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PEACEBUILDING IN NEPAL

- the tentative quest for post-liberal peace

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Abstract

The focal point of this thesis is the peacebuilding environment in Nepal following the end of the civil war in 2006. A fieldwork investigation was conducted focusing on the perceptions of inhabitants of Kathmandu on peace and peacebuilding issues using semi-structured interviews. By investigating these perceptions the study seeks to answer three main questions:

- How can the contrasting perspectives on the peace process be understood?
- Can life in post-conflict Nepal fruitfully be conceptualized as a "no war, no peace"-society, and if so, what are the possible implications of this on the peace process?
- How do people in contemporary Nepal envision sustainable peace?

The thesis draws on theoretical frameworks which are critical of the liberal peace - mainly problematizing its tendency to neglect the local context and needs, and its reliance on top-down and technocratic measures.

The conclusion of this thesis is that the contrasting perspectives on the peace process can be understood as a consequence of the disjuncture between everyday experiences of peacebuilding in Nepal and the top-down perspective of liberal peacebuilding actors. Furthermore, the study has found that Nepal can in material and political terms be aptly described as a "no war, no peace"-society, yet at the same time there appears to be socio-cultural factors which restrain a return to civil war. Finally, people in Nepal conceptualize sustainable peace in a manner which highlights everyday issues such as material improvements and social inclusion.

Key words: Peacebuilding, Nepal, Kathmandu, liberal peace, post-liberal peace.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	5
1.1 Research problem	6
1.2 Research aim and research questions	7
2. Theory	9
2.1 On peace	9
2.2 The liberal peace	10
2.3 No war, no peace	11
2.4 Post-liberal peace	13
3. Methods and Methodology	17
3.1 Epistemology	17
3.2 Empirical material	18
3.3 Semi-structured interviews	19
3.4 Sampling	20
3.5 The parts and the whole	21
3.6 Limitations	22
4. Background	23
4.1 Nepal – a brief political history	23
4.2 The Maoist insurgency of 1996 - 2006	25
4.3 The post-conflict era	26
5. Main findings and analysis	29
5.1 How can the contrasting perspectives on the Nepali peace process be understood?	29
5.1.1 Liberal top-down peacebuilding	29
5.1.2 Everyday dynamics of peace in Nepal	31
5.1.3 Concluding discussion	34
5.2 Can life in post-conflict Nepal fruitfully be conceptualized as a "no war no peace"-society, and if so, what are the possible implications of this on the peace process?	35
5.2.1 Everyday life in Nepal as "no war, no peace"	35
5.2.2 Popular agency and the demise of existential fear	36
5.2.3 Concluding discussion	37
5.3 How do people in contemporary Nepal envision sustainable peace?	38
5.3.1 Visions of peace in Kathmandu	39
5.3.2 Concluding discussion	41
6. Summary and concluding discussion	42
7. References	45
7.1 Literature	45
7.2 Websites	48
7.3 Reports	50
7.4 List of interviews	50

List of Abbreviations

CA	Constituent Assembly
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPN-M	Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist
EU	European Union
INGO	International Non Governmental Organization
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNMIN	United Nations Mission in Nepal
UPF	United People's Front
US	United States

1. Introduction

Despite the best efforts of myriad peacebuilding actors across the globe since the end of the Cold War, the task of creating sustainable peace in post-conflict societies has proven immensely challenging. In various contexts, including East Timor, Guatemala, Kosovo and Lebanon, international peacebuilding operations have failed to produce conditions for sustainable peace (Mac Ginty 2010; Richmond 2009). In the wake of peace agreements, these societies continue to experience war-like conditions, characterized by low socio-economic development and high levels of group animosities, political tensions and communal violence (Mac Ginty 2010: 152). This state of affairs is frequently mirrored in the lack of legitimacy that international peacebuilding operations enjoy amongst local populations of post-conflict societies, who lament that these operations are "ethically bankrupt, subject to double standards, coercive and conditional, acultural, unconcerned with social welfare, and unfeeling and insensitive" (Richmond 2009: 558).

Given this rather bleak outlook of many contemporary peacebuilding operations it has become commonplace amongst academics to challenge the currently dominant formula for peacebuilding, i.e. the liberal peacebuilding model. Influential academics such as Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond have made it their particular niche to highlight the flaws of the liberal peacebuilding model, mainly problematizing its top-down, technocratic, acultural and Western biases, and calling for alternative models for building peace which are grounded in the everyday needs and experiences of the populations of post-conflict societies (Richmond 2009: 579; Mac Ginty 2010: 158).

1.1 Research problem

The situation in Nepal following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2006 appears to follow a similar trajectory as predicted by critics of the liberal peacebuilding model. Commentators on the peace process in Nepal have increasingly begun to challenge the sustainability and quality of the current peace. These critical voices highlight the fact that the majority of the population remain entangled in poverty; that the Constituent Assembly (CA) has been chronically unable to produce a new constitution; that political life remains highly polarized and dysfunctional; that the country is increasingly afflicted with crime, and that ultimately the root causes of the conflict remain unresolved (AHRC 2012; New York Times; ICTJ 2013).

The characteristics of contemporary Nepal can thus be said to resemble a "no war, no peace" society – a theoretical framework put forth by Roger Mac Ginty in order to conceptualize the unsatisfying realities of many contemporary post-conflict societies (2008; 2010)¹. Mac Ginty argues that post-conflict societies are frequently plagued by "chronic poverty and underdevelopment, continuing violence and deeply dysfunctional inter-group relations" (Mac Ginty 2010: 146). At first glance Nepal would appear to fit the bill perfectly for such a society, and commentators have indeed described post-conflict Nepal literally as a "no war, no peace"-society (Scoop Independent News; Nepali Times).

