



The Effectiveness of Peace-building Efforts and the Legitimacy of Actors: An Exegesis and Reflection of “The Local” in Myanmar and Nigeria

Ephraim Bassey Emah & Chris M.A. Kwaja

About the authors

Ephraim Bassey Emah is a Master of Global Affairs - International Peace Studies student, and Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies scholar at the University of Notre Dame's Keough School of Global Affairs, USA. He can be reached via email at: eemah@nd.edu

Chris M.A. Kwaja, Ph.D. is a senior lecturer and researcher at the Centre for Peace and Security Studies, Moddibo Adama University of Technology, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the growing debate within the peace-building literature on who and what constitutes “the local”. It explores the challenges associated with attempts to arrive at a universal framing for the particular groups that make up ‘the local’. Scholars, practitioners and policy makers have developed different peace-building interventions that have focused on improving and sustaining peace among different populations. However, evidences continue to show that these actions target specific groups who are identified through processes of mapping, specifically with reference to their relevance, impacts and abilities to enforce and influence long-term changes within societies. These actors leverage and consistently engage the population to strengthen the effectiveness of diverse peace-building efforts. Drawing on examples from Myanmar and Nigeria, this paper conceptualizes “the local” as a product of individual constructions and experiences, particularly by demonstrating a clear understanding of conflict zones and how different actors influence actions and inactions that affect the overall process of peace-building.

Introduction

The debate on ‘the local’ in peace-building discourses has emerged due to the relevance and need to improve the approach and delivery of peace-building interventions, which is further linked to promoting the positive impact of peace-building actions on populations most affected by violent conflicts. Considering the dilemma and criticisms which the liberal peace model has encountered, particularly in its approach and goal i.e. the promotion of free markets, democracy and ‘negative peace’ – the idea of ‘the local’ can be seen as a critical attempt to rethink the design, implementation and sustainability of peace-building interventions. The notion of ‘the local’ demonstrates a paradigm shift from the liberal peace’s top-down approach to one that puts local agents and groups as critical components of peace-building debates and actions. Moving peace-building debates and programs to ‘the local’ reveals an emphasis on the relevance of establishing bottom-up approaches to building and sustaining peace. However, while the concept of ‘the local’ appears attractive, gaining recent prominence in academic and policy arenas, its conceptualization is problematic, thereby raising concerns about its application to the sustenance of peace-building efforts. While it is important to engage with the debate of increasing the legitimacy, power and agency of local populations involved in peace-building, it will be reductionist to then overlook the importance of the liberal peace agenda in conflict de-escalation.

The liberal peace model, which has gained a normative stance as “the most powerful method” of halting high-intensity violence, has not been most effective in its approach to institution and nation building with regards to promoting inclusivity, i.e. engaging different ‘local’ populations in conflict transformation and understanding the intersectionality that exists between them. Hence, the politics associated with the liberal peace model, while showing the power and influence of international actors in determining the fate of in-conflict and post-conflict societies (local populations), has demonstrated the challenges involved in institutionalizing peace-building in order for it to be strategic, transformative and sustainable. Peace-building that emphasizes liberal values as a normative and strategic perspective is unsustainable (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013), because its translation into practical efforts within a local context may not reflect the lived experiences and daily realities of the conflict-

affected population. However, even though ‘the local’ turn in peace-building has been advanced as a critical agenda for the sustainability of peace-building actions and efforts, its operationalization is constrained by what Mac Ginty & Richmond (2013) call “the margins of orthodox-dominated peace-building thinking and practice”. It is important to also acknowledge the complexity, politics, oppression, resistance and variability that exist within different locals, which in turn significantly influences the outcomes and effectiveness of peace-building. Evidently, the liberal peace and “the local turn” are not without their own dynamics, themselves playing adversely into the conceptualization and realization of peace-building, thereby necessitating the demand for collaborative forms of peace-building that represent hybrid models.

