Peace by Peace: Educational impact
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Abstract:
This paper highlights the peace education impact of *Peace by Peace*, an online, free-access youth peacebuilding manual which interviews over 100 youth peacebuilders around the world (see https://www.peace-by-peace.com). The paper describes the necessary steps to plan, execute and sustain such a project, as well as practical aspects such as "selling" peacebuilding initiatives to senior management. Explanations of experiential learning, threshold learning and service learning provide pedagogical and motivational foundations for initiatives such as *Peace by Peace.* Processes are described such as trust building, co-creation and solution-oriented dialogue, all of which provided students and faculty with opportunities for exercising the very peacebuilding skills being researched.

Topics such as youth participation are explored as a new typology is introduced that links voice and violence, demonstrating how participation may prevent conflict. This paper illustrates the connection between young people learning from projects such as *Peace by Peace* and becoming peacebuilders themselves. In doing so, they may more fully realize their potential as agents of change in their own deeply divided societies. Pedagogical justification is provided for Peace Studies programs at institutes of higher education, and a roadmap is drawn that inspires both students, faculty and senior management with the educational basis for sustaining similar projects. The paper outlines the potential of participatory peace education when youth voice and agency are prioritized.

1. Introduction

Peace by Peace (www.peace-by-peace.com) is a co-created example of peace education. This paper introduces the initiative and explores its educational impact. The project promotes peacebuilding in a variety of ways: creating a peacebuilding network, training students who co-created the project and amplifying youth peacebuilding voices. The three-year process of co-creating an interactive website that also functions as a "how-to" guide raises awareness regarding the nuanced challenges of entering the world of peacebuilding activism. Seventy-five students from Amsterdam University College (AUC) have participated in the project, many of whom went on to make careers of peacebuilding. This paper aims to present *Peace by Peace* as an example of how peacebuilding skills such as active listening, holding space for contradictory perspectives, realization of peace privilege, transformative dialog and negotiation can be taught and learned within the context of practicing qualitative research methods fieldwork skills.

The *Peace by Peace* project seeks to amplify the voices of over 100 youth peacebuilders worldwide as they answer questions related to how young people in deeply divided societies might begin their own peacebuilding organizations. It is a practical, hands-on manual for youth peacebuilders in deeply divided societies (including our own).

Students practice qualitative research skills such as interviewing, analysis and identifying themes, as well as writing, teamwork, communication and organizational skills. They are inspired about youth agency and experience firsthand the value of fieldwork, as well as the complexity of issues concerning the Peace and Conflict field. Participating students use their own (varied) language skills and enhance and develop education by highlighting where theory meets practice, and have an advantageous entry for their graduate-school applications. The project also expands the networks of students, so that they benefit from potential future research and career opportunities. AUC alumni, three of whom are here today, have also contributed.

Additional skills which my colleagues will explain include learning website layout software, editing the 100 interview articles and teaching a team of research assistants

about interview techniques, themes, journalistic writing, academic writing and qualitative research in general.

This paper is framed around an exploration of various pedagogies, including Service learning, which is described in depth as a source of justification for similar peacebuilding projects. In addition, a new typology is introduced that links voice and violence, demonstrating how youth participation may prevent conflict. This, other pedagogies and Service learning provide answers to the research question: **How might an examination of the educational impact of projects like *Peace by Peace* forge the connection between young people learning from such projects and becoming peacebuilders themselves?** In other words, how could higher education design similar projects that help students more fully realize their potential as agents of change in their own deeply divided societies? Pedagogical justification is provided for Peace Studies programs at institutes of higher education, and a roadmap is drawn that inspires both students, faculty and senior management with the educational basis for sustaining similar projects.

The motivation for this peace education may be partially justified by means of both the UNSCR 2250 (https://press.un.org/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm) and the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development (https://www.unesco.org/en/global-citizenship-peace-education/recommendation. This paper outlines the potential of peace education when youth voice and agency are prioritized.

The paper is organized into the following sections and subsections:

2. Project steps;

    "Selling" peacebuilding initiatives;

3. Pedagogies;

    a) Experiential learning;

    b) Community engagement: Giving back and forth;

    c) Threshold learning;

What follows is a narrative from the educational perspective providing examples of various challenges the project (students and lecturer) faced and how these challenges were met with trust building, co-creation and solution-oriented dialog. These processes provided students and faculty with opportunities for exercising the very peacebuilding skills being researched. Students often referred back to these experiences in bachelor's theses and graduate studies. Alumni provide feedback about the skills they learned and how they impacted their graduate studies and careers. From a teacher's perspective, the project has been a great success, but it did not come without its own challenges and surprises.

Project background: A narrative

My previous experience includes a rich history of traveling, interviewing, writing and publishing books about a wide variety of subjects, including youth combatants (Liberia

and DRC) and AIDS survival in sub-Saharan Africa. This project combines my publishing network and author background with my current teaching and peacebuilding research.

I wanted to write a book that would amplify the voices of youth peacebuilders, as I had met many in my travels and research in post-conflict countries. Their voices and courage are the motivation for my going back to school in my forties and earning a master's and PhD in Peace and Conflict studies. I wanted to teach peacebuilding and explore specifically where theory meets practice, as seen from a youth perspective. This project is called *Peace by Peace*. Since 2021 the project has grown organically and become an online, free-access youth peacebuilding manual which interviews over 100 youth peacebuilders around the world.

In 2021 near the end of the Covid pandemic, I realized the flip side of online classrooms could be greater access to people living elsewhere. The plan was that students would help me collect information from an already established network of youth peacebuilders living in post-conflict areas around the world, and compile it into a book. The project would expand the Experiential Learning aspect of both the *Human Rights Human Security* course and *Peace Lab Kosovo* and *Peace Lab Rwanda* courses I teach. In so doing, the project would develop and structurally embed, as well as strengthen the skills taught in those (and other) courses, including critical thinking and awareness, qualitative research methods, teamwork, community service learning, developing confidence, leadership skills, writing and editing.

All this happened and much more. During the Autumn semester 2021 four students earned internship credit as they conducted interviews with young peacebuilders around the world. Halfway during the semester the snowballing effect kicked in and we found ourselves interviewing and transcribing an increasing number of conversations with leaders of youth-led peacebuilding and community-building organizations. During the Spring semester 2022 ten students earned internship credit, while three of the four from Autumn semester continued working as well (though not for credit). We expanded the roles, researching online free-access publishing options, graphic design of the book and layout software, all the while continuing with the interviews, coding and transcribing.