At the same time there exists a contrasting perspective on the Nepali peace process which is markedly more positive. From this perspective liberal peacebuilding in Nepal is portrayed as a success story in the making, where "the transition from war to peace is proceeding quite smoothly and the political institutions in the capital city are undergoing significant transformation" (Denskus 2009: 54). The United Nations (UN) boasts that the peacebuilding efforts have

¹ This theoretical framework will be discussed in closer detail in the theory section below.

achieved the re-integration of former combatants as well as peaceful democratic elections (UN News Centre), while the United States (US) Institute of Peace claims that "the success of the peace process achieved through the 2006 People's Movement has been slow but steady" (US Institute of Peace).

1.2 Research aim and research questions

Reflecting on the different perspectives on the Nepali peace process one cannot help but to be perplexed. How can these contrasting perspectives be understood and possibly reconciled? The first aim of this thesis is to attempt to find an answer to this question. This will be done by comparing the UN's representation of the peace process with the perceptions of people living in post-conflict Nepal.

The second aim of this thesis is to investigate post-conflict Nepal from the perspective of the "no war, no peace"- framework. Is Nepal currently in a situation of "no war, no peace"? Mac Ginty proposes that such societies are in risk of civil war recidivism. Is this then an impending prospect for Nepal? What do everyday experiences from post-conflict Nepal suggest in this regard?

The third aim of this thesis is to take up the quest for everyday, post-liberal versions of peace in contemporary Nepal, as called for by academics such as Mac Ginty and Richmond. The basic aspiration is to grasp how peace is understood by people in post-conflict Nepal, and how it relates to their everyday experiences and needs.

Building on the above, the research questions of this thesis are as follows:

- How can the contrasting perspectives on the Nepali peace process be understood?

- Can life in post-conflict Nepal fruitfully be conceptualized as a "no war, no peace"-society, and if so, what are the possible implications of this on the peace process?
- How do people in contemporary Nepal envision sustainable peace?

2. Theory

2.1 On peace

One of the basic assumptions of this thesis is that peace entails more than simply the end of direct violence. Peace should instead be treated as a holistic concept which should not only address direct violence, but also the underlying structural and perceptual causes of conflict². A failure to address these causes will at best produce a fragile ceasefire between former combatants, rather than self-sustaining peace (Mac Ginty 2008: 22-24).

Moreover, I argue that peace can not be defined in a universal manner, as societal organization with claims to universality invariably tend to be oppressive to some people (Galtung 1996: 7). Instead, peace should be conceived of as context-dependent processes, which can not be properly understood or achieved outside of their particular settings (Mac Ginty 2008: 15-18).

The most common contemporary version of peace is the liberal peace. In fact, the liberal peace framework has become so dominant globally that it is frequently labeled hegemonic (Richmond 2010: 667). Rather than adhering to this hegemonic form of peace this thesis aims to draw out counter-hegemonic, subjectivist, versions of peace. In order to grasp the rationale for this positioning a theoretical review of the liberal peace framework and its critics is necessary. Following this, an approach to capturing alternative versions of peace will be presented.

² See: Galtung 1969 and 1996, as well as Mac Ginty 2008: 179.

2.2 The liberal peace

The theoretical origins of what is commonly known as the liberal peace can be traced back to Immanuel Kant's essay *Perpetual Peace* from 1795 which envisioned a liberal world order where peace reigned supreme. In Kant's conception liberal states were equated with peacefulness, whereas illiberal states were thought to be inherently belligerent. Thus liberalism, defined by Kant as republicanism with representative government, should be promoted globally in order to ensure a peaceful world order (Kant 2010).

Although Kant did not explicitly refer to the virtues of democracy in *Perpetual Peace* (2010) his legacy has been prominent in the democratic peace theory, popularized by Francis Fukuyama in 1993. Following the end of the Cold War, Fukuyama claimed that "the end of history" had arrived, and that liberal democracy had proven victorious. Henceforth, he argued, the spread of liberal democracy would ensure international peace and security (Fukuyama 1993). Peace thereafter became synonymous with liberal democracy, and peacebuilding operations were invariably predicated upon a formula of liberalism and democracy (Richmond 2008: 87, 91).

The end of the Cold War and the supposed victory of liberal democracy opened up for a new form of liberal intervention in states plagued by conflict and human rights violations – i.e. in "weak states" (Robinson and Aidan 2009: 7-10). In this context, issues that had formerly been considered the sole concern of sovereign states became viable for international intervention as these matters became linked to the international protection of peace and security (Chandler 2004: 66, 74).

Since the heyday of liberal interventionism in the 1990s, it has arguably lost some of its potency and legitimacy (Richmond 2008: 150). Some commentators go so far as to claim that liberal interventionism may not yet be dead – but it is currently at least in the process of dying (Sandu 2012). However much liberal

interventionism is currently suffering in legitimacy, the liberal model of peacebuilding is still widely practiced, and may in fact still be "the only game in town" (Mac Ginty 2011).

Contemporary liberal peacebuilding operations usually rest on five main legs, namely: "democratisation, the rule of law, human rights, free and globalized markets, and neo-liberal development" (Richmond 2006: 291). As such this has come to be considered the standard recipe for contemporary peacebuilding, although commentators have suggested that some of the ingredients may in fact be incompatible when applied concurrently (Robinson and Aidan 2009: 14).

2.3 No war, no peace

Roger Mac Ginty takes as his starting point the fact that many contemporary post-conflict societies are experiencing an uneasy peace characterized by largely the same conditions as during the conflict - i.e. "no war, no peace"-situations. In such societies direct violence has been contained, but structural inequalities remain ingrained, levels of unemployment and crime are high, group animosities remain strong, and there is often a sense of disconnection between the people and the government (Mac Ginty 2010: 151). Public optimism following the peace agreement is quickly eroded due to the lack of positive improvements. Where these issues remain unaddressed, Mac Ginty argues that there is a heightened risk for civil war recidivism (Mac Ginty 2008: 80; Mac Ginty 2010: 152).

Mac Ginty argues that the failures of contemporary peacebuilding operations can be traced back to the inherent characteristics of the liberal peacebuilding model, in which he identifies several fundamental flaws. First, liberal peacebuilding is a top-down approach which has been agreed at the elite level of society. As such, it lacks a vital connection to the experiences of the people living in post-conflict

societies, for whom peace makes little real difference (Mac Ginty 2010: 157).