This paper acknowledges the need to ensure the sustainability of peace-building efforts. Therefore, it seeks to provide an exegesis on the concept of ‘the local’ and its relevance to the design and implementation of peace-building interventions. The paper provides an overview of ‘the local’, followed by the application of the concept to the design of peace-building interventions by drawing upon examples from Myanmar and Nigeria (to better understand the politics and influence of local agency) and finally offers an expansive debate on the concept. The paper also argues that ‘the local’ has contexts, contradictions and paradoxes, which require deeper attention, understanding and a nuanced appreciation in order to determine the specificity of the groups and populations of which it is comprised. Paying close attention to this concept (i.e. the local) allows peace-building practitioners and scholars to unpack the specific or different categories that form ‘the local’. Deeper reflections into the concept of ‘the local’ will induce a shift in how the concept is discussed, thereby opening up opportunities for understanding its dynamism and intricacies. The paper, however, submits that the concept of ‘the local’ emerges as a product of both personal and group experiences/understandings and not just particular geographies. This view helps us to delve deeper into analyzing the concept, rather than to present it as a concrete and readily visualized cartographic entity.

Overview of ‘The Local’

The concept of ‘the local’ is a contested term that has been defined in multiple ways by both academics and practitioners alike. The complexity of what and/or who constitutes ‘the local’ has created a multiplicity of definitions, in which many have presented it as a rather concrete concept. Hughes, Ojendal & Schierenbeck (2015) noted that “the local is inherently defined through relationships to other political scales and spheres, primarily the national and the global”. It is comprised of “codified relationships, practices and sites that are somehow below the level of the national state” (Hughes et al, 2015). Following this perspective, ‘the local’ can be an ideology formed to resist hegemonic systems that constrain the possibilities of increasing or achieving social change. This definition of ‘the local’ alludes to the existence of a concrete presence of powerful actors or groups within specific territories, each having distinct boundaries, languages and structures of authority as well as political, economic and social influence.

As an ideological construct, the concept of ‘the local’ can be said to emanate from the need to raise awareness of injustices and structural violence, as well as to challenge schemas that offer a particular strategy for interacting with different environments affected by violent conflicts. Consequently, it is better understood when it is neither portrayed as a betrayal of the liberal peace approach, nor as an independent

alternative to achieving peace and sustaining peace-building, nor debated as a linear and formulaic model for categorizing group agency and influence. Instead, the epistemological understanding of 'the local' should focus on the mapping of actors who are strategically positioned within specific locations of power necessary in influencing strategic peace-building outcomes within a given locality of conflict. These actors are better characterized through their individual experience and knowledge of local contexts, their consistent engagements with a broad range of actors, their adoption of reflective practices and a critical juxtaposition of divergent 'analytical framings' that allude to the capacity and resources that different groups possess towards ensuring significant outcomes can emanate from peace-building efforts.

Donais (2009) advises that 'the local' presents a collision between two competing visions of peace-building; the local and the international. The conceptualization of 'the local', in Donais' view, focuses on pursuing a communitarian vision; an agenda that emphasizes the emanation and sustainability of peace-building as 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down', which is the current practice of the liberal peace model. Following this paradigm, 'the local' is reflected as concrete agency that presents as an organized [political/social] structure which is responsible for implementing initiatives that reflects the exact needs, interests and capacities of a legitimate population. This local population takes leadership and ownership of actions that are prescribed or developed locally or collaboratively towards ensuring collective social good. Meanwhile, his assessment of 'the local' depicts liberal peace as a very limited perspective that neglects and disempowers effective forms of ownership by local populations co-existing in the contexts where conflicts occur. The point of ownership is to ensure that the local population directly affected by conflicts makes the decisions on peace-building because they are experts on their own issues. The more that local agency is empowered to contribute to the conceptualization of its own peace, the more local populations become responsible and accountable to the operationalization and sustainability of peace. The political and social influence that exists within the local agency, when leveraged, guarantees the success of peace-building actions and the creation of multiplier effects within the local domains in which peace-building efforts are undertaken.

