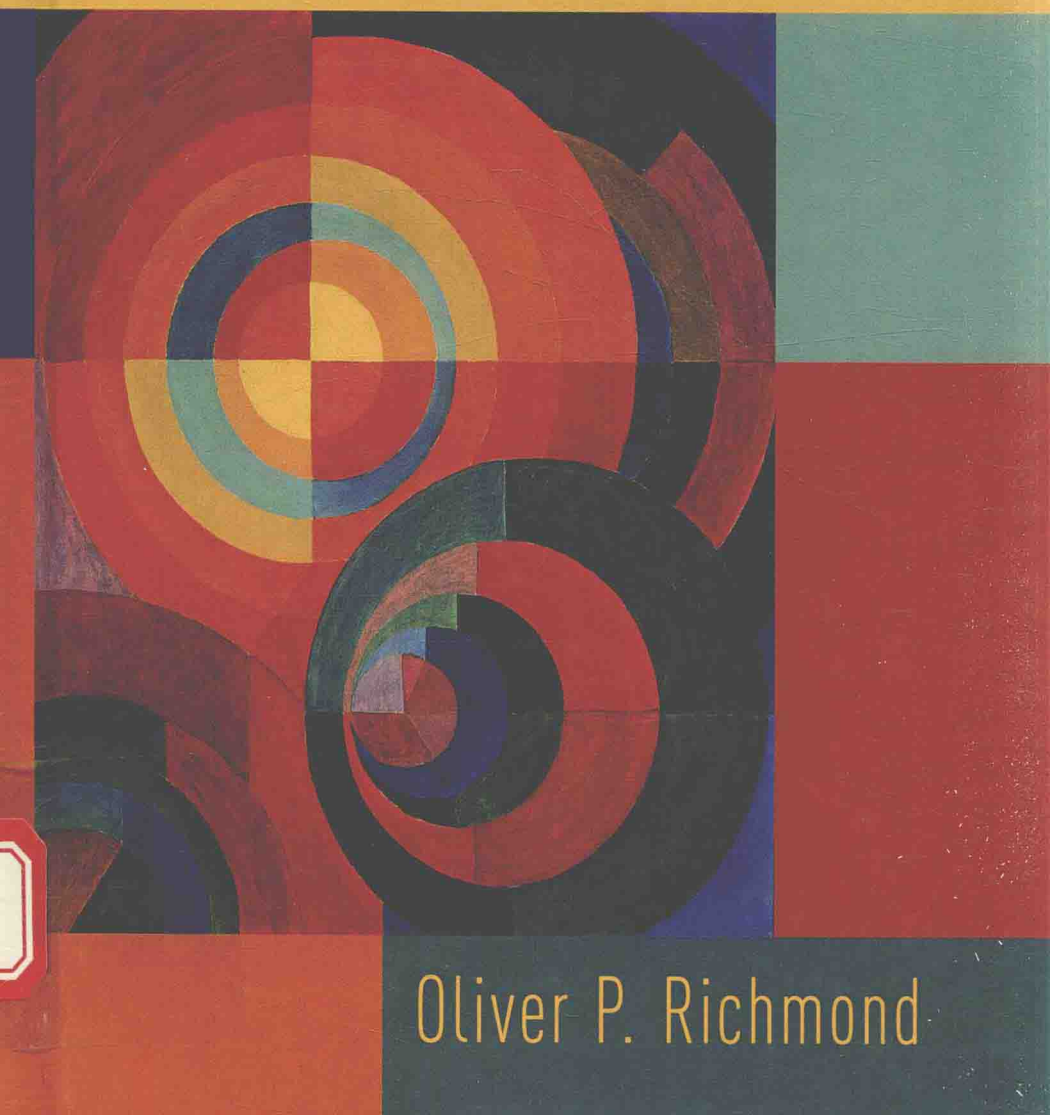


Peace Formation and
Political Order in
Conflict Affected Societies



Oliver P. Richmond

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

PART I: Theorizing the Social Formation of Peace

1. Peace Formation, Local Dynamics, and Transversal Networks 21

2. Four Paths for Peace Formation 52

PART II: Reconstructing the Empirical Evidence

3. Peace Formation in Practice 85

4. Cases Studies in Peace Formation I: Potential and Limitations 103

5. Case Studies in Peace Formation II: Transforming the State and
Addressing the Causal Factors of the Conflict 133

6. Infrastructures for Peace: Negative or Positive Hybrid Peace? 155

Conclusion: Peace and the Formation of Political Order 174

*Appendix: Comparative Indices for Conflict-Affected Countries: From the End
of Armed Conflict to the Present* 191