Secondly, liberal peacebuilding normally embraces neo-liberal economic reforms which open up post-conflict societies to the impacts of the global market under the premise that this will create development. Mac Ginty argues that this may constitute a danger in societies emerging from conflict, as these reforms may result in the exacerbation of group tensions (Mac Ginty 2010: 157).

Thirdly, Mac Ginty notes that the liberal peacebuilding approach is naïvely optimistic about the positive impact of democratic elections in post-conflict societies. If elections are seen as the endpoint of the democratic process there is a risk that the need to cultivate a pluralist political culture in these societies becomes neglected. Such a pluralist democratic culture may be necessary in order to overcome the root causes of conflict, whereas simply focusing on electoral competition between parties might serve to aggravate political tensions within post-conflict societies (Mac Ginty 2010: 157).

Finally, Mac Ginty stresses the problematic aspects of treating the liberal peace as a universally applicable model. By deploying the same kind of peacebuilding operations in post-conflict societies globally, these operations fail to grasp the specificities of the local context, and thereby fail to produce sustainable peace (Mac Ginty 2010: 152).

Having said that, Mac Ginty does also acknowledge the positive impacts of "no war, no peace"-situations, most importantly the fact that organized violence has been contained. However, the author stresses that one should demand more from peacebuilding operations, including addressing "structural factors that underpin conflict, indirect violence and affective issues such as reconciliation" (Mac Ginty 2010: 159). Without addressing these issues, contemporary liberal peacebuilding operations are destined to continue producing "no war, no peace"-situations.

Mac Ginty notes that there is frequently a steep disjuncture between what is formally acknowledged as peace and what inhabitants of post-conflict societies

actually need and expect from said peace. By encouraging the populations of post-conflict societies to “imagine peace”, one might grasp how this disjuncture could be overcome, and thus how one might be able to create better peace policy in these societies (Mac Ginty 2008: 97-98).

Moreover, Mac Ginty stresses the importance of identifying conflict recidivism factors in post-conflict societies. The author notes that perhaps the most important factor in restraining a return to conflict is “demonstrable signs that the peace accord environment offers greater advantages than war” (Mac Ginty 2008: 105). This could for example manifest itself in political institutions that are able to serve basic public needs in a manner perceived as efficient and equitable (ibid: 105). Mac Ginty also notes that conflict-restraining factors may sometimes have “a subtle quality deeply embedded within social and cultural norms” (ibid: 107) and that therefore these factors may not always be immediately visible to the observer. Nonetheless, he argues that it is essential to identify and build on these factors in order to guard against civil war recidivism (ibid: 107).

2.4 Post-liberal peace

Oliver Richmond's conception of post-liberal peace takes as its starting point the failure of contemporary liberal peacebuilding operations to create sustainable peace. As such it builds on many of the same critiques as those of Roger Mac Ginty. However, Richmond provides additional insights that are worthy of elaboration, as we shall see below.

In order to follow Richmond's main arguments one needs to briefly examine his conception of the three graduations of liberal peacebuilding. The *conservative* graduation focuses on establishing hard security. This entails a top-down, frequently externalized, approach to building peace which offers basic security but no engagement with everyday dimensions of peace. The *orthodox* graduation

focuses mainly on institution-building, placing its emphasis on developing the institutions of the liberal state as well as the market economy. Although the orthodox graduation does suggest a commitment to everyday dimensions of peace through its liberal rights-based approach, the main focus remains top-down and institutional. Finally, the *emancipatory* graduation is a bottom-up approach with a significant focus on local ownership and needs. This graduation offers a strong commitment to everyday issues such as social justice and welfare provision, as its main focal point is the needs of the local populations (Richmond 2009: 560-561).

In theory the graduations of the liberal peace can be thought of as a sequenced approach to peacebuilding, where the conservative moves through the orthodox to the emancipatory (Richmond 2009: 568). As such, the emancipatory peace can be seen as the endpoint of liberal peacebuilding, and has also frequently come to serve as the legitimation for the conservative and orthodox graduations (ibid: 560, 562). However, Richmond observes that despite liberal peacebuilding's theoretical ambition to build an emancipatory peace, contemporary liberal peacebuilding operations tend in practice to be "stuck" in the conservative and orthodox graduations (Richmond 2009: 569; Richmond 2006: 303).

Richmond links this problem to the ontological foundation of the liberal peacebuilding model. He notes that the liberal peace rests on a Westphalian logic³, and that therefore the liberal peace tends to prioritize approaches which seek to contain inter-state conflict through institutional top-down measures, rather than approaches that address socio-economic grievances within states (Richmond 2009: 568, 569).

Moreover, due to its focus on political rights the liberal peace may be stifled from becoming a truly emancipatory peace, Richmond argues. This is the case as political rights are considered the pinnacle of the social contract in the liberal conception of the state. However, in many post-conflict societies everyday needs may be related to other issues, such as material gains (Richmond 2009: 568, 569).

3 I.e. the establishment and perpetuation of the modern state system.

Furthermore, Richmond is critical of the possibility of creating peace policy that could be universally applicable. Instead, he emphasizes the inherent plurality of post-conflict societies and the importance of protecting difference in the face of the often homogenizing influences of liberal approaches (Richmond 2009: 568).

Given the above, how does Richmond envision peacebuilding in practice? The answer arguably lies in broadening the grasp of peacebuilding operations to move "beyond Westphalia" (Richmond 2009: 569) by incorporating the dimensions of the *everyday*. Such a broadened grasp would complement the "cold institutionalism" (ibid: 574) of liberal peacebuilding with a focus on everyday needs in post-conflict societies. By doing so, Richmond argues that peacebuilding can regain some of its lost legitimacy amongst local populations, which in turn would render peacebuilding operations better equipped at building truly sustainable and emancipatory peace where "individuals and communities have primacy over states in terms of their rights, freedoms, and participation" (ibid: 577).