The project itself snowballed and at the moment, we have more than 100 interviews with youth peacebuilders from all over the world as the project has taken on a life of its own. In total now 75 AUC students have worked as research assistants and/or coordinators, many of whom have gone on to use the qualitative research skills they learned in graduate studies.

I have to admit, the size and scope of this project took me by surprise, but as it kept growing organically, it became apparent that having youth peacebuilders being interviewed by youth peacebuilding students created a unique dynamic, a combination of peer teaching on both sides. The AUC students have identified their own "peace privilege" during the process, and reflected on the many skills they learned, such as interview techniques and qualitative research methods, including identifying themes and coding. They have worked closely as a team, and we met at least once a week to discuss our own emotions as well as status and practical aspects of the project. The result is a how-to manual for young people who want to start their own youth-led peacebuilding organization, with tips about financing, gaining respect and legitimacy, as well as security issues. The site went live last semester and we continue to regularly post more of the 100 interviews, broken down into 500 words each and accompanied by individual profiles of the interviewees.

In addition, the theoretical and thematic analysis parts of the book were researched by colleagues present here today, written and edited, following the themes that were identified. All these texts were sent back to the subjects for their approval, together with the profiles introducing them.

2. Project steps

This interdisciplinary project began during the Autumn semester 2021 as a so-called Undergraduate Research Project. There was the opportunity to receive hours for projects like this, so I applied and the plan was accepted. At that time at Amsterdam University College (AUC), there were funds and political will available to promote diversity and inclusion, so I sold this initiative to senior management as such an example, as well as one of experiential learning. It also ticked the boxes of community service learning. I

have learned during the four-and-a-half years I served as the inaugural Chief Diversity

Officer at the University of Amsterdam (UvA), that oversell works. Aim higher than

expected and overprepare the undergirding rationale so there can be no room for denial.

At that time AUC and the UvA made hours available and wanted to use the language

associated with community engagement, so I tailored the description of this

peacebuilding initiative along those lines.

Peacebuilding does not attract the same attention or funding as terrorism or security

studies, often due to its politicized nature (Bush, & Duggan, 2014). My advice is to use

their own language so they cannot deny you.

The initial stages of the project involved first building trust among the

participants. Trust as a foundation for effective teaching has been extensively

researched (Platz, 2021; Fisler, J. L., & Firestone, W. A. (2006). How this was achieved

was through weekly team meetings and by learning to know each other better, including

dinners at my home later in the project, also sharing vulnerability (Turner, 2006).

At first, when students were unable to secure interviews through informal networks

and social media, LinkedIn was used as a means of communicating with potential

interviewees. The questions students had as they learned how to interview and sharing

their newfound confidence also encouraged greater team dynamics.

Each semester brought new challenges as a new team of research assistants would

have to be trained in qualitative research methods, including interview techniques,

coding, identifying themes, journalistic writing, website design software and other

various communication skills. A database was set up and renewed regularly. Previous

research assistants became coordinators and this contributed to the sustainability of the

project as expertise could be preserved and passed on from semester to semester.

Organizing the data became a huge challenge and students created a database with the

recordings of our interviews, as well as different story and profile versions and a record

of communication with interviewees.

"Selling" peacebuilding initiatives

The practical aspects such as "selling" peacebuilding initiatives to senior management involves a certain amount of navigation and often depends on the context. There is funding and interest in projects focusing on societal responsibility by promoting and facilitating civic engagement, as well as social entrepreneurship education, which promotes societal innovation. Learn the buzzwords of your institution and bend peacebuilding initiatives in that direction. It could be something like:

- transdisciplinary learning projects;

- social science meets science;

- campus community partnerships.

In Section 4. Service learning is explored as a tool, or means to obtain funding and attention, by way of university civic engagement.

My colleagues will go into more depth about the impact of this project, including:

- Creating a peacebuilding network;

- Training students who co-created the project;

- Amplifying youth peacebuilding voices;

- Raising awareness.

These topics are researched and the impact described in four additional conference papers presented during this Roundtable 7 (Celma Werthwein, J., 2025; Khare, S., & Sivrikaya, E., 2025; Paré, C., 2025; & Vodvárková, E., & Volbracht, E., 2025). Their papers outline the impact of the project that involved 75 students from Amsterdam University College (AUC), many of whom went on to make careers of peacebuilding. During their internship with *Peace by Peace* they learned peacebuilding skills such as:

a) Active listening;

b) Holding space for contradictory or contested perspectives;

c) Realization of peace privilege;

d) Negotiation;

e) Transformative dialogue;

f) Qualitative research methods fieldwork;

g) Communication;

h) Leadership skills.

The actual processes in which students learned these skills entailed several pedagogical theories. The next section explores these and embeds this process in education theory, providing a foundation for similar projects.

3. Pedagogies

Various pedagogies explain initiatives such as *Peace by Peace*. They include concepts such as Experiential learning; Community engagement; Threshold learning; and Service learning. These first three will be explored in the following sections and Service learning in Section 4.

a) <u>Experiential learning</u>

This is a learning style that starts with sending out students, then they reflect on how they feel and what has changed for them. It is experience driven (not theory driven) (Gentry, 1990). It concerns the very structure of learning and knowledge (Kolb, 2014). This is outlined, among others, by Miettinen (2000) who uses John Dewey's theory of reflective thought and action.

During the *Peace by Peace* project, and especially at team meetings, students and the lecturer check in with each other: how are they feeling, what had moved them, what resonated, what inspired them from the interviews? Various mental health strategies are recommended as students and the lecturer shared well-being tools such as journaling, meditation, exercise and prioritizing sleep.

The *experience* of interviewing young people and hearing their voices and immersing oneself in these voices and lived narratives impacted students in a variety of ways, including triggering trauma and inspiring career choices, all of which called for active listening and follow-up strategies, which were then co-created with the students.

b) <u>Community engagement: Giving back and forth</u>

Concepts such as experiential learning, service learning and threshold learning further enhance the pedagogical processes, and when these are combined with

community engagement, the ways of understanding can expand borders beyond concepts such as "them and us."

Peacebuilding by definition reinforces dialogue and active listening, negotiation techniques and mediation skills (Barnett, O'donnell, & Sitea, 2007; Goetze, 2016). The *Peace by Peace* project also strengthens socially responsible learning and community engagement as students learn more about different perspectives and pro-active "everyday" peacebuilding (Mac Ginty, 2014; Sahar, & Kaunert, 2020) from peers. In addition, we decided to divide the interviews per continent in an attempt to eliminate the so-called "Global North-Global South divide." This exposure to post-conflict areas around the world expanded the learning horizon of students (Paulson, 2020) and enabled students to learn about contested, or contradictory perspectives and move beyond the question of who is right and who is wrong (Kester, Abura, Sohn, & Rho, 2022).