Notes 195

Bibliography 223

Index 245

Introduction

The challenge is that society should strive to obtain security and justice for human beings, and also progress.¹

A REORIENTATION

In an era of globalization and democratic demands for decentralization, subsidiarity, and more sensitive forms of representation, it is commonly accepted that society provides legitimacy. Thus society must be represented in political processes. As Cicero warned two thousand years ago, leadership needs local consent.² In modernity, top-down and Weberian notions of state legitimacy are clearly in conflict with bottom-up, Foucaultian versions of the agential subject³; and in conflict-affected societies, both are normally in tension with liberal international norms. Indeed, there is a broad and perhaps unexpected agreement across much of international relations (IR), political, economic, and social theory, that local dynamics are the foundation of a viable international order, whether normatively (in liberal terms); in terms of resource distribution, social justice; in terms of knowledge systems, legitimacy; and increasingly, in methodological terms. Yet, the aim of most peace thinking and policy since the end of the Cold War, and perhaps reaching as far back as World War II, has been to bring the local in line with the state (or to bring society and the state into a near alignment) according to realist or liberal versions of the social contract. Simultaneously, it has sought to bring the state in line with international norms as laid down in the UN Charter, the Declaration of Human Rights, and international law.

Civil society (the importance of which to politics was realized as early as the work of Aristotle), social activism, mobilization, resistance, and even revolutions are making ongoing and vocal claims against the modern state, the international architecture for peace and development, and global capital. This network of local agency has exposed much of the international system as anachronistic and ill-suited to its changing purpose of supporting a web of civil societies according to their representational demands. Indeed, the state and international system may have taken on other goals, in which civil society is a means rather than an end in itself. Civil society often agitates for better and more responsive leadership, or for structural change in more extreme situations, using critical forms of agency, and resistance, to deconstruct the systems that maintain violence, both direct and structural.

Much liberal thought assumes that a benign order will emerge in the end, and that power will be overcome and turned to the ends of the “good” society, state, or international order, often pointing to the transnational networks, institutions, the social contract, civil society, and social activism. And yet, it is still uncertain whether there are sufficient checks and balances available to prevent “backsliding” (as Immanuel Kant noted long ago) and a rather more negative form of peace from remaining dominant in conflict-affected societies, as well as in the world order. As has been debated from Nietzsche to Foucault, political order, and life itself, is unstable, subject to domination, resistance, truth and discourse claims, and fluctuating power relations. Work on gender issues within sociology and on ethnographic methods has further highlighted the embedded nature of power relations, their naturalized status, and the need to move beyond traditional perspectives, boundaries, and levels of analysis to understand how to respond to war.⁴ One might argue that the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, now rarely mentioned, had already placed many of these problems at the forefront of liberal international and state policy,⁵ but this covenant is rarely taken seriously by state or international elites. Local organizations, NGOs, networks, and scholars regularly mention its relevance to their situations and analysis, however.

Local agency has been linked to legitimacy, sustainability, and progress, even when it is also often seen as retrogressive in other perspectives. It provides functional “navigation points for policy” as David Mitrany once argued.⁶ Many scholars and policymakers have sought to highlight the positionality of the subject, the space of the “local,” the everyday,⁷ and the local’s scalar relations with the state and the international, through norms of human rights, concepts of human needs or human security, elicitive approaches, and others, which foreground the subject over the state and the

international. The everyday, spanning the work of Foucault, Le Feuvre, Elise Boulding, and James C. Scott, including anthropology, sociology, modern feminism, geography, and other areas, has increasingly provided a platform for understanding peace.⁸ Indeed, such approaches try to reverse power relations from the state and international scales to the local and the subject positionality. This highlights the mundanity of peaceful life as well as the subaltern political struggles for equality, rights, and services in a variegated world, as twin dimensions of what peace means (the term “subaltern” refers here to conflict-affected subjects). Such research also tends to connect such frameworks with peace thinking, with peace agreements and peace processes, or, more recently with peacebuilding, which all seek to reconcile peace with power. It often endeavors to create the conditions for reform, complementarity and subsidiarity, and ownership between a vertically organized (and sometimes opposed) array of actors, from local to global.⁹