In contrast, 'the local' could also reflect a range of agencies that are locally-based and present in conflict and post-conflict environments. These agencies identify and create the necessary conditions, processes and mechanisms needed for achieving long-term peace, perhaps with or without international help. The manner in which these mechanisms are framed constitutes a way of promoting the legitimacy of 'the local' and of creating a locus for the convergence and complementarity of international efforts that aim at achieving peace. In this case, the local is an emancipatory group where power, rights and the redistribution of legitimacy are slowly rethought, mapped and reflected in institutional and international architecture (Mac Ginty & Firchow, 2015; Mac Ginty, 2014; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013).

Furthermore, Hughes (2015) highlights that "the concept of the local operates both to distinguish the 'sub-altern' from dominant and oppressive social forces and to designate a collection of possibilities that are separate from the liberal peace". When translated into practice, Hughes' assertion justifies why peace-building and conflict transformation strategies should develop in a manner that empowers indigenous populations; allowing for a resistance to a monolithic and hegemonic agenda of the liberal peace, increasing recognition and legitimacy for cosmopolitan agencies

and promoting an evolution of group power to determine the outcomes of peace-building actions. This status induces resistance, which in turn creates a resultant need to hybridize or modify peace-building interventions, albeit displaying the complexity embedded in the very conceptualization of 'the local'.

The local-turn needs to be explored not as a "culturally-based approach" (Hughes, 2013), but as a complement to the liberal peace agenda. Even though the normative framing of liberal peace is one that portrays executive authority, thereby distorting or relegating the capacity of indigenous agencies, it remains important to draw a link of complementarity between both approaches in order to establish the importance of ensuring hybridized forms of peace. It is crucial that peace scholars and practitioners highlight, understand and define the interplay between the various factors that contribute to the production of hybrid peace. Local and international actors are frequently unable to act autonomously. Thus, both local and international actors become compelled to operate in environments shaped by the dynamism that they each embody (Mac Ginty, 2010).

Providing legitimacy to the agency of 'the local' and incorporating its capacity into the strategies of the liberal peace prevents distortion of peace-building strategies and instead encourages the development of comprehensive and participatory frameworks that deliver effective, transformative and long-term peace in societies. International actors operating in local contexts would achieve stronger impacts when their actions are supportive of the agency and initiatives of the local, primarily because of the latter's familiarity and knowledge of local domains and ability to navigate indigenous population and politics at the community level. While unpacking the identity and power of 'the local' in peace-building is important, considering the place of indigeneity or nativity is itself very crucial. Analyzing 'the local' through the lenses of indigeneity or nativity allows peace scholars and practitioners to understand how power – its relationships and asymmetry – is developed and operated within local groups that are organically linked together. Such analysis also reveals the political complexity that occurs in local domains. Hughes (2015) summarized that although indigeneity is itself constructed, it is subject to power operations within local contexts. Even though all groups share a collective identity, it is noteworthy to highlight that different forms of contestations continue to persist within the agency of 'the local', especially over the authenticity and identity of the group's culture and ties to its environment. Unvaryingly, actors are engaged in "political maneuvering both internally, over the nature of 'culture', and externally, over the practices and meanings of intervention" (Hughes, 2015).

Although Mac Ginty (2010) and Cooke & Kothari (2002) argue that the rhetoric of local ownership and participation may not easily mask the power dynamics associated with the planning, design, funding, timeframe, implementation and evaluation of peace-building programs, it remains realistic to recognize that the overall goal of peace-building programs is to promote and maintain positive social change that will in turn be sustained by local populations. This vision, when considered and pursued sternly and consistently, ensures that the goal of peace-building is jointly achieved by external and local actors that are operating collaboratively within a conflict-affected context. However, problematizing the concept of 'the local' in a manner that reveals the capacity gaps of international and local groups allows scholar-practitioners to assist a broader range of actors. This also increases regard of peace-building interventions (whether local or international) as not fundamentally

domineering, but as a potential source of strengthened partnerships that support the efforts and struggles of both the international and local communities to promote and institutionalize peace.