Community building is at the very heart of peacebuilding and students met and learned from other young peacebuilders about problem solving, community engagement, critical thinking and dialogue. They heard from their interviewees inspiring stories about reaching across the divide in post-conflict and polarized societies and in the process, learned about their own and others' agency, problem-solving competencies and cultural understanding . Several bachelor's theses were based on this research as students used this experience in a wide variety of research projects.

Students learned about positive peace (Galtung, 1969; Galtung, & Webel, 2007) among nations and among communities, as well as peace among nations, people groups, individuals and "peace of heart," a term often referred to by peacebuilders worldwide as a pre-requisite for building peace among others. To hear about peacebuilding in post-conflict countries often put into perspective the "peace privilege" of students, while providing them with inspiring examples of young people with agency and fewer resources, but who help build communities based on positive peace (i.e. not just the absence of violence) (Kertyzia, 2021).

Building peace and becoming inspired by youth peacebuilders transformed this project into an active process of development for all involved. The compassion and

empathy it generated were not necessarily in terms of an ability to put oneself in the shoes of another, but more immediately, recognizing the so-called "Other" in ourselves (Kristeva, 1991). This mental and psychological leap is part of the "moral imagination" Anderson (1983) refers to as initial necessary steps in imaging peace. (Section 7.b) will address this more.) This applies to every deeply divided community. This leap manifests a key objective of another pedagogical foundation of *Peace by Peace*, namely Threshold learning.

c) Threshold learning

Threshold learning concerns the transformation of those doing the learning. My understanding of it is that it must be based in trust as students are brought to a place where they are intellectually pushed over the edge, so to speak. In freefall they let go of what they know, what they think they know, what they think they should know and what they think others think they should know. And in the process, they grab onto new knowledge, owning it, exploring its limits and taking ownership of that knowledge as their understanding deepens. Often emotion is coupled with this learning process.

Previous research addresses initial thresholds and amounts of learning and the relationship between the two (Lengyel, & Fiser, 2019), as well as threshold learning within the context of science outcomes (Schultz, Southam, Buntine, Colthorpe, Howitt, Johnson, & Yucel, 2023). It has also been analyzed in terms of implicit learning (Dienes, & Berry, 1997). However, the transformative process experienced by participants in the *Peace by Peace* project and described in the preceding paragraph, refers less of a releasing of threshold concepts (Land, 2015), and more to what this paper refers to as a "letting go to lay hold of," a grabbing onto new knowledge which then sticks because it resonates with the lived experiences of the students themselves. In this way, too, the community of *Peace by Peace* grew, as boundaries between interviewees, interviewers and the lecturer melted away and the Other became Us.

4. Service learning

The above-mentioned pedagogies help explain the process of peacebuilding realized and agency exercised during the *Peace by Peace* project. There is, however, one primary

learning concept that undergirds it all and that is Service learning. This is significant because it may hold the key to additional funding and attention for peacebuilding initiatives like *Peace by Peace.* It provides a potential answer to the question how can we institutionalize peacebuilding classes?

One way is to adopt peacebuilding language (Wright, 1998) which means translating peacebuilding initiatives into language that adapts to a particular context. How can service learning be translated into peacebuilding initiatives within the context of higher education?

a) Definition

Service learning involves all of the following:

- Social impact;

- Develop and enhance Community building;

- Civil society;

- Facilitation;

- Social enterprise;

- Excluded groups;

- Civic engagement;

- Experiential learning.

This inter-disciplinary (not to be confused with multi-disciplinary) concept of service learning (Rooks, & Winkler, 2012) encompasses aspects of all the following fields: International Relations, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology and more. It involves the idea that social and human growth is the path, a process that involves learning—learning situations that combine experiential learning and a community involvement strategy.

This undergirds the educational, the pedagogical motivation behind *Peace by Peace.* In order for similar projects to find funding favor, they may need to include the following elements in order to attract a commitment from executive boards:

- Community involvement;

- Strategy where students may earn credit;

- Aspects initiated by the students;

- Use volunteering;

- Deliberate learning is reflective;

- External programs (Get them out of the bubble!).

Keep in mind that Community service is emergent; it is unplanned learning that may give credit for the *doing*. However, Service learning is deliberate, planned learning; meaningful community service or engagement offers students academic credit for the *learning*. Service learning is not an episodic volunteer program, completing minimum hours to get a grade. That is one-sided: benefiting only students or only the community (Hyde, Dunn, Scuffham, & Chambers, 2014).

Service learning is neither community service, nor social internships (Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2004). The difference is that the benefit is the importance of civic engagement and community involvement to individual communities and society. This is about how to integrate societal responsibility into universities (Kaye, 2004). Societal responsibility may be the language used at certain universities where peacebuilding can be better integrated.

b) Individual knowledge

Another example involves teaching students creativity, so that they might know a more implicitly individual part of knowledge. This happened during *Peace by Peace* intuitively as students not only opened themselves to the community of youth peacebuilders, but became youth peacebuilders themselves, inspired by the stories they transcribed and the individuals they grew to know. In this way they gained an experiential knowledge of a group. In fact, this was one of the take-aways from the project, the need to network and build the community, both a safe and a brave space for these young people: interviewers and interviewees.

Because we need to cope with a complex, unpredictable and uncertain world, our students need to understand and use tacit knowledge and improvisational patterns in organizations and social systems (Knowing, 2018). This happened as we co-created *Peace by Peace*. For example, the logo was designed by a student, even the idea of

focusing on a free-access, online version of what I thought would become a book, was improvisational.

Students who experience the service learning teaching method, apply their learning to real-world needs, providing valuable help to underserved communities and bridging the gap between theory and practice (Chupp, & Joseph, 2020). This involves:

- Transdisciplinary projects with community partners;

- Artistic process for research and teaching;

- Design thinking;

- Community-based research (to legitimatize it academically);

- In Finland, there is the example of students starting their own businesses first then choosing the books they need, so teachers are coaches (Sahlberg, 2021).