Across the world, in recent times, popular committees, plenums, new civil-society actors, peace infrastructures, and other forms of often widely networked social organizations have emerged and made demands for a better local and international order. Some organizations work for human security, some for human rights; some engage with material needs and development goals; some seek to reform the state along liberal lines, and others seeks to preserve culture, identity, or the environment. Many make alliances with other organizations across the planet. Many desire political autonomy and also integration into a world community. They fill the missing spaces of the weak or oppressive state. Many such actors—from Bosnia to Egypt to Kenya—see themselves as representative of the true spirit of collaborative and participatory democracy. Such organizations are widely equated with enhanced local legitimacy when compared to previous state forms, or even the more traditional style of Western, bureaucratic democracy. Sometimes they connect their agendas directly to international law. Sometimes their ambitions are minor, but in other instances they want to scale up into the state and even beyond into the transnational environment.

Yet the state and international architecture for peace and global capital have not been able to respond, protect rights, or provide sufficient and legitimate leadership. Peace processes and peacebuilding commonly focus on the state and its institutions, and are run by elites at the state and international levels. The question appears to be in relation to peace: Why do so many peace movements and activities at the local social level remain marginal to the state and to international society?

Local peace movements appear to be tenacious if small in scale. This should not be a surprise. In fact, peace in history has more often been formed within societies and by their cooperation over nonviolent

approaches to dealing with political problems, mostly related to the fair distribution of resources. Institutions, law, and state or international organizations emerged from these processes over time. Root causes of conflict are experienced viscerally at the local level, and require responses from government, whether local, state, or global. Thus, more needs to be known about the nature of peace formation from the perspective of local peace actors, and the views from their positionality as to conflict causes, the transformation of the polity and the state, and the best role for the international community. More understanding is needed of the capacities local actors have in discursive and material terms, the obstacles they face from internal conflict actors, what they demand from the structure of the states system, the international architecture, and global capital. Similarly, more knowledge is required about the opportunities these frameworks offer for peace from a local positionality.

This raises the genealogical question of how people and communities have made peace for themselves and in their own specific contexts throughout history, especially as “human power” has increased unequally.¹⁰ What sources of agency and inspiration do they draw on and what type of peace do they create? What role does society play, especially what has become known as “civil society”? It has now been accepted that in many war or conflict zones, small peace communities and activists often emerge. They favor accommodation and compromise, but they often use nonviolent means of resistance. They are also normally seen as marginal to the march of power and related historical events and are often ignored. Yet, on closer examination, such dynamics often show tenacity, longevity, good faith and a rejection of violence, political and social skills, contextual knowledge, inclusiveness and pluralism.¹¹ This commitment and capacity can be observed in conflicts spanning Northern Ireland, Colombia, Sierra Leone, Israel-Palestine, Cyprus, Sri Lanka, and others.

What does this mean for peacemaking in local and international order? Is local peacemaking irrelevant because of its lack of power and resources, or is it formative of a new, more legitimate and peaceful order (given that the global is made up of the circulation of local actors, norms, and ideas, also determined by relative power)? If the local is partially formulative of the global, how does relative power between the two poles of a transversal and transnational order engage in translating the requirements of peace, especially where local agency, peace actors, and activists, including women and marginalized groups, tend to be excluded from elite-level politics and negotiations? So far, most translation has followed power rather than contextual concerns, as with the current top-down liberal/neoliberal peace and human rights regimes.¹² As a result, rights take precedence over needs and

identity, as if the latter were inconsequential to any peace process. This fits in with Agamben's recent argument that contemporary politics focuses on governing effects rather than addressing causes.¹³ This is far from adequate as a policy or theoretical guide for sustainable peacemaking and political order (even if it is a reasonable preliminary step toward those goals). Does this mean that peace must follow the naturalized and hegemonic order determined by epistemic power in a top-down manner? Or does peace indicate that more revolutionary forms of structural (and discursive) change from the bottom up are required in society, the state, and the international system?