Even though there exists divergent opinions on the definition of 'the local', there are points of convergence among peace scholars and practitioners on what the concept should represent. When the conceptualization of 'the local' targets the influence of regional authorities, sub-national institutions and local governance structures, the ownership and effectiveness of peace-building, therefore, reflects a clear understanding of how liberal peace is built and translated into practices within domestic systems. This translation could be based on templates with which local actors are familiar and can adequately operationalize, to reflect the shared values and needs of the diverse groups that make up the population, particularly as it refers to peace in their everyday lives (Mac Ginty & Firchow, 2015; Mac Ginty, 2014; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Brinkerhoff, 2011; Schou & Haug, 2005). Additionally, when there is attentiveness to the variations and specificities of the individuals, groups and agencies that make up 'the local', it offers an integral opportunity to conceptualize and operationalize peace within diverse societies (Austesserre 2014; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). Judging by the position of several scholars, practitioners, and commentaries given on 'the local', it becomes clear that the concept is not an absolute solution to complex social problems – especially those that are associated with political contests for power and legitimacy at national levels, particularly during elections and to a large extent, during the distribution of federally allocated resources like oil revenues to the federating units, as in the case of Nigeria. Subsequently, even though the local could offer emancipatory and effective methodologies and mechanisms to deliver sustainable peace, there are divergent notions as to how this could be achieved.

The categorization of actors and the 'patterning' of peace-building in societies (in-conflict or post-conflict societies) by external or international actors, who consider themselves experts in the best interests of local populations, more often than not affect the effectiveness of peace-building efforts as well as the ownership of said efforts by domestic elites. It is imperative to note that ownership of peace-building actions and efforts does not take place spontaneously because it is neither developed nor handed-down by international actors. Acknowledging local agency and capacity harnesses contributions to peace-building interventions by creating space for constructive interactions that foster complementarity. This is a significant step towards effective peace-building. While local actors in post-conflict societies may require intensive efforts and accompaniment to disintegrate the post-conflict political structures that impede the possibility of nurturing a new peace agenda, international actors can help ensure their effectiveness when they combine "capacity-building with 'capacity-disabling' – by the deliberate marginalization of domestic political forces that obstruct peace" (Donais, 2009). This process of building local capacities by external actors should, however, remain modest and be based on a clear understanding about what can be realistically achieved by and within the local context.

Despite the risks and complexity present within the conceptualization of 'the local', local ownership cannot be circumvented because it is an integral element for promoting and sustaining peace. Experience reveals that externally-driven processes of reform within conflict-affected societies are not always durable. For instance, Myanmar's internal armed conflict has continued to protract since 1948, starting just after the

country gained its independence from Britain. Different armed actors, especially Myanmar's military (also called Tatmadaw) and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), have continued to engage in fierce lethal combats (ISDP, 2018). As a pluralistic state, other factors such as religion also play a crucial role in fueling unrest across various regions. The upswing in the use of religion to mobilize pockets of violence also influences the relationships among different actors, including Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and Atheists. With many communities displaying allegiance to ethnic and religious leaders, inter-communal tensions are easily mobilized. These religious actors, who often display a significant level of influence over their immediate constituents, have been leveraged by international and regional organizations like the Muslim Aid to transform inter-communal conflicts, which also have religious rhetoric associated to them. The high level of respect and prestige given to these local actors and the religious institutions they emanate from allows them to be a major entry point for international peace-building efforts that seek to transform relationships affected by religious conflicts, such as the MaBaTha (969) Movement.