- In a related way, in the Netherlands we see experiential learning in business schools, where it attracts funding and where they call it a consultancy to non-profits instead of service learning (personal communication, 2016);

c) <u>Be charming often</u>

Returning to the theme of how to sell peacebuilding to your university, some strategies that worked for *Peace by Peace* include:

- Calling it a pilot, baby-step your way forward, build a small success, then as momentum grows, increase the scale;

- Make your project into a small minor and baby-step it becoming part of the curriculum;

- Start with a summer school course, then a minor, then a master's and maybe a Chair for Peace Studies;

- Announce an award for the best peacebuilding project, but frame it as service learning;

- Identify the ten most influential or important full professors in your university and convince two of them to use service learning. Once they are, you can slip peacebuilding under the radar.

- Media coverage, something we have not done yet for *Peace by Peace*, but we have distributed information about it widely on social media and the students and I get invited to different venues to talk about the youth voice and agency involved in the project.

- Social entrepreneurship education—house peacebuilding in the Business or Law faculties where there is traditionally more funding available (Marco-Gardoqui, Eizaguirre, & García-Feijoo, 2020).

d) <u>Service learning as a teaching tool</u>

Use learning outcomes, reflection reports, journaling—all tools of service learning which lend themselves well to peace education (Bajaj, & Brantmeier, 2011; Kertyzia, 2021). In this way the methodology of service learning (Billig, & Waterman (Eds.), 2014) can be utilized to improve teaching. The process could look something like:

- course basics and theory (which leads to)

- introduction to service learning and project work (which leads to)

- introduction to community partners and projects (which leads to)

- project (which leads to)

- advertisement of what is happening for appreciation and acknowledgment,

all of which can promote peacebuilding projects and raise the level of teaching in higher institutions.

To start with, find topics that are very wanted. Service learning can shift teaching so it is more project based. In this way students learn not just about academics, but about real world communities. With *Peace by Peace,* students reflect that they are knowledge receivers, but also knowledge coaches. Use service-learning design patterns as a tool for innovative teaching design.

Pattern language for service learning (and thereby peacebuilding) and community engagement.

e) <u>Creating knowledge</u>

Implicit knowing or tacit knowing means there is in addition to explicit knowing (textbooks), something like intuition, gut feelings (Reber, 1989). Gut feeling is important

to use when teaching well. Some forms of knowing are explicit, implicit and tacit (not yet embodied), and transcending knowledge (not yet existing) knowledge may translate into innovation. Where do new ideas come from, how does it emerge, how do we sense what is the next big thing? That is innovation (Johnson, 2011).

Many of our universities talk about innovation, but innovation needs collaboration and peacebuilding skills embrace this type of learning:

- Slow hunches need to cling with other hunches;

- Create and offer open space for cooperation and co-creation;

- Good service learning needs space, time for incubation and the bringing together of hunches and partners;

- So there are different patterns where good ideas come from. *Peace by Peace* demonstrated this in how everything from the database to the logo to the team design took place.

The ultimate way to attract funding is to "follow the money." Employability is why service learning is so worthwhile and in addition to the moral arguments, it is why peacebuilding is so worthwhile. Peace and prosperity really do go hand in hand (Naudé, 2007). Youth participation enables this process.

5. Youth participation

Peacebuilding is rooted in trust. From the educational perspective, *Peace by Peace* provided examples of various challenges faced by students, myself and the community. Contrary to research about the riskiness of youth (Barakat, & Urdal, 2009), specifically regarding the youth-bulge theory (Wagschal, & Metz, 2016), research conducted with young people may provide elegant, inexpensive and effective solutions (De Graaf, 2018). As a counter-initiative to the perceived danger of a high youth population (Urdal, 2006), personal narratives and an evaluation of methods of advocacy can elucidate youth engagement (Hammack, Harland, & Senehi, as cited by De Graaf, 2018). These challenges during the *Peace by Peace* project were met with trust building, manifest by means of participation. Part of this involved participating in the co-creation of the project, as well as a conscious shift toward using solution-oriented dialogue.

The rest of this section explores the topic of youth participation. It establishes the educational benefits of greater participation of youth, including diminishing levels of despair. This, in turn, promotes lower frustration and consequently, less likelihood of ensuing violence, all key concepts to the originality and impact of the *Peace by Peace* project. One way of illustrating this process is to envision the various steps leading to disillusionment.

a) Hart's Ladder

[1]The new typology introduced in the following sections (Vortex) builds on Hart's Ladder (1992), which was chosen in particular because of its emphasis on participation. It contributes towards a solution to the "transformation of violent conflict" (Darby and Mac Ginty, 2008, p. 5). Hart's model is applicable to conflict and post-conflict situations, including deeply divided societies.

By way of further background, UNICEF recognized the significance of the arguments that Hart made in practical policy terms in 1992. Believing that young people can have a lasting impact on issues of global significance, such as sustainable development, the environment and children's rights, UNICEF commissioned Hart to conduct extensive research on the levels of children's participation around the world, and the related consequences for the respective societies involved. The resulting publication attempted to link a concern of growing international importance: the environment, as now expressed by the international movement for sustainable development, and children's rights, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The research concentrated on the conceptual issues, processes and methods for authentically involving young people in research, planning, design, management and monitoring of the environment (Hart, 1997).

Hart argues that when communities acknowledge young people's developing competencies and unique strengths, some policy goals become that much more attainable (Hart, 1997). For Hart (1992), this concern with participation translated into a

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[1] The following sections are based on De Graaf, 2018.