This study argues that "peace formation" stems from local-scale agency, networks, from forms of mobilization for legitimate and progressive peace agreements. It draws on everyday, localized understandings of positionality vis-à-vis politics, justice, and reconciliation, and is scaled up—at least theoretically—toward the state and international order. It often draws upon liberal international norms. It is central to legitimate authority within the state and an embedded, sustainable peace. These characteristics emerge from any candid assessment of historical progress: the need for relative material equality, recognition of various forms of identity, human rights, political representation and a rule of law, environmental sustainability, and the impact of social power (albeit slow) on legitimacy and sustainability within and across political orders. Held to these general assumptions and standards, often elucidated by discourses within society, the state, the global economy, and the international community have only made uneven progress. Peace formation raises issues of positionality and of the ethics of working with subaltern political claims (with serious methodological implications), agency, progress, justice, and reconciliation, as well as power relations. It also requires a pragmatic assessment of the limits of peace formation agency.

Peace formation can thus be seen as form of subaltern agency or power—a set of practices—which operates cautiously in order to circumvent and negate the direct and structural power of the state, the international geopolitical system and global economy, that may directly or indirectly cause overt violent conflict (militarism, nationalism, inequity, etc.). It may also shape or influence the governmental power of the state, which often maintains predatory statehood. It may also respond to the policy frameworks of the international community, which follows hegemony, meaning its "soft" or "normative" capacity to shape order.¹⁴ Thus, peace formation must be seen as a subaltern and critical form of agency that seeks to engage with direct, structural, or governmental power, which sustain conflict or injustice and structural violence, with varying degrees of success or failure. It is

therefore important to realize the potential and the limits of peace formation in the context of these dynamics of power and violence.

This raises questions related to how the “formation” of peace from the ground up, from the grass-roots level, influences the nature of peace and the state. What would this look like if these marginal peace agencies began to determine the nature of the state, global economy, and IR? How might local “scale” peace processes be facilitated by external actors? How are they established, and maintained, how do they contribute to the state’s evolution, and how are they networked across local and global scales? How might an international system built by a range of local peace actors around the world look? Would it be different from what exists today? How should reconciliation and an emancipatory peace be achieved? These are complicated questions, especially if peace is to rest on local knowledge and practice, consent, and legitimacy in widely divergent cultures and regions around the world, while being at the same time part of the global economy, international community, and accepting the norms that go with human rights.

I realize that this is an ambitious project, which pits hidden and marginal social agency against direct, structural, and governmental power, including the industrial capacity of political, military, and economic elites, who are often not averse to the use of violence, and which also opens up questions of historical and distributive justice. My analysis is based upon the very fragmentary evidence that we have so far collected using methods that tend to highlight macro perspectives. A comprehensive and watertight micro perspective and analysis is therefore not possible (or advisable), but I think that in what follows I am still able to demonstrate unequivocally that peace formation exists and does have an impact upon thinking and policy practices about political order and the development of more emancipatory forms of peace.

Since Aristotle, civil society has been associated with a shared community operating under a rule of law, which defines the peace by providing liberty and setting out clear limits to human behavior.¹⁵ Cicero added the idea that such dynamics of citizenship made for a decent society.¹⁶ John Locke understood the implications of these dynamics for the emerging social contract in a liberal state and economy: the preservation of life, liberty, and property.¹⁷ From de Tocqueville to Robert Putnam, civil society and voluntary association and social networks have been thought of as crucial to legitimate political institutions, particularly to democracy.¹⁸ What is more important is that civil society implies that the state, and subsequently the international system, can be designed by societies rather than merely emerge as a result of a natural evolution of elite-led power struggles. No

doubt other cultural traditions around the world have alternative versions of this debate about the nature of the social and its relation to the state. An active political role for society implies that its material concerns, identities, historical structures, norms, and cultures will be platforms for mobilization. On these bases, groups within society have always thought about the possibilities of peace, requirements of a more progressive form of politics, and types of reform and transformation that would be required for peace.