The focus on everyday needs in peacebuilding could for example entail the provision of "jobs, welfare, education, and social justice as well as security" (Richmond 2009: 580). However, given the innate plurality of post-conflict societies Richmond is wary of suggesting a universally applicable "blueprint"⁴ for reaching sustainable post-liberal peace (ibid: 579). Instead, Richmond outlines what he considers the appropriate *methods* for reaching this end – calling for a methodological re-positioning of the liberal peace where participatory, empathetic, methods are increasingly favored over institutional ones. In practice, Richmond suggests that "discourse analysis and ethnography allows for greater, and more culturally appropriate, access to everyday life" (ibid: 570).

Although Richmond warns that "predatory institutional frameworks" (Richmond 2009: 568) often come "at the expense of everyday life" (ibid: 568) he does not categorically reject the notion that institutions can play a positive role in peacebuilding. However, he stresses that these must be grounded in an in-depth

4 See: Richmond 2012.

understanding of their role in the local context, and should be flexible and sensitive to everyday needs in order not to become oppressive (ibid: 576, 579). The practical implications of this is that peacebuilding actors should engage in reciprocal, continuous, dialogue with people of the local contexts about "how institutions and their creation or development affect the individual, communities, and society" (ibid: 570).

Finally, Richmond highlights the importance of local agency in peacebuilding operations in order to assure genuine "self-government and self-determination" (Richmond 2009: 571). To this end, he suggests that perhaps the most suitable role for international peacebuilders is a facilitative one; providing support for peace initiatives that are ultimately the product of local agency and consensus, while avoiding taking on an overly directive role (Richmond 2009: 579; Richmond 2010: 691).

3. Methods and Methodology

3.1 Epistemology

In the present study the focus lies on subjective perceptions of people in Nepal – a focus which fits well with the overarching research aims of the thesis. By focusing on subjective perceptions, this thesis adopts a constructivist epistemology, where claims to "objective social reality" are rejected in favor of subjective world-views, perceptions and beliefs (Young and Collin 2004). As such, the generated data of this study should be seen as individual mental *representations*, rather than necessarily factual encounters of an objective reality (Heath et al 2009: 89). Given what this study pertains to achieve, i.e. the understanding of subjective perceptions on given issues, the notion of *data as representation* should not pose any significant problems for the credibility⁵ of the study (ibid: 88-89).

By focusing on subjective perceptions one might gain insights into the contrasting perspectives on the peace process in Nepal. If there is, as Mac Ginty argues⁶, a systemic disjuncture between the official and the everyday experiences of the liberal peacebuilding project, this will be uncovered by comparing the perceptions of people in Nepal with the official discourses of peacebuilding actors. Moreover, by documenting perceptions of people in Nepal the researcher will glean an understanding of the dynamics that keep conflicts active at an everyday level (Mac Ginty 2008: 80; Nordstrom and Martin 1992: 14). As such, the focus on

5 Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest "credibility" as an appropriate manner to conceptualize internal validity in qualitative research.

6 As discussed in section 2.3.

perceptions will provide the researcher with a bottom-up understanding of the current state of the peacebuilding process, as well as possible insights into its future.

Finally, the documentation of perceptions will help provide an understanding of how people in contemporary Nepal understand and envision sustainable peace. This is an intrinsically subjective experience which is rarely, if ever, found in official representations of the peacebuilding process. These perspectives may vary significantly from the dominant ones, and may thus help provide a more comprehensive take on these issues (Mac Ginty 2008: 98).

3.2 Empirical material

The main empirical material of this thesis is derived from a field study that was conducted in Kathmandu in April and May of 2013. In total, I spent 31 days in Kathmandu for this purpose. During the field study I conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with interlocutors from various sectors of Kathmandu society. These interviews, short of one, were recorded and then selectively transcribed⁷. The main rationale for conducting fieldwork in Nepal was, essentially, that the perspectives of ordinary citizens of Nepal are not readily available in mainstream media and academia.

In addition to the interviews this thesis draws on the analysis of secondary sources such as UN reports and statements, reports from non governmental organizations (NGOs), newspaper articles, academic texts, and policy documents.

⁷ The interview recordings are available for review upon request.

3.3 Semi-structured interviews

In order to capture the perceptions of people in Nepal I relied on the semi-structured interview format. The semi-structured interview is a qualitative hermeneutic research method which aims to capture the personal world-views, attitudes and beliefs of the interlocutor. By inquiring into a number of pre-specified themes in each interview this method enabled me to probe deeply into the subjective world-views of the interlocutors (Bryman 2008: 439). The themes that were covered in the interviews were derived from the theoretical frameworks that underpin this study, which were then formalized in an interview guide that was prepared before coming to Kathmandu (Bryman et al 2004: 519)⁸.

Included in the interview guide is a brief positioning of myself as a researcher, my professional and personal background, as well as a short statement on what my research pertains to achieve, which I shared with the interlocutors at each interview occasion. This was done in order to conduct research which is as transparent, reflexive, and reciprocal as possible. Moreover, I argue that it is important to share the research aims with the interlocutors because it will, in this case, produce higher quality and more realistic results. Explaining to the interlocutors that I am not seeking to find official discourses or "the right answers", but rather that my interest lies in subjective perceptions likely enabled the interlocutors to feel more relaxed and prone to sharing their particular world-views during the interviews⁹. I also told the interlocutors that they could be anonymous in the study, so as to ensure that they would not feel hesitant to speak out on sensitive issues.

The questions that were asked during the interviews were not specified beforehand, and were intentionally kept as open as possible in order to allow the ideas and interests of the interlocutors to come out freely without too much guidance (DiCiccio & Crabtree 2006: 316). At the end of the interviews, if issues needed to be clarified or elaborated upon, more specific questions and prompts

⁸ The interview guide is attached as Annex 1 to this thesis.

⁹ This is also argued by Björnehed (2012).

were used (ibid: 316).

The interviews were conducted in English, except in one case where a translator translated between English and Nepali.

3.4 Sampling

As one of the main aims of this study is to understand different perceptions and experiences of peacebuilding and everyday life in post-conflict Nepal, I strove to interview people from diverse socio-economic, political, religious, gender as well as caste backgrounds.

