true, and why youth have special *power* in peace-building. These reasons are the product of observations and numerous examples, yet, more studies should be undertaken to assess to what extent such generalizations can be made. Cases need to be documented and such propositions should be analyzed in relation to age and considering other variables affecting young people's attitudes and behaviors. However, these propositions are presented as starting points for further exploration:

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[33] Rehn, Elisabeth and Johnson Sirleaf, Ellen; *Progress of the World's Women 2002, Volume One, Women, War, Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building* (UNIFEM, Kumarian Press, 2002)

Young people are more open to change

As Johan Galtung said on his lecture on 11 May 2005 at the European University Center for Peace Studies (EPU) in Austria: "Young people are searching for new ideas and open to new challenges while adults have already formed their dogmatic discourses. I have seen this hundreds of times in my life. In peace-building processes, young people should meet, and even better, young women should meet." From our experience as youth workers and educators, we observed that youth are eager to try new strategies and are not "married" to any specific truth. In an interview with one of the authors in August 2005, a programme officer of a Dutch Development Agency stated that she enjoyed working in projects led by young people (she was specifically referring to one of the project of Peace Links which works with ex-child soldiers reintegration in Sierra Leone) for their openness and willingness to listen and critically assess feedback.

Young people are future-oriented

Young people inherit the past from older generations. In many cases, they have not witnessed war directly but their parents and schools have passed down stories. They will have to live in the world that others built. Since they have more time ahead, they are willing to try alternatives and are more bound to "forget" the past than those who were directly involved in a painful moment of history. McEvoy also points out that "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."[34]

Young people are idealistic and innovative

Many revolutions were started and led by young students or activists. Students often have more time to think, read, meet colleagues and develop ideas. They also have more time to engage different activists groups. "Students historically have always been in the vanguard of social change. So if you're looking for that pillar of support, it doesn't take nearly the amount of resources to get them up to where you want them and in some cases, like in the Burma

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34 McEvoy-Levy, Siobhan, "Youth as Social and Political Agents: Issues in Post-Settlement Peace Building" p. 5

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movement in 1988, the students were mobilized and active well before any of the other institutions of society were. So when it came to the crisis point, the other pillars of support were not ready to support them." [35] Youth also create ideas that solve old problems in innovative ways. Youth seek for alternative roots of power and influence.

Young people are courageous

Young people are also less experienced and willing to try new adventures. This risk-taking nature combined with a belief in a cause and a situation that cannot get worse pushes them to be courageous, especially when others believe that change is impossible. Stanko Lazendic, from OTPOR, Novi Sad expressed: "Each and every one of us has lived our youth in a very negative way. Living such a negative youth, and having an unclear picture of our future, we had nothing to lose. We could either react and take part in creating our own future, get out of here, or simply keep quiet "give up, and pretend it does not concern us."[36]

Young people are knowledgeable about their peers' realities

Young people possess valuable knowledge of the needs that exist among their peers, based on their own experiences and close contact in their age group. Adults often are or seem to be clueless about young people's behaviour, language and ways of communicating.[37] Youth set priorities different from adults and this diversity of perspectives should be appreciated.

The potential of youth as peace-builders

The characteristics mentioned above will not create a sustainable movement of young people for peace by themselves. As they are trained to be soldiers, youth need to be supported as builders of peace and democracy. Their potential and power has to be developed in order to sustain a process of change. This presents enormous challenges.

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35 Colonel Helvey Excerpted from an interview with Steve York: Belgrade, January 29, 2001.

36 Excerpted from an interview with Steve York: Novi Sad, November 29, 2000. Note: This interview was translated from Serbian.

[37] This has been a resource tapped by HIV/Aids prevention campaigns.

*Training***:**

Young people should have access to training opportunities in conflict transformation, mediation, negotiation skills, facilitation of group decision making processes, project and organisational management and other themes of their interest and/ or relevant to their social contexts.

Peer Education:

One of youth's major contributions can be through peer group non-formal education. Young people and especially teenagers spend a lot time with their friends, and on many occasions they listen more to them than to their parents or teachers. They also have a greater flexibility and openness to new ideas. They can build bonds and relationships easier with other young people to overcome old barriers. The key to success is allowing youth the space, time and trust to take up the initiative.