methodological approach for measuring current participation and a language for stating the potential for youth involvement. He states that the direct participation of young people helps them develop a genuine appreciation of democracy and a sense of their own competence and responsibility to participate (Hart 1997)—thus potentially bringing a post-conflict society that much closer to a lasting and sustainable peace.
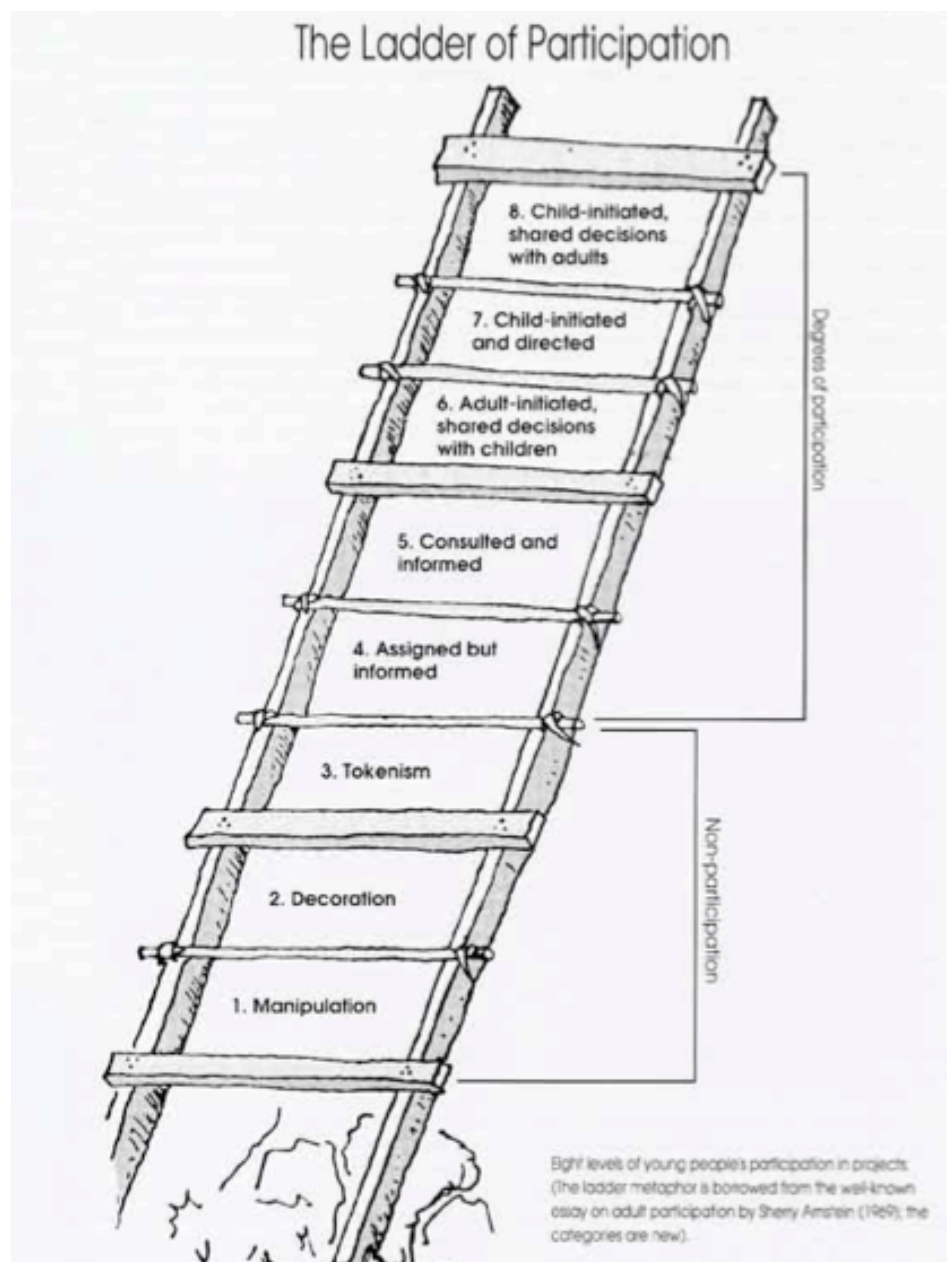
Here is Hart's Ladder:

The Ladder of Participation

8. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults

7. Child-initiated and directed

6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children

5. Consulted and informed

4. Assigned but informed

Degrees of participation

3. Tokenism

2. Decoration

1. Manipulation

Non-participation

Eight levels of young people's participation in projects. (The ladder metaphor is borrowed from the well-known essay on adult participation by Sherry Arnstein (1969), the categories are new).

Figure 1: Children's Participation Ladder

(Note at bottom of illustration:

Eight levels of young people's participation in projects (the ladder metaphor is borrowed from the well-known essay on adult participation by Sherry Arnstein (1969); the categories are new [to Hart]).

As mentioned previously, Hart's ladder was inspired by Arnstein's. In her piece that first used a ladder as a metaphor for (adult) participation (1969), Arnstein addresses the question of how participation is significant to IR:

> My answer to the critical so-what question is simply that citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out. In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform, which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society. (pp. 1-2)

This process can also be applied to young people marginalized by power, as a more participatory policy helps redistribute power. A more in-depth discussion of this aspect can be found in De Graaf, 2025. Hart labeled Arnstein's steps, proposing a number of key categories with regard to increased youth participation (Hart, 1992). These steps are:

8) Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults

7) Child-initiated and directed

6) Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children

5) Consulted and informed

4) Assigned but informed

3) Tokenism

2) Decoration

1) Manipulation.

The following analysis will extend Hart's framework to specifically take into account the issues of voice: the narrative that voice creates; and the relationship of that narrative to violence as a means of preventing violence. Hart's Ladder articulates the different stages of youth participation, and gives a label to specific events that some might think are participatory, but that in actuality, merely use young people as "tokens" or "decoration," with the purpose of enhancing the status or trustworthiness of adults.

This experience goes to the heart of debates that consider whether, in fact, children have rights, or whether instead, it is adults who claim those rights on behalf of children (see, for example, O'Neill, 1992). This is important to my own research because upon analysis, young people who do not in actuality have rights, may then be prohibited from participating. And if there is no meaningful participation, then they are effectively isolated from the policy process. Arguably it is for reasons such as these that youth remain marginalized: they are either too young or, as Stephens (1995) notes, too "risky" for their voices to be trusted. This gap in the research it addressed as follows.

   b) Creating new steps

This paper positions itself in the context of contributing to the existing literature, and adds to it through a new approach in an attempt to improve upon Hart's model. This takes the question several steps further in understanding the (adverse) effects of youth participation. Hart himself has admitted there are limitations to his Ladder (2008). Here I provide a new framework in the guise of the Vortex of Voice and Violence, as my research has demonstrated that violence itself is considered as a form of communication (Schmid & De Graaf, 1982) chosen by young people (and indeed, all marginalized groups) whenever their voices go unheard within post-conflict and deeply divided societies.

This assertion is not new, and rests on the shoulders of a wide variety of scholars who have published an extensive history of research into the links between voice, or communication, or lack of communication, and violence itself as a form of communication. These range from Held (2008), who states that an act of violence may need to be justifiable, should a political system fail to give voice, to Tauman (2003), who outlines the idea that terrorism is a process of communication. These ideas go back to works such as that by Schmid and De Graaf (1982), who pioneered terrorism studies by making the link between insurgent terrorist acts and the perpetrators' need to be heard. The authors point out that the purpose of insurgent terrorism is often to "draw the attention of the world" (p. 27). They list case studies of terrorist acts in the 1960s and

1970s that consistently rated the communication of (fear-) messages to a mass audience as the number one use of terrorism.