Moreover, I strove to interview as many people as needed in order to reach theoretical saturation. The concept of theoretical saturation refers, simply put, to the stage of interviewing when no new relevant data is produced from conducting new interviews (Bryman et al 2004: 416). Working according to this logic, I kept interviewing for as long as it provided me with new relevant information. As I was conducting the final interviews however, I realized that the gist of the information conveyed had already been covered in previous interviews. Thus, I concluded that theoretical saturation had been reached, and did not pursue more interviews.

With regards to sampling in practice, I relied at first on a local connection who helped me find suitable people for the research. As time passed and I conducted more interviews, I also came to rely slightly on snowball sampling; basically asking interlocutors if they knew somebody who could be interested in being interviewed for the research project (Corbetta 2003: 268).

3.5 The parts and the whole

The initial research motivation for this thesis began with the identification of an empirically puzzling observation, i.e. the contrasting perspectives on the Nepali peace process. How could this be understood? From this initial question, theoretical frameworks were identified that might help explain the contrasting perspectives. A deeper review of these theoretical frameworks then spawned the identification of further research venues, which came to form the basis for research questions two and three.

Although the research aims and the questions of this thesis were to a certain extent theoretically constructed, the empirical material that was collected in the field came to have a strong bearing on the theoretical elements that were deemed relevant to include in this thesis. At the same time, the theoretical frameworks conferred analytical value on the empirical material, and thus to a certain extent guided the identification of empirically relevant material. As such, one could conceive of the theoretical-empirical relationship in this thesis as a hermeneutic circle (Debesay et al 2008: 58)¹⁰, where theoretical assumptions and empirical material influenced each other in a continuous dialogue throughout the research process. In this tactile back-and-forth dialogue between the different parts of the text, meaning gradually developed which came to form the analysis section of this thesis.

It is however important to note that the analysis may never be entirely finalized in the hermeneutic circle, but should instead be seen as an ever-evolving process (Debesay et al 2008: 65). Despite this state of affairs, at some point the researcher has to decide that the analysis is “finished enough” to be a credible representation of the whole. After several loops in the hermeneutic circle, I argue that this was eventually achieved in this thesis.

10 Or as some would prefer: a hermeneutic *spiral*. See: Nåden (2010).

3.6 Limitations

The most fundamental limitation of this study is its limited transferability¹¹. Due to a number of methodological factors, such as the sampling procedures and number of interlocutors, this research is not intended to be transferable to cover larger populations in or beyond Nepal. Nonetheless, the study has provided significant insights into the research issues at hand, and should be treated as a preliminary study. As such it would benefit from being complemented by further and more extensive studies.

Moreover, the study would have gained from including an extended methodological discussion on research reflexivity, where the position of the researcher in relation to the field of study was highlighted and problematized¹². However, due to space limitations such a discussion had to be excluded from the final text.

Finally, it is reasonable to reflect on the fact that the study was conducted in Nepal while the researcher is a native Swede. Thus, one might conceive of a multitude of socio-cultural misunderstandings between researcher and interlocutor that could potentially obscure the findings of this thesis¹³. This problem was however mitigated by the fact that I spent six months working in Kathmandu in 2010, and in doing so I acquired a basic understanding of the socio-cultural context. These six months may not have translated into *perfect* cultural know-how, but at least it enabled me to avoid some of the basic mistakes that novice foreign researchers may otherwise make.

11 Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest “transferability” as an appropriate manner to conceptualize external validity in qualitative research.

12 See for example Aull Davies (2002) for an interesting discussion on research reflexivity and fieldwork.

13 See for example: Debesay et al 2008:61.

4. Background

4.1 Nepal – a brief political history

What is today known as Nepal came into being as a unitary kingdom in 1796 when King Prithvi Narayan, backed by an army led by members of the Hindu warrior caste *Chhettris*, united the country. Before the unification of Nepal, its territory was comprised of small independent principalities (Von Einsiedel et al 2012: 5).

The unified Nepal was a highly diverse kingdom comprising a vast number of ethnic, caste, tribal and linguistic groups. Nepal was from its inception administered in a top-down manner by the powerful elite close to the king; an elite stemming almost exclusively from the Hindu caste and speaking Nepali. Thus, despite the diversity within Nepal the ruling institutions of the kingdom came to be associated with a single religion, i.e. Hinduism, and a single language, i.e. Nepali (Von Einsiedel et al 2012: 6-7).

In 1846 the *Rana* autocracy came to power through a *coup d'etat*. It established a form of autocratic rule embodied in the prime minister position, where the king retained his position in theory but in practice was stripped of all power. The *Rana* autocracy introduced the *Muluki Ain* (Civil Code) of Nepal, which codified the Hindu caste system and incorporated all groups residing within the borders of Nepal, no matter if they were Hindu or not. A form of institutionalized discrimination was thereby established which left large parts of the population

legally marginalized. It was not until 1963 that the official state sanction of the caste system was revoked from the *Muluki Ain* - however, by that time these social structures were already deeply embedded in Nepali society (Von Einsiedel et al 2012: 43).

In 1951, as a consequence of mounting popular pressure, the *Ranas* were compelled to stand down from power. During the following years political parties of all convictions thrived in Nepal, and in 1959 the first general elections were held. However, in 1960 King Mahendra, backed by the army, seized power and banned all political parties and introduced in its place the so called *Panchayat* system, i.e. a party-less system of governance where the power was concentrated in the hands of the king and his closest advisers (Von Einsiedel et al 2012: 40).

The *Panchayat* system was upheld until 1990 when the popular uprising known as *Jana Andolan*¹⁴ demanded that King Birendra abolish the *Panchayat* system and introduce a constitutional monarchy with multi-party parliamentary democracy. The main demands of the movements were incorporated in the new constitution of 1990. However, as a compromise with the king and the military, the constitution confirmed Nepal as a Hindu state and the king as the supreme commander of the army (Von Einsiedel et al 2012: 7).