Hence, the experiences relayed through this example reveal the need for external interveners to give rapt attention to specific actors who both affect peace-building processes and their outcomes. While 'the local' may appear in several debates as an indicative space where actions and efforts of peace-building can be sustained, it does not serve as a cure-all remedy to the different issues faced particularly at the national level. Rather, 'the local' can present an opportunity to consider and understand relations between the agency of groups, their freedom and underlying power dynamics. The importance of understanding how agency and the power differential between groups (most often between national governments and local communities) is formed enables peace-building practitioners to predict how resources can be better allocated, considering the level of need and power asymmetry across various groups. Despite these contesting views, continuous capacity building of local communities will enable them to engage in peace-building themselves and make its outcomes sustainable. Additionally, while it is important not to over-romanticize 'the local', it is crucial that international actors who provide external resources should not be overwhelmed or distracted by the complexity that exists within local communities. Consistent efforts should, instead, be made to build capacity in order to harness local abilities and allow them to gain mastery of their own solutions, while also assisting in the definition of elements that would represent peace in their communities.

For peace-builders, if 'the local' is to have agency, then it becomes important to note that 'the local' has both symbolic and apparent functions. It reminds peace-builders that the decisions taken for and on behalf of 'the local' should be true reflections of their needs, demands and realities. These decisions should not demonstrate a "universalist prescription". In other words, the decisions of peace-builders on 'the local' should be specific to a context or group and not be generalized. Supporting 'the local' and local ownership of peace-building can be a highly politicized process; one that involves mediating the tensions between internal (domestic) and external (international) visions of governance, institutions and the forging of relationships.

Engaging with 'the local' also requires a clear understanding of the political dynamism of this category. The local continues to remain a contested space, where there is continued demand for access and control of power and resources. Hughes et al. (2015) assert that "the local resides below the national, with more visible struggles for power, positions and control, which often occur through imperfect elections that

are contested under heavy conditions". This reveals that the desire for local actors to seek prominence, legitimacy, authority and the control of wealth and other resources also explains the extent to which they are willing to go in order to achieve their goals. When locals are able to achieve their goals, they tend to become more influential and can contribute to the development of their communities and the maintenance of overall peace in a manner that is sustainable. Thus, failure to understand the complexity of 'the local' and how its politics play into the overall structure, agency and peace of an environment can cause the collapse of centralized peace-building efforts. Therefore, instead of considering 'the local' in instrumental terms – as one side that can bring about greater engagement with other actors (Bojicic-Dzelilovic & Martin, 2016), scholar-practitioners should analyze the concept in full view. 'The local' should be seen as the overall capacities that can be leveraged (positive social capital) within the relationships of local and external actors operating to achieve long-term strategic peace-building in a conflict or post-conflict context.

Application of 'The Local' to Peace-building Interventions

To operationalize 'the local' in peace-building, there is need for a deeper understanding of the various peace-building structures and networks that exist within the location of an intervention. This understanding should include conducting an assessment of the comparative advantages and challenges of each structure and/or network. Too often, outsider interveners place priorities for peace-building on vertical relationships and the influence that national elites or international stakeholders can advance in institutionalizing peace. Inadequate or insufficient consultations with actors at the horizontal level or the lack of incorporation of local knowledge could create a major setback on ownership and sustainability. While it is important to recognize the impacts that national elites can have on peace-building, leveraging the significant influence and reach of local actors, including civil society organizations, traditional institutions and other informal groups also adds remarkable value to peace-building processes (Connolly, 2018). Efforts to consolidate or sustain peace require clear contextual understanding – the acknowledgement of local politics, actors and agencies – and a deliberate effort to adjust peace-building efforts to the changing dynamics that exist and emerge in an environment over time. Hence, paying close attention to the politics of 'the local' and the trajectories that it provides for peace-building remains pertinent to the sustainability of peace and the effectiveness of peace-building actions and efforts.

In terms of commonalities that can be drawn from Myanmar and Nigeria, there is a sense in which traditional community leaders have evolved over time, serving as both rallying points for local communities as well as primary points of contact for peace-building interventions. These commonalities are manifestations of the credibility and legitimacy that such leaders have built over time. For instance, across temples, shrines, churches, mosques and other places of religious practice or worship, religious leaders exert significant influence in determining the nature and character of responses to interventions. The same applies to local or traditional leaders in communities where customs and traditions are highly revered. Despite the wave of modernization that holds sway in developing countries, indigenous knowledge systems and practices are still prevalent and dominant (Kwaja, 2009). More practically, in Myanmar for instance, religious institutions are held in high esteem, with significant respect being accorded to Buddhist monks both within indigenous communities and nationally. Emanating from this respect, religious institutions