This paper argues that a program of participatory peacebuilding provides a potential solution to this problem as students are trained to "shut up and listen" to those who are not being heard. The new typology of the Vortex of Voice and Violence recognizes whole groups who do not even fit onto Hart's Ladder of Participation.

The Vortex illustrated in the following section includes young people previously marginalized or not even acknowledged. The Vortex also demonstrates how youth feel about the promise of agency, and how they become frustrated when they see ways in which they are lacking it. Young people may already play highly diverse role in everyday peacebuilding, exercising agency through voice and thereby, preventing conflict.

6. Voice and violence

The *Peace by Peace* project demonstrates that having a voice does not mean being consulted about a policy change so a box can be ticked. It means having power and potentially co-creating the policy itself. Clarke (2015) discusses various means of including young people from marginalized groups in order to empower them. Other examples include the ethnographic studies of lives of disabled teenagers (Wickenden, 2011). These are just two illustrations of how voice can be linked to identity and power.

The *Peace by Peace* project demonstrates that in order for sustainable peacebuilding to manifest through young people, their legitimacy needs to be recognized, their voices heard. Regarding the question: *How does voice work?* I sought to consider the applicability of Hart's model within conflict and post-conflict contexts. I also recognized, however, that before even getting to the stage of manipulation—the lowest stage of participation in Hart's framework—the relationship between young people and the way in which they are listened to may be subject to a more nuanced approach. In particular, I hypothesized that being

-1) Ignored

-2) Humiliated

and -3) Marginalized

might be significant substeps to Hart's Ladder. As mentioned below, these concepts are particularly important to consider as they reflect elements of an already existing critical literature within the IR discourse.

The study of being ignored, and humiliation as weapons of war, have become established within the IR discipline and affirms that those humiliated in conflict can respond with violence. Examples include studies of sexual violence during wartime, behavior at checkpoints, and terrorism studies. Writings include those by Buss (2009), Fierke (2005), and Lang & Beattie (2009). These authors look at the power of excluding others, ignoring them, the humiliating treatment of marginalized populations, and conclude that such behavior exacerbates conflict as powerfully as the use of weapons. Similarly, the literature on identity and identity politics in IR (see, for example, Heyes, 2012; Riggins, 1997; Hekman, 1997) is very much part of a wider literature on marginalization in IR that highlights the lack of agency that a particular construction of an identity, whether determined by age, gender, or ethnicity, creates.

This sample of literature supports my claim that youth participation can be measured within IR as a tool for peacebuilding. Having a scale against which to gauge the (lack of) youth participation illustrates the need for youth-oriented benchmarks and youth-narrated visions. The model I submit is a modified version of Hart's Ladder of Participation. As a result of investigating the different levels of participation that Hart describes, and exploring this disconnect between rhetoric and reality an enhanced version of Hart's model was developed, termed here, the "Vortex of Voice and Violence."

a) Vortex of Voice and Violence

This Vortex of Voice and Violence is original, a new way of framing, an extension—so to speak—of Hart's Ladder. Hart's Ladder is a tool of policy, used by several disciplines within the Social Sciences, such as Psychology, Sociology, and Human Geography, but here it has now been adapted for use in International Relations. This is a different approach to violence and peacebuilding, and adds a new dimension to the already existing body of knowledge. The Vortex provides an illustration of how a lack of

voice may lead to increased violence, demonstrating potential links between voice and

violence, from an IR perspective, thereby extending the discussion of these topics.

VORTEX OF VOICE AND VIOLENCE

PARTICIPATION:

8. Youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults

7. Youth-initiated and directed

6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth

Verbal communication and participation

Activism without direct participation

Peaceful demonstrations

5. Consulted and informed

4. Assigned but informed

NON-PARTICIPATION:

Violent demonstrations

3. Tokenism

2. Decoration

Riots

1. Manipulation

Terrorism

DOWNWARD SPIRALING VIOLENCE:

-1. Ignored

-2. Humiliated

Civil War

Anarchy

-3. Marginalized

Inverse realtionship between voice/participation and violence: the greater the level of participation, the lower the levels of violence; the lower the level of participation, the greater risk of spiraling violence.
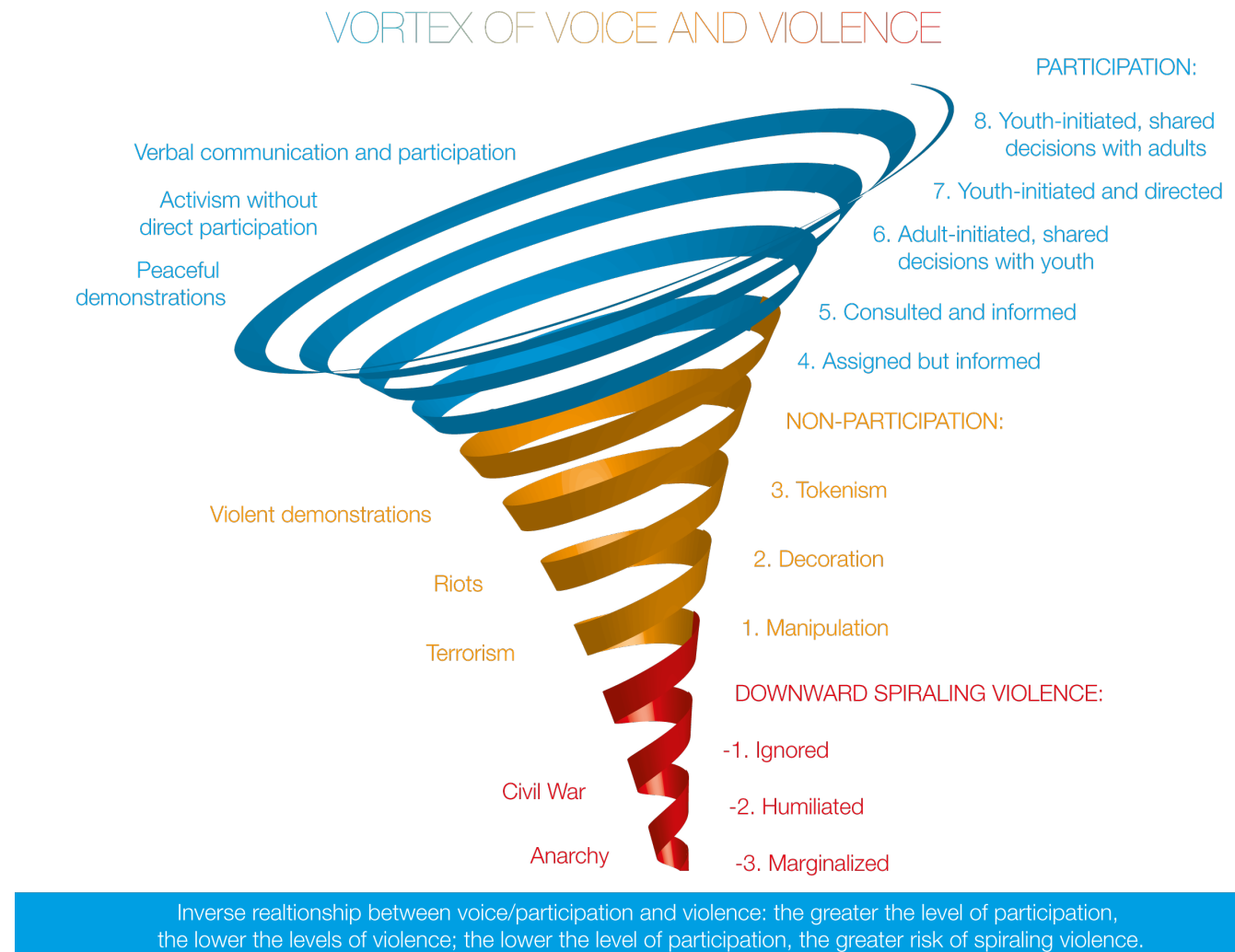
Figure 2: De Graaf's Vortex of Voice and Violence (2018)