The multi-party democratic system that came into being in 1991 did open up the political space in Nepal for marginalized groups to push for their rights, although the governments during these years generally failed to address their grievances. Moreover, the governments between 1991-1996 were all short-lived, and failed to provide necessary stability to the political system (Von Einsiedel et al 2012: 7). It was in this context that the Maoist insurgency found widespread popular support.

14 Literally translated as "The People's Movement".

4.2 The Maoist insurgency of 1996 - 2006

The Maoist insurgency should be understood against the backdrop of the *Jana Andolan*. This movement paved the way for the re-introduction of political parties in Nepal, and thereby legitimized the Maoists, who up until that point had merely been an underground movement. Following the popular uprising of 1990 the Maoist movement was able to participate as a political party in the new multi-party system under the name United People's Front (UPF) (Bohara et al 2011: 887).

The *Jana Andolan* however did not prove to be quite as groundbreaking as many had hoped it would be. In fact, most commentators argue that the democratic reforms introduced in the wake of the popular uprising were merely a mirage for most of the population of Nepal. The majority of the citizens still remained in abject poverty and lacked any real political influence, as political parties largely pursued the interests of the Hindu upper castes (Bohara et al 2011: 887)¹⁵.

The Maoist found mobilizing ground in the structural inequality, poverty, and lack of political influence of the ordinary Nepali citizen. On February 13, 1996 the Maoist splinter division Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) ignited The People's War by attacking a police station in the hill district Rolpa in Western Nepal (Bohara et al 2011: 887-888; Uppsala Conflict Database: Nepal). The attack provoked heavyhanded retribution by the police, which in turn fed the popular support for the Maoists, thus enabling the insurgency to recruit members more easily (Bohara et al 2011: 887-888).

The civil war lasted for 10 years, during which time approximately 13.000 people lost their lives. The Maoist insurgents deployed guerilla tactics and targeted government officials, police officers and public infrastructure, and managed to seize control of large areas of the country. The stated objectives of the insurgency

¹⁵ The caste system in Nepal is highly complex, and intersects with other social identities and structures. This thesis will not dwell further on this matter, but those interested may consult Subedi (2010) for an introduction to caste in Nepal.

were to abolish monarchy, establish a people's republic and elect a CA which would draft a new constitution for Nepal (Quy-Toan and Iyer 2010: 736). As mentioned above, the root causes of the conflict have invariably been identified as endemic poverty combined with vast inequalities between different groups in Nepal, i.e. "horizontal inequality" (Von Einsiedel et al 2012: 8-17; NOREF 2013: 3).

In 2006, reacting to a royalist seizure of power in 2005, a popular movement known as *Jana Andolan II* paved the way for the abolition of the monarchy, the reinstatement of multi-party rule and eventually the signing of the CPA between the government and the CPN-M, who had reached a mutually hurting stalemate in the conflict (Surkhe 2009: 8, 33). Amongst its most important achievements, the CPA formalized a permanent ceasefire between the parties; tasked the UN with overseeing the disarmament of certain cantonments; provided for elections of a CA, an interim constitution, interim legislature and government, and suspended the monarchy until the constituent assembly decide further on its role (Uppsala Conflict Database: Nepal).

4.3 Post-conflict era

Following the signing of the CPA on November 21, 2006 Nepal entered into its post-conflict phase, in which the main challenges would be to implement the points of the peace agreement and build sustainable peace.

Although the actual peacemaking process was largely a Nepali achievement¹⁶, the subsequent peacebuilding phase has involved the international community to a larger extent. Perhaps most notably, the UN came to occupy a central role in this delicate phase through the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) which was established in early 2007. UNMIN was tasked with three broad components,

¹⁶ Albeit with some degree of foreign influences. See Van Einsiedel et al (2012) chapter 6 for an elaboration on this topic.

namely: monitoring of arms and armies; support of the CA election, and assistance for monitoring the peace process at the local level (UNMIN; Von Einsiedel et al 2012: 207). The UN mission was the deliberate creation of the former conflict parties, and was as such enshrined in the CPA (Uppsala Conflict Database: Nepal).

In addition to the creation of UNMIN, the CPA also stipulated the continued presence of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) which had been active in Nepal since 2005 (Surkhe 2009: 15). The mandate of the OHCHR was to independently monitor and report on the human rights situation in Nepal (Von Einsiedel et al 2012: 181-183).

Both the UNMIN and OHCHR offices in Nepal were closed down in 2011. The former closed as a consequence of a UN Security Council decision, and the latter as the Nepal government did not renew its mandate (Von Einsiedel et al 2012: 228). However, the UN still remains in Nepal through the work of its other programs, such as for example the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

The UNDP has been active in Nepal since 1963 and has mainly been focusing on combating poverty through capacity building of government agencies, civil society and community groups (UNDP Nepal). In addition to its work on reducing poverty, the UNDP also has a strong focus on enhancing the rule of law as well as promoting and strengthening human rights. Moreover, since the end of the conflict in 2006 the UNDP has a specific program on peacebuilding which takes up about 20 percent of its annual budget (UNDP Nepal Annual Report 2013: 52).

Aside from these UN agencies myriad organizations and agencies, both local and international, have proliferated in the peacebuilding efforts following the CPA. It is however beyond the grasp of this thesis to cover all of these organizations and activities¹⁷.

¹⁷ For an overview of some of the organizations and agencies that are active in peacebuilding in contemporary Nepal, see: Insight on Conflict: Peacebuilding Organizations.

Finally, it is relevant to note that the international peacebuilding operations in Nepal can be characterized as a "light footprint" approach, where local ownership of the peace process has remained high, and Nepali politicians have to a large extent dictated the level of acceptable influence of international actors (Surkhe 2009; Von Einsiedel et al 2012: 201-231).

5. Main findings and analysis

5.1 How can the contrasting perspectives on the Nepali peace process be understood?

As described in the introduction of this thesis, the Nepali peace process is frequently portrayed in highly contrasting terms. On the one hand it is described as a liberal peace success story in the making, and on the other hand as a failure which has created an unsustainable and poor quality peace. How can these contrasting perspectives be understood?