continue to play a significant role in conflict escalation and de-escalation. This significance of Buddhist monks influences the outcomes of peace because, often, some of these religious leaders seek to uphold practices and systems that are not easily influenced by broader politicized peace-building actions. Several peace-building efforts in the country acknowledge this tension and work constructively with both types of local actors to implement their strategies in a conflict-sensitive manner. While this dynamic also exists in Nigeria, traditional and religious institutions hold significant power in deciding the forms and outcomes that peace-building takes. The religious and traditional institutions in Nigeria are constantly engaged (and more often incorporated into national frameworks of peace-building) because of the reverence that many communities have for these institutions and the influence that they hold on their constituencies.

In Myanmar, the Women Peace Initiative for Peace (WIN-Peace) has remained an effective mechanism for engaging women from diverse ethnicities within various war-torn regions. This community-level network creates the space for women to strengthen their agency, share their stories and raise awareness about issues of sexual violence and the importance of women's inclusion in peace-building. The group utilizes the UNSCR 1325 to lobby and advocate for women's peace and security concerns, and to further advance these demands. WIN-Peace has gained legitimacy and trust from local communities and CSOs in its efforts to facilitate grassroots women-led initiatives that build capacity and increase solidarity. Through collaborative and partnership approaches, WIN-Peace designs strategies that focus on building long-term relationships among various women's groups across several ethnicities. Its capacity to mobilize women has made it a valuable resource in the call for women's participation in national governance and peace processes in the country. Most international organizations have leveraged this structure to reach out to women and strengthen the capacity of their agency to undertake initiatives that promote effective peace-building, particularly within rural communities.

In the case of Nigeria, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) as well as other local-level actors that frame their emergence and activities along fault lines such as ethnicity, religion and politics have continued to play active roles in shaping peace-building interventions and outcomes (Kew & Kwaja, 2018). Though considered 'locals' in the sense of their location, the successes of externally designed interventions have been defined by the extent to which external actors utilize the local knowledge systems that these groups have built over time (Omeje & Kwaja, 2015). Under such circumstances, these traditional and community leaders represent what can be viewed as a bridge between external actors and 'locals'. In accepting these realities, many external actors have come to appreciate the value associated with adopting hybrid approaches (mixture of external and local frameworks), which are anchored on the core principles of mutuality, reciprocity and complementarity. For instance, the youth-led policy and security governance project of Conciliation Resources in Nigeria's Plateau State demonstrates the importance of identifying and building the capacity of youth leaders in local communities to constructively advocate for improved policing and delivery of local governance. The acknowledgement of the Youth-led Peace Platforms (YPPs) as a legitimate mechanism to advance project objectives and ensure ownership of future engagements was critical to the project's success. This platform has continued to remain on the forefront in the calls for improved governance and sustainability of peace in rural communities. More so, through different collaborative problem-solving platforms and policy-level engagements,

the YPPs are exposed to some of the challenges of policing, policy formulation and implementation respectively. Through effective capacity development and awareness creation, they are able to mitigate tensions that emerge between community youths on one side and security and policy actors on the other. This arrangement further strengthens the channels to demand accountability for actions and to complement the efforts of local governance authorities towards ensuring peaceful and progressive communities in Plateau State.

Meanwhile, in the design of many peace-building programs, there are claims that several international policies on peace-building are in conflict with the cultural norms and practices of local communities. Through these policies, international interveners often attempt to dominate or overturn local traditions (AP & PD, 2019; Hughes et al, 2015; Hughes, 2015; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). Following these claims, it becomes imperative that international peace-builders adopt ethical measures in the design and implementation of peace-building programs. Strong rhetoric and representation that portrays external peace-builders as monolithic entities who are insensitive to 'local agency' can result in the mobilization of local support against peace-building efforts or other forms of external interventions. International peace-builders, who often operationalize a liberal peace agenda, should seek to understand contextual sensitivities by adopting conflict sensitive/Do No Harm methodologies to ensure that their programs do not threaten the agency of 'the local' or diminish its legitimacy.

Peace-builders need to be attentive to the particulars of what and who constitutes 'the local', thereby enabling local variations that are helpful for the implementation and sustainability of peace-building efforts. Giving attention to local contexts allows peace-builders to engage ethically and design programs that recognize and give power to local agencies. This demystifies power asymmetry or the notion of exclusion between 'external' interveners and 'local' actors, thus ensuring complementary roles in the sustainability of peace. Local people and mechanisms that are engaged in reducing direct forms of violence or its escalation within communities constitute a significant asset that is ineffectively tapped by peace-builders currently (AP & PD, 2019). Although it is important to identify the specific 'local' that peace-building programs are designed for, this process of identification often reveals the complexity of said 'local'. Peace-builders, especially external interveners, are then required to conduct a thorough assessment of their context in order to identify the specific 'local' that their peace-building programs ought to particularly target. These assessments also require knowledge of the power dynamics at play in the different levels and among the various groups that form 'the local'.

In most cases, it is imperative to study the institutions, politics and mercenaries of power, as well as competition for resources and exclusionary tactics that exist in 'the local', to justify how and why peace-building resources are allocated in a particular way. Simply put, assessing these dynamics are a *sin qua non* for peace-building programming within 'the local' context; it is an absolute necessity. Peace-builders' inability to demonstrate clear and critical knowledge of the culture and politics of 'the local' could provide a strong justification for local resistance to those same peace-building interventions. Peace-building is made strategic, sustainable and long-term through a combination of efforts by local communities, civil society groups, private and public businesses, national governments, intergovernmental bodies as well as regional and international organizations (Mac Ginty & Gurchathen, 2015; Pugh 2006b; Appleby & Lederach 2010).

The absence of a specific universal description for 'the local' could create a challenge for peace-builders in the design of interventions. Consequently, the multiplicity of descriptions for what and who constitutes 'the local' implies that international peace-building interventions should not be magnified or justified *a priori*. Rather, 'the local' should be discussed as a reminder of the limitations of international peace-building, which is often conceptualized as a normative project. Local mechanisms for institutionalizing peace-building and transforming conflict relationships should also be understood during the development of international peace-building projects, by drawing on indigenous practices that exist within grassroots societies (Hughes et al, 2015; Richmond, 2009a; Richmond, 2009b; Mac Ginty, 2008). Thus, the knowledge and push for 'the local' approach to peace-building is best made practical when it proceeds from a combination of theoretical deductions and individual observations or experiences. While this position could be contested based on its relativism, it commands a certain consciousness on the part of peace-building practitioners to understand the complexity of framing groups into different categories. The framing of groups, especially as 'local', then requires clear resonance and acceptability within a specific environment.

The concept of 'the local', therefore, reveals how groups can become 'local' due to the direct interactions that occur between them as mobile bodies (individuals) or as a result of interactions influenced by various factors, including forced migration or resistance to factors that threaten their 'original' cultures. This population of 'new locals' (maybe 'global locals') may emerge in many post-conflict settings. Hence, developing a peace-building intervention in areas where there are 'new locals' living side-by-side with the 'old locals' makes the achievement and sustainability of peace problematic and complicated, especially when interveners do not take into account the history and dynamics of the new group's relationship to the local community.

Expanding the Discussion on "The Local"

This paper lays out the complexity encountered in describing what and/or who constitutes 'the local'. This complexity makes it necessary for peace-builders to thoroughly assess, understand and justify what factors qualify the framing or categorization of specific groups as 'the locals' in the design of peace-building interventions. While there is an absence of a universal description for 'the local', it is important to highlight that whichever group(s) make up 'the local', various levels of agency, power and capacity exist within them and are added values to peace-building interventions. These capacities are required and should be leveraged to achieve and sustain the effectiveness of peace-building programs. In addition, it is crucial that in framing the local, peace-builders should provide clarity on the power structures and contextual politics that exist. Further, they should be made aware of how the levels of power present are able to provide entry points for their efforts to maintain the sustainability of peace.

It is incumbent upon peace-building practitioners to identify and understand how particular locales can reinforce existing structural violence and power asymmetry present in a given context. The idea of effective peace-building is to avoid doing harm as much as possible. Hence, attempts to reverberate power asymmetry through monolithic or hegemonic peace-building programs have tendencies to stir resistance from 'the local'. For instance, implementing peace-building interventions through top-down strategies in deeply divided societies may privilege ethnocentrism

and further increase the oppression of weaker groups by locally powerful actors. A peace-building intervention that presents the likelihood of affording privilege to particular (repressive) actors over others calls into question the depth and quality of the initial analysis conducted by peace-builders. It is crucial to take into account elements such as local context, familiarity with issues on the ground and a clear-cut understanding of the power play-offs that tend to emerge. Peace-builders, therefore, need to build and sustain their relationships with 'the local' in order to understand the compelling logic of exclusion and the dynamism of lived experiences that connect different spatial points and networks. Relationships with local populations allow peace-builders to visualize different temporal and spatial connections that reveal the strengths and weaknesses of individual and group agency within 'the local'.

Subsequently, while peace-builders' contextual knowledge of the local is required, the creation of spaces for 'the local' to interact with external actors (in this case peace-builders from the outside) is equally relevant. Acknowledging 'the local' involves allowing individuals with cultural appropriateness to use their voice; it requires recognizing their agency. While the liberal peace model has been identified as paying little or no attention to the voices of 'the local', an effective and strategic peace-building model recognizes the vocal agency of 'the local' because in many cases, peace-builders make decisions on behalf of people on whom they hold limited knowledge. There is need for peace-builders to deliberately create space for 'the locals' to make decisions about their own futures. However, a necessary question to ask here is: can peace-builders work without being monolithic or hegemonic? This paper argues yes, peace-builders can indeed do so. Adopting more collaborative and facilitative models as the fundamental strategies for working with 'the local' will help to ensure that power emerges (not devolves) from local actors. Although the positionality of peace-building interveners will not change, in terms of the power they possess, a conscious adoption of collaboration as a means to developing programs with and for 'the local' allows for the effectiveness and sustainability of peace-building efforts.

By expanding on the debate of 'the local turn' in scholarly literature, the question on what and who constitutes the local remains complex and unanswered. Within this complexity, this paper argues that the concept of 'the local' has contradictions and paradoxes that require deeper attention and understanding. Hence, paying close attention to the concept allows for peace-building practitioners and scholars to unpack the specificity or categories that form 'the local'. However, this paper submits that the concept of 'the local' emerges as a product of experience and understanding, and not just particular geographies. Viewing 'the local' as a product of experience enables peace-building actors to delve deeper into its analysis, rather than to present it in a solely cartographic perspective that is neither concrete nor readily visualized.

Conclusion

Peace-building, as a conscious and coordinated process of promoting social change, requires actors to formulate relationships (between external and local actors), to strengthen capacities for peace and to display a clear understanding of the context within which they intervene and operate. More specifically, effective peace-building delves into mapping and harnessing significant resources that will be instrumental for transforming conflicts and sustaining peace. Therefore, understanding and conceptualizing 'the local', based on the interactions and intersections that occur between interveners and a range of actors, structures and institutions, provides a clear path towards achieving the effectiveness of peace-building actions. 'The local' is a fluid concept that can be both misconstrued and misinterpreted when generalized. Thus, the pursuit of a universalist description or understanding of the concept of 'the local' becomes problematic because it limits the space for deeper analysis. While the debate in academic literature and among peace-building practitioners about 'the local' could impede opportunities to develop conflict-sensitive peace-building programs, clearer contextual identification and description of a 'specific local' increases the possibilities of implementing successful interventions that can sustain long-term peace.

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