As the Vortex moves downward, farther away from participation, young people

are perceived as riskier, and what little trust there might have been disintegrates. This

trust issue applies to all marginalized groups, as fear and lack of trust brand them as

unpredictable and risky (Stephens, 1995), whether their differences are based on race,

gender, class, socio-economic background, sexual orientation, or age. In addition,

marginalized youth may feel the promise of agency, but become increasingly aware of

ways in which they lack agency, which just further fuels their anger and frustration.

With regard to this lowest sub-step of being Marginalized, marginalized groups

throughout history were often further pushed to the edges of society by being denied a

voice. Not just youth, but all marginalized groups fit this model of voice (or lack of voice) and agency (or lack of agency). Examples include indigenous groups and minority populations whose children were punished in school when using original languages, as well as those people lacking political representation. The closer young people, and other marginalized groups, find themselves to having no voice at all, the more likely they are to turn to violence as a form of communication. The peacebuilders interviewed for *Peace by Peace* confirm this dynamic.

As the Vortex illustrates, youth activism is a form of communication. If it is not listened to, then peaceful demonstrations often tip into violent demonstrations, and depending on the response of authorities, into riots. How violent they become, depends on how they are perceived. Authorities' reactions to peaceful demonstrations may exacerbate the situation. When youth activists are not listened to, often police view them as risky (Stephens, 1995) and assume violence, so there is an escalation on both sides as positions become entrenched. When youth feel that they are not being listening to and assume the worst, this equals the stage my own research has created, that of being Ignored. Similar scenarios illustrate the sub-step of being Humiliated.

The Vortex provides an analytical device for examining how far a particular society has progressed in terms of developing participation. It includes Hart's "non-participation" categories, each of which can be recognized for its existing significance within IR discourse. Thus, Hart's recognition of the significance of manipulation is echoed in the work of Stedman & Tanner (2003); Pugh (2002); and Perry (1988) on the plight of refugees, during and after war, and on the operation of political parties. The same holds true in terms of Hart's "tokenism" within IR. This category of tokenism is particularly relevant with regard to young people and their place in peacebuilding, and the consideration of whether all of the means so often used to include them, are in reality of any relevance to their position as agential actors. As Hart notes, "A nation is democratic to the extent that its citizens are involved, particularly at the community level" (1992, p. 4).

When citizens are not involved, their voices go unheard. Looking at how people communicate means recognizing violence as a form of communication. According to Blementhal (2006), when words fail, for whatever reason, violence provides a powerful form of communication, which may have devastating consequences. But it is also a breakdown of the mental process necessary for thinking, cutting off any potential exchange of ideas. "Violence is a communication at such a primitive level that it bypasses thought altogether, and consequently the dialogue between the victim, the perpetrator and society occurs largely at a level that is beyond awareness" (Blementhal, 2006, p. 4).

b) Violence as communication

The Vortex refers to violence as a means of communication. This is relevant because Peace Studies explore how being in a post-conflict or deeply divided society just adds instability, which breeds unrest. That tipping point, when peaceful demonstrations become violent, as illustrated on the Vortex, is much more frightening within a post-conflict context or within a deeply divided society. In some ways this is unsurprising, given the IR literature that exists on youth bulges, as explained previously. Within the field of IR, youth are considered to play very limited roles, most of which are risky (Stephens, 1995). The consequences of non-participation, however, are exacerbated within a conflict situation, and sometimes even more so when the war is over. Therefore, studying this phenomenon is especially significant for understanding post-conflict peacebuilding, especially at a communal level.

7. Conclusion

History can be better understood if seen through the lens of absent stakeholders. The Vortex is a tool for determining the level of participation young people enjoy, and the levels still to be reached if this enjoyment does not (yet) exist. It provides an analytical advice for examining how far a particular community has progressed in terms of developing participation. As such, the Vortex provides both a roadmap for greater youth participation, and a warning, as at this lower level of participation, there is also a greater risk of spiraling violence. By means of providing both language and an expanded

vision of what greater participation might look like, the Vortex illustrates how voice might enable youth to claim agency within divided societies, and as such proves significant for understanding post-conflict peacebuilding, especially at a communal level. This paper contends that when a segment of the population is not listened to, violence may become an alternative way of communicating, and perhaps their *only* way of being heard. The educational impact of *Peace by Peace* demonstrates how students contribute to this learning about voice and agency, both reflectively and from the point of view of peacebuilders wrestling with these dynamics in post-conflict communities.

Young people are not the only marginalized groups within societies. Any group positioned on the lower steps of the Vortex, such as groups that are being ignored, unheard or humiliated and that are thus excluded from society, are relevant to the models concerning participation, voice and agency as discussed in this paper. These groups may be women, a racial minority, a religious minority, an indigenous group that has been colonized, or children.

This research attempts to highlight issues of voice and peacebuilding among youth—how to listen and how to create listening spaces. These are concepts embedded in the educational aspects of the *Peace by Peace* project.