As suggested by academics such as Oliver Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty, part of the explanation might be found in the disjuncture between the top-down perspective of the liberal peacebuilding model and the bottom-up perspective of everyday experiences of life in Nepal. Let us investigate this notion further by looking closer at these perspectives to see whether the contrast might stem from here.

5.1.1 Liberal top-down peacebuilding

In this section the focus will be on how the UN has been portraying the peacebuilding process in Nepal. The UN is taken as the case example as it has

been one of the most salient peacebuilding actors in Nepal, as well as an international actor which is frequently associated with top-down and technocratic approaches to peacebuilding¹⁸.

On June 29, 2012 the UN pledged an additional 8 million USD in funding for the UN Peace Fund for Nepal¹⁹. In a press release from the UN News Centre announcing the sustained funding, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nepal Robert Piper described the peacebuilding process in the following terms:

There have been important achievements in the peace process to date, including the completion of the discharge and integration process of the ex-Maoist army, the successful and largely peaceful elections in 2008, the removal of all minefields, and a smooth transition to a Republic (UN News Centre).

In the same press statement Mr. Piper discussed the remaining challenges of the peace process, focusing mainly on the missed deadline for the creation of a new constitution and the dissolution of the CA that followed (UN News Centre).

In a similar vein, UNDP Nepal's Annual Report of 2013 identifies Nepal's primary remaining challenge as the creation of a "democratic and inclusive constitution that is acceptable to all sections of society" (UNDP Nepal Annual Report 2013: 2). The report proceeds by highlighting the significant contribution of UNDP in the continuing struggle to achieve such a constitution: "UNDP's support to electoral reform contributed to making the 2013 elections inclusive, fair and peaceful" (ibid: 2).

These examples are largely representative of the manner in which the peace process in Nepal is portrayed by the UN – i.e. as a mainly successful enterprise with several important achievement to date, albeit with some challenges still ahead. These challenges are however often presented in technical terms, e.g. that the work on the constitution must be resumed and finalized. In a similar fashion, the UN's representation of the hitherto "success" of the peace process is mainly

18 See: Richmond 2009: 560-561.

19 The UN Peace Fund for Nepal is a coordinating UN body which directs resources for activities of clear relevance to the peace process. As such, it does not implement any projects of its own.

focusing on technical achievements, e.g. the discharge of combatants from cantonments and the carrying out of free and fair elections. According to this logic, the success of the peacebuilding process becomes a matter of ticking off boxes on a checklist which will eventually be exhausted, after which the peace process will be considered complete.

Interestingly, the aforementioned UN press statement of June 29, 2012 does mention the medium and long- term importance of addressing the structural causes of the conflict in Nepal: "Nepal will also require investment for medium- and long-term initiatives to address the underlying causes of the conflict" (UN News Centre). This indicates that the UN conceives of peacebuilding in Nepal as a sequential process²⁰, where addressing the root causes of the conflict is a task that is considered relevant only in the medium to long term. Accordingly, it is not considered a fundamental problem that the root causes of the conflict are left largely unaddressed in the first wave of the peacebuilding process, as they will supposedly be addressed later on. This kind of sequenced approach to peacebuilding might help account for the different evaluations of the peacebuilding process in Nepal.

Let us now proceed by examining the everyday dynamics of peace in Nepal, to see how that may enrich our understanding of the issue further.

5.1.2 Everyday dynamics of peace in Nepal

During the field study in Kathmandu I frequently came across the conception that the everyday situation for most people had deteriorated since the end of the conflict. Interlocutors explained that prices of food, water, fuel, housing and electricity had risen radically since the end of the conflict, and that unemployment was becoming more and more widespread. There was a common opinion that more time had to be spent on securing the basic necessities of everyday life, and

20 See: Richmond 2009: 568

that there was little, if any, time for focusing on social activities, and even less so on engaging in politics. This notion was vividly expressed by a male interlocutor, a tour organizer for the tourist industry and a father of two:

People in Kathmandu today are only thinking about how to survive, what to eat in the evening, what to eat in the morning, when to go to the office [...]. This is the main problem; if they had enough resources then they could think about the political situation, about the government, and about the country (Interview 1).

This opinion can be seen as indicative of the disjuncture between the technocratic problem-solving approach of peacebuilding agencies such as the UN, and the everyday dynamics of life in post-conflict Nepal. Given this disjuncture peacebuilding agencies can proclaim successes when certain objective criteria have been met, such as the completion of the integration process of former combatants, while at the same time most people perceive their everyday situation to have gotten worse since the peace agreement was signed. These two realities can thus exist side by side, and thereby produce highly contrasting perspectives on the progress of the peace process.

A second common theme that was found when conducting interviews in Kathmandu was the perception that the national political system is dysfunctional. Nepali politicians were frequently portrayed as greedy, corrupt, self-serving, and unwilling to compromise. According to most interlocutors there is a lack of a common sense of purpose amongst national politicians who generally are not seen to be working for the interests of Nepal as a whole. The notion of the self-serving politician was conveyed by, among others, a male interlocutor who works as a teacher at a secondary school in Budhanilkantha, Kathmandu:

Value based politics is becoming eradicated from the country [...]. Instead it is replaced by selfish politics. If they find any benefits from the politics, leaders do that, whether this is ethically correct or not (Interview 6).

The fact that the national political system is perceived to be fundamentally flawed is likely to influence the way that people in Nepal appreciate the progress of the

peacebuilding process. From the perspective of lived experience in Nepal, it matters little that the UN has helped organize democratic elections if said elections only produce politicians who are self-serving and corrupt, and in effect perpetuate Nepal as a highly unequal and poverty-ridden society.

A third salient theme that came up during the fieldwork was the perceived failure of international agencies working in development and peacebuilding in the country. There was a commonly held attitude amongst the interlocutors that these international agencies are failing to make a difference due to a lack of understanding of the local context, an urban bias, national vested interests, as well as an unwillingness to incorporate local people and resources in the process. A male teacher in Bansbari, Kathmandu expressed his frustration with the work of international agencies in the following manner:

They don't like to go to the rural areas [...]. You are going to conduct a program in the rural area, but still you are not thinking about the participation of the local people [...]. Public participation should be more [...] the local area, the local people, local resources should be utilized to the optimum level (Interview 2).