Nevertheless, societal roles in politics and peacemaking need to be placed in a historical context of power relations, from local to global, many of which provide an explanation for the fragile peace and states that often emerge from attempts to make peace in conflict-affected societies. Furthermore, the impact of capitalism has to be taken into account, in terms of both the possibilities it opens up for and the limitations it places upon civil society. Indeed, the state and capital is generally where policy and academic attention is focused. The evidence tends to show that civil society suffers from a lack of capital and agency, especially in the context of absent public services; from the flow of private capital into low-wage or predatory and extractive industry; and from the distribution of capital by donors, which often introduces new tensions and conditionalities.

The peace that comes about through the interplay of these various forces is often a hybrid peace, in negative form, resting on an encounter between different forces, norms, and identities.¹⁹ What has arisen from this encounter in the clash among the international peace architecture, the state and related power structures, and local societies has been tense and conflict prone, even in the eras of liberal and neoliberal peace (from 1990 onward). This raises the question of what causes negative and positive forms of peace to arise, in hybrid forms, and of how local individuals, actors, and organizations engage intersubjectively with the question of producing a positive peace connected with a progressive form of politics.²⁰ Like E. P. Thomson's revolutionary account of "history from below,"²¹ which countered the elitist nature of history, "peace from below" has become a critical refrain in IR, increasingly connected to re-imagining the political order.²²

Such matters have long been an issue for peacebuilding praxis, whether conducted by the UN or other international actors. Most of the work on peace settlement, conflict management, or peacebuilding aims at an elite agreement representing elite forms of consociation. These have often obscured the need for reconciliation and resolution within and between societies. These have recently become more of a concern, however, including issues of local ownership and conflict sensitivity: indeed, internationals often argue that they already pay a lot of attention to local dynamics and actors. Local peace efforts are not a matter of a having romantic view of

the past or future but instead represent a reconstruction of peace theory based on local-scale agency, historical legacies, as well as contemporary issues and liberal standards. International and national level peace agreements, peace processes, and progressive reforms have little meaning unless they are contextualized across an array of identity, institutional, legal, and material platforms.

Such logic raises a range of important questions for international relations, international organization, donors, activists, NGO personnel, and academics today. For example, the Western narrative of the gradual emergence of the states-system, international organization, and law, as well as of civil society and the social contract (including contact outside the West, of course), can be seen to represent a gradual formation of a peace system from the complex social fabric of the West. Such networks gradually intensified into the international architecture we have today, which the West has done its best to spread around the world in the last quarter century and more. However, in that period, top-down and externalized approaches to “building” peace and the state have been relatively unsuccessful. In effect, statebuilding and peacebuilding have perceived the space of everyday life as a “conquered country,” provoking a predictable level of local resistance.²³ Yet, it is widely acknowledged that sustainable peace rests on a social, grass-roots, and mid-level process of accommodation and reconciliation, on governance and the nature of the state, and on the support of international organizations or donors. This points to an everyday dimension, incorporating insider-partials, and an elicitive approach, building dialogue and consensus on political, social, economic, legal, and cultural matters.²⁴ It means that the local is as much a site of peacemaking and preventative action as are the state and the international scales (which have received the most attention since the Enlightenment).

LOCAL PEACE FORMATION AGENCY

The local may be seen as a space, a scale, a site, a community, or an infrastructure.²⁵ I prefer to see it in scalar and spatial terms, as the base of political legitimacy but implicated closely in the state and international/global and the related emergence of a progressive and emancipatory form of politics.²⁶ They mutually enable innovative and alternative sites for peace agency to emerge by way of a political debate about the nature of peace, institutions, law, and the state in each local context, and in relation to international norms.²⁷ This process often occurs in liminal spaces.²⁸