One of the findings of the project is its intersectionality. For instance, that agency may be developed along the lines discussed in this paper for the indigenous, the disabled, LGTBQI, and other groups who find themselves unheard. Whereas the rhetoric that exists about peace agreements often includes references to children, this can be considered often as tokenism, as theirs is a marginalized voice. This study of voice has tried to stress the need for opening up listening spaces for all individuals, so that they receive greater levels of recognition. It has ramifications both in policy terms for peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

The *Peace by Peace* project and similar Peace Studies teaching enables young people to examine the nature of their existing and potential contribution to peacebuilding efforts. Perhaps more significantly, it has the potential of providing language and indicators, or benchmarks in measuring participation in policy frameworks, gauging

informed perspectives, especially among young leaders. They could make valuable contributions to policy decisions on security, institutional building, democratization, rule of law, human rights, marketization and development. If this takes place within the context of responses to the root causes of the conflict, then peacebuilding occurs at two starting points, i.e. not just in stopping the violence, but also establishing a greater understanding of a local and everyday peace and preventing future conflict. As young people participate in the *Peace by Peace* project and the (re-)building of their worlds, their proposals and peacebuilding initiatives can only be utilized if they are actually listened to, actually recognized.

a) Recognition

To listen is to recognize. Recognition theories provide a lens through which to understand better the concepts of both vulnerability and recognition. It draws on G.W.F. Hegel's recognition ethics, which stipulate that an ethical relationship can only exist where there is a prior act of mutual recognition (Honneth, 2012). So, recognition can occur between individuals, but also between communities, despite the fact that power and inequality are constraints on ethical recognition. Mutual and free recognition are required if people are to be recognizable as moral agents. Rights presuppose free, autonomous, self-conscious agents capable of rational choice. Some theorists claim redistribution must be a condition of recognition (Fraser, 2003), and others say that recognition ethics are the baseline for the enjoyment of rights in multicultural societies. Without the recognition of minority rights, no liberal democratic society can function. Recognition theory is about safeguarding dignity.

According to Honneth (1995, 2003, 2007, 2012, 2014), the individual is capable of unfolding a practical identity to the extent that he is capable of reassuring himself of recognition by having a growing circle of partners with whom to communication. Subjects capable of language and action become recognizable individuals solely by learning, from the perspective of others who offer approval, to relate to themselves as beings who possess certain positive qualities and abilities. And so, as others' consciousness of their individuality grows, they come to increasingly depend on the

conditions of recognitions they are afforded by the life-world of their social environment. Furthermore, a concept of morality based on the theory of recognition would rely on the support of historical and sociological studies that are capable of showing that moral progress is born out of the struggle for recognition.

It needs to be noted that any kind of sustainable peace is difficult to achieve without recognizing the complexity of the links between voice and violence, and power and lack of power (Arendt, 1970).

Young people struggle for recognition at all strata of society: politically, economically, emotionally and personally. This paper has attempted to contribute to the conversation about the recognition of youth as viable, societal agents by highlighting the voice-youth thread, the youth-agency thread, and the voice-agency thread, and weaving them into a tapestry that reveals how voice and agency might serve other marginalized groups. *Peace by Peace* is but one example of this process. The project demonstrates that in order for local peacebuilding to be effective, people need to be able to imagine peace in the first place.

b) Moral imagination

Moral imagination is a topic that was introduced earlier in this paper. It resurfaces here as a means of completing the paper discussion. When young people participate in peacebuilding it shifts their lack of agency, providing an alternative to violence. This paper has looked at various ways in which peace might be spoken into being, such as how youth voice could be used as a benchmark to measure the viability of an imposed peace. But such a peace needs to be envisioned by both the peacebuilders and the keepers of everyday peace, including youth. Peace must first be envisioned before it finds its way into voice. Part of this process involves the need for a moral imagination. *Peace by Peace* interviewees teach us that this might be done by means of focus groups, surveys, and generational-impact studies, whenever young people are asked for their own ideas on peacebuilding.

Imagining change, as moral imagination describes, as a precursor to then making change happen is a form of agency. My research shows there are different stages of

being denied agency, in relation to not being heard: being a decoration, being a token, being spoken on behalf of, being ignored, being humiliated. This is not just true for young people, but it can also be so for families and whole societies and all marginalized groups. It works for all marginalized groups who would turn to violence because it is perceived as the only option to voice society grants them.

c) <u>Listening in a deeply divided society</u>

Projects like *Peace by Peace* demonstrate and inspire those of us from increasingly deeply divided societies and teach us how to build peace. Wherever there are divisions, where there is youth, wherever there are societies in transition, there is a need for recognizing individual voices, asking how can there be more cooperation, and looking for the unseen, listening for the unheard. There are broad parallels about dispossession and division, massive differences, but great similarities as well. Individual youth voices and individual experiences take the place of a non-existent so-called youth voice, in the singular. What one child experiences can prompt listeners to engage in topics they might otherwise shun.

The top level of participation is all about listening, which might include requiring NGOs to conduct generational impact studies before initiating projects. A generational study would mean pro-actively listening to the opinions of youth. Sustaining youth participation equals sustainable peace.

Institutes of higher education must take their social responsibility seriously and pioneer these processes.

In the listening to others, to our own hearts, we find peace and healing. In my own research, young people who have survived conflict situations often display courage and wisdom without therapy, and know what needs to happen in order to survive. Significant gaps of knowledge exist, not least within the field of IR, where both emotion and youth narratives remain outside the consideration of mainstream research.

In South Africa, during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), emotions often ran high (TRC of South Africa Report, 2002). Language, identity, past crimes, present trauma, a hope for freedom and equality, all swamped the tree glades and

classrooms where the meetings took place. Often at the end of the sessions, people spontaneously began singing. Their language abilities could not express the longing for peace they felt at such moments of truth and reconciliation, lies and a lack of forgiveness. The Zulu/Xhosa song they sang at those times is called *Senzeni na* which means, "What have we done?" It is an old apartheid-protest song, crying out at the injustice, wondering why they were being targeted to suffer. The verse's meaning changed, however, as during the TRC, people broke out into song, the same question now directed toward and representing both perpetrators and victims, when their emotions proved too strong for words. It was still voice, still communication, but a different use of voice to express the deep feelings of relief and release, fear and hope. This chorus called together voices of all backgrounds and skin colors, as together, as individuals and as a society, they found themselves speaking peace into being.

Peace is a practice, a process, not an end goal. It is pieced together, *Peace by Peace.*

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