When prompted about how international agencies might make a better contribution to Nepal, the interlocutor replied:

INGOs are somehow always working for their own nations first and then secondly they are working for Nepal [...]. Whenever you have come to help Nepal, see that the Nepalese are helped [...]. If your vision is not clear, then you will not do anything – and that is happening in Nepal (Interview 2).

The above is indicative of the failure of international agencies to properly understand and connect with the local context, thereby creating projects that do not resonate well with local needs and circumstances. As such, these projects will invariably be considered failures from the local perspectives, whereas international agencies are likely to add them to their list of achievements.

5.1.3 Concluding discussion

In the above, we find a number of themes that can help explain the contrasting perspectives on the Nepali peace process. To a large extent the above confirms the common critique of the liberal peacebuilding model, problematizing its technocratic, top-down and problem-solving approach to building peace, as well as its inability to properly understand and adapt to the realities of everyday life in post-conflict societies.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that the UN has adopted an emancipatory rhetoric on peacebuilding²¹, which is clear in its reference to addressing the root causes of the conflict. However, this is only considered a priority in the medium and long term, which confirms that the UN peacebuilding operations in Nepal so far follows the standard trajectory of liberal peacebuilding, where emancipatory peace is considered an option only in the final stages, after already having engaged in extensive security and state-building operations.

Given the fact that many of the interlocutors of this study expressed a deep dissatisfaction with the work of peacebuilding and development agencies, as well as with the socio-economic and political conditions of their everyday lives, one might question whether this has in fact been the most appropriate approach to peacebuilding in Nepal. Instead, one might have had adopted an approach where the everyday dimensions of peace, such as for example the widespread poverty and inequality, were addressed simultaneously and with equal weight as security and state-building issues at the first stages of the process. I suggest that this post-liberal approach²² to peacebuilding would have resonated better with the needs and experiences of the interlocutors of this study.

21 See: Richmond 2009: 561.

22 See: Richmond 2007: 577, 574.

5.2 Can life in post-conflict Nepal fruitfully be conceptualized as a "no war, no peace"-society, and if so, what are the possible implications of this on the peace process?

In this section I will elaborate on the everyday dimensions of life in post-conflict Nepal to assess the extent to which Nepal can be described as a "no war, no peace"-society. Following this I will attempt to identify some of the possible implications of this for the future of the peacebuilding process.

5.2.1 Everyday life in Nepal as "no war, no peace"

As already noted in section 5.1.2 it is clear from the interviews that everyday life in Kathmandu has gotten more strenuous since the end of the conflict, and that the national political situation is considered dysfunctional. Political parties are seen as unable to cooperate in a democratic manner, and therefore as a source of constant political instability. This notion was articulated by, among others, a female lawyer interlocutor of Lazimpat, Kathmandu: "Since the peace agreement there has been so many leaderships of Nepal [...] there is no political stability [...] the parties do not trust each other" (Interview 4). Moreover, since the peace agreement of 2006, Nepal has been increasingly troubled by organized crime, in particular in the Terai region of the country (AHRC 2010; Surkhe 2009).

Furthermore, the service delivery of Nepal's public institutions to its citizens was overwhelmingly seen as faltering by the interlocutors of this study. A student interlocutor used the example of how passports are issued in Nepal to illustrate this point:

If you pay 5.000 you get your passport in 45 days, if you pay 10.000 you get your passport in two weeks, if you are ready to pay 15.000 you get it in 48 hours [...] the government is just doing business in Nepal instead of serving the people (Interview 10).

Adding the above factors together it is fairly uncontroversial to argue that Nepal can be conceived of as a "no war, no peace"-society. Does this entail that Nepal is currently on the brink of a return to civil war? I argue that this claim is dubious, as we shall see below in a discussion which highlights subtle factors that are "deeply embedded within social and cultural norms" (Mac Ginty 2008: 107) and which may serve as a restraint to civil war recidivism.

5.2.2 Popular agency and the demise of existential fear

One of the main insights that was gained from conducting interviews in Nepal is that although certain dimensions of life in Kathmandu, such as the material and political, remain the same or have even deteriorated since the end of the conflict, other dimensions have in fact radically changed.

Most notably, people are no longer experiencing existential fear as they were during the conflict. As noted by an interlocutor: "during the conflict nobody went anywhere, they were always scared, they were always worried when the news came and they heard how many people died in the conflict" (Interview 4). In fact, most of the people that I interviewed had somehow been influenced by the violence of the conflict – either from a direct encounter with Maoist insurgents, having friends or family killed, or simply by being constrained by constant police surveillance. As expressed by an interlocutor: "in the wartime we could not go anywhere, and there were always police checking you" (Interview 1). These conflict-related fears have now been mostly eradicated from Nepali society, according to the interlocutors that I spoke to.

The implications of the above appear to be far-reaching. As people are no longer experiencing existential fear a new freedom is found in life in Kathmandu - one that enables people to move about at will and to re-engage politically. As expressed by an interlocutor, a male youth leader of a political party: "Before the peace process it was totally dark – but now it is light. People have achieved some kind of awareness [...] now they are fearless" (Interview 3).

Although the people that I interviewed were all mostly discontent with the current political situation, there was simultaneously a strong sense of agency for political change amongst many of them. The following statement from an interlocutor is indicative of this: "Nepali politicians must change! Otherwise, as the new generation has come, they may remove them all" (Interview 6). Thus, it appears that the end of the conflict has empowered people to regain a sense of freedom and political agency, and opened up for the resumption of political awareness and action.

The political reawakening after the conflict should not only be understood as a freedom from existential fear, but should also be seen against the backdrop of recent Nepali political events, where people's movements have managed to remove the authoritative power of the king in favor of democratic government on no less than two occasions in the past two decades.

5