Yet, in numbers alone, the people living in these spaces are not liminal. The World Bank estimates that 1.5 billion people are affected by conflict.²⁹ Given the conservatism of the World Bank and of the full range of international institutions, the figure is probably far higher, especially when we take into account the changing nature of conflict and the prevalence of structural violence based on material and rights inequalities between socioeconomic and identity groups, as well as gender and age factors, (or what might be called “structural conflict”) across the planet. Thus, making peace is an activity that has an impact on a significant percentage (over 20 percent) of the world’s population in their everyday, local context, whether urban or rural. Making peace and assisting development in “other” societies thus raises serious issues about methods, ethics, and of course, global inequality and transitional justice on such a scale (including in historical terms). It raises deep philosophical questions about how to engage with social wrongs committed with seeming impunity in the past, the effects of which still reverberate, and the connected distribution of rights and material resources around the world today.

One of the most prominent related debates of the second decade of the twenty-first century is about the disconnection between governments and their peoples. It has been understood in the limited framework of the lifespan of democratic governments today, but it also relates to the gap between the donor and UN system and conflict-affected citizens around the world. Yet, this space is local and global as well as historical. It is mediated by the state and by transnational organizations and transversal actors. As a caveat, it should be noted that the international and the local (likewise, the liberal and the non-liberal) are arbitrary categories that only provide a general sense of the categories and hierarchy maintained by power; but they are thrown into the sharpest relief when viewed from the bottom up: from the perspective of the 20 percent or more of the world’s population who live under the threat of conflict and from the power structures that sustain it. To a large degree, many of the categories and frameworks of meaning of nineteenth- and twentieth-century power and political organization are collapsing or under great pressure (the territorial state, capitalism, national societies, the place of war in international order). Like the gap between civil society and the state, they are maintained with great difficulty by a gradually fading hegemony.

Northern knowledge about peace, norms, security, the state, rights, and development, carried through the emerging international architecture for peace (including the UN, IFIs, donors, and INGOs), seems to have resulted in the rule, by unaccountable executive power, of states and societies far from the global North. This is a rule based on expertise, advice,

governmentality, normative power, and conditionality (and sometimes on military force). International actors and INGOs have become more concerned with security, rights, and service delivery, as well as with monitoring government performance rather than solidarity (also in material terms) with local populations in an emancipatory framework of peace.³⁰ Western rational knowledge about power, interests, and norms, often excludes communities, people, and needs. Social advancement, including peace, is deemed to arrive through the expert knowledge of leaders and their access to science and economics. Local knowledge is, however, also a site of politics and legitimacy, which have long been distant from but implicated in, and influential of, the Western liberal forms. Local actors often aspire to the liberal peace while also holding themselves to be distinct, and also lacking the necessary resources to neutralize the conflict dynamics of the modern world. Such intertwining is now becoming more obvious and more influential, but it has long influenced debates over peace, order, and statehood. The UN has regularly pointed to strategies aimed at “cultures of peace”; rights to peace; the need for “new economic orders”; economic, social, and cultural rights; independence; self-determination; development; and peacebuilding. This includes its social level, as well as its implications for the state and the international scales.

However, the distance of power holders from their subjects is geographic and epistemic. Conflict’s subjects are governed for the good of the North by tentacles spread throughout the international architecture for liberal peacebuilding. Yet this rule does not automatically enable legitimacy, autonomy, self-determination, emancipation, or even empathy. Consequently, from the perspective of the recipient—the subject of intervention, development, peacebuilding, and statebuilding—it often looks like a neocolonial practice aimed at legitimating Western interests. The subjects of these power dynamics are bound to react. They are often embedded in situations in which the state is predatory and of limited capacity, delivering law, institutions, and resources informally, through custom, religion, or community frameworks. There are often historical patronage and clientelist-based power relationships in these systems (as there are informally in the liberal peace system), which have accrued a great deal of legitimacy in local contexts. They are far from the “tame social movements”³¹ that international donors and INGOs often want as partners in context.