*Participation***:**

Youth participation should be encouraged at all levels of social interaction, from the neighbourhood, school, and local community to the national and international levels in a multi-track diplomacy approach. They should be given responsibilities according to their capacities and be taken seriously.

*Advocacy***:**

Young people should learn from other movements' histories and achievements.   In this respect, the efforts that led to Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council of October 31st 2000, which recognises the role of women in peace-building, is an example to follow. A similar resolution would help to raise awareness and develop processes towards the inclusion of young people in peace-building.[38]

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[38] There are recent youth advocacy initiatives. See for example, UNOY Peacebuilders and Fundacion Culture de Paz Youth Advocacy Initiatives during 2005 and 2006 www.unoy.org and Commission for Sustainable Development Youth Caucus www.youthcaucus.net

Inter-generational mainstreaming[39]:

Processes and decisions should be analysed taking into consideration how different generations are involved. Different generations have different opportunities, roles and needs, and thus political decisions affect them differently. This analysis should not be only restricted to how young people are treated in conflict situations but rather how are they treated in general in society. Partnerships between adults and youth should be fostered.

Use of Information and Communication Technologies:

Young people are attracted by and easily learn to use ICTs to support and improve their work and extend their outreach.

Networking and self-organising:

Young people create networks, mutual support structures and common platforms for advocacy, sharing resources, know-how and ideas.

Conclusion

This paper presented three main views on the role of young people in relation to conflict. The most generalised ones see young people in a negative light, that is, as victims or as violent actors. The last sections propose that young people should be seen and studied as *agents* of positive change. If youth are only perceived as the "devil in demographics"[40] or as only helpless and powerless actors, their power and potential will not be harnessed for peace. Sociological frameworks which aim to reconcile or transcend "structure" and "agency"[41] could be useful to analyze how structures influence human behavior and how humans are capable of analyzing critically and changing those structures at the same time. The examples described show that young individuals, who are directly affected by violent conflict and who have grown up immersed in violent cultures and structures are indeed able to challenge these

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[39] This is a new term introduced in this paper which proposes that projects, policies and organizations should be analysed from a generational perspective. This analysis would involve assessing how actions and structures affect different generations and take into consideration their needs and special characteristics.

[40] Henrik Urdal, *The Devil in Demographics. The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict, 1950-2000.*

41 See for example: Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (London: Cambridge University Press, (1977), Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Logic of Practice*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

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cultures and structures. The concept of agency refers to the capacity of individuals to think and act independently and is useful to address one of the most crucial questions underlying this article: Are youth more capable of critical thinking because they have not internalized fully structures that limit their thinking and behavior?

The examples presented suggest that at least some individuals affected by a violent conflict are not only victims swallowed by violent structures, but also are able to chose to challenge these structures.

Many questions remain unanswered which could be addressed by different social sciences and disciplines. From the political science discipline, studies could address the question of which factors influence young people's choices to become political aware and active in a context of violent conflict and which are the spaces where the political culture of young citizens is shaped in absence of role models or traditional structures affected by war. Are young people better negotiators as they are not so bound to the past? Should adults support or promote youth emancipations or should youth do it themselves? How are youth empowering themselves in the absence of adult role models? How can youth peace organisations build an inter-generational partnership with adults when youth are not taken seriously? The discipline of psychology could contribute to the study of resilience of youth affected by violent conflict and how they are able to recover from trauma. Sociology could also look at the new forms of youth activism from social movements' theories.

Furthermore, in the debate on the role of civil society organisations in peacebuilding, democratization and development processes, to what extent are youth organisations schools of citizenship and leadership? Organisational and public administration studies could also look into ways the power of youth is and could be harnessed to support peace-building processes, how the impact of small initiatives is or could be scaled-up and what is effective about youth networks and ways of organising. Finally, how can the potential of youth organisations be tapped on by public policies of governments and international institutions? For example, the newly established UN Peacebuilding Commission has as a priority for its work in Sierra Leone the issue of youth employment and they are slowly starting to work with youth organisations as partners.

These questions and suggestions are proposed as starting points for further reflection, research, and discussion. Indeed, the power and potential of youth in peacebuilding is yet to be fully explored.