In order to understand these processes, a postcolonial and subaltern turn in theoretical and policy terms is required, as well as a genealogical approach to the evolution of peace interventions and processes. These intersubjectively reveal the power relations and political struggles, but more importantly, the everyday lives of people dealing with conflict,

maintaining their families and communities, and building local as well as national institutions. They do this in the face of a fairly unsupportive, objectively oriented, and problem-solving international environment, where there is much rhetoric about rights and democracy, but very limited material action. The aid, peace, and development budgets are insignificant as a proportion of most states' GNP or their expenditures on arms and security for themselves.

This local turn³² and its relations with power, emancipation, and the everyday, points to how peace in IR needs to be decolonized³³ if legitimacy in local contexts is to emerge. The local scale is clearly "modern," political, and agential and has had a long "indigenous" and transnational engagement with the question of the necessary conditions for peace. Understanding the exercise of agency to form peace from inside a conflict system, regardless of the pressures or sanctions faced, or the preponderance of established patterns of power and politics, is necessary. It would shed some light on the slow processes of sociopolitical reconstruction that occur during and after conflict, which attempt to reduce violence, respond to structural violence, and lock in systems to prevent future conflict from leading to collapse of the new peace.

A new language has entered into the discourses of peace recently, which is ever-shifting in its hierarchy of discourses.³⁴ Across the literature on conflict, development, peacebuilding, and statebuilding from all over the world there exists many scattered examples of the benefits of local organizations, the role of social actors, particularly women, young people, or elders, and a wide range of organizations, often drawing on custom and tradition and equally often seeking to modernize these. Often nonviolent resistance or self-governance in informal modes is mentioned. They infer tolerance, pluralism, dignity, local governance, law, security, and resource distribution and management. They sometimes have ambitions to reform the state. A related issue is the introduction of ethical and methodological approaches that should "do no harm" and are sensitive to conflict or context.³⁵ If peace should be determined locally and contextually, there are implications beyond top-down conceptions of conflict sensitivity, connected with deeper and embedded conceptions of rights, justice, and power in relation to a hybrid and emancipatory peace. The latter must be based on the local context, but capacity may well have to come from elsewhere to overcome long-standing blockages to peace.

Bearing this in mind, as this study illustrates, engaging with peace formation throws into sharp relief its limitations: social institutions for peace, built up through complex networks over long periods of time, can easily be dislodged, and very quickly. Various forms of industrial, modern, and

ethno-nationalist power or mobilization, often drawing on international sources or backing, can easily destabilize the fragile social institutions of peace, which operate slowly, in the safer shadows, drawing on broad modern and historical forms of legitimacy but having little direct power in the face of major disruptions. Modern political, economic, industrial, and military power requires the slow piecing together of peace architectures, from the local to the global.

These processes have often been called grassroots peacebuilding, seen as conflict transformation or resolution, and are often civil-society oriented (meaning by NGOs rather than by indigenously formed institutions) and donor supported. Yet this area has become so important that such terminology no longer does justice to its significance, especially in relation to external policies and goals and the emergence of new donors. Indeed, all of this terminology is open to an assumption that peace in conflict-affected societies has historically been led by external actors, who seek a peace according to their own preferences, interests, and ideologies. They may impose it, or create it more subtly through the creation of pliant “native” administrations and organizations. This is only partly true: social institutions have emerged over time to deal with localized conflicts too. It is unlikely that these can be designed according to external knowledge, given the essential variable of context in structural (meaning geopolitical and economic), political, social, legal, cultural, identity, and institutional terms.

The concept of peace formation differs from previous work on local peace activities, for example, in the fields of conflict resolution, conflict transformation, peacebuilding, or statebuilding, in one key way: peace formation does not expect that mobilization, agency, and the institutions that emerge to make and maintain peace are shaped mainly by the knowledge and power of external actors. Instead, peace formation arises from within a sociopolitical context, learning from many sources, across transnational, transversal, and international scales. Across the literature, policy documents, historical texts, and many other sources, there are many implicit references to such processes often as the “lowest,” least effective example of peace and order production. Some notable efforts to move beyond this Northern centric bias do exist, of course.³⁶

To understand these dynamics requires a political sociology and ethnography of peace formation, drawing on a range of examples from around the world to address the following questions:

- i. Who are the local agents of peace formation? What types of activities do they engage in? What type of peace and polity do they envision, with what implications for the international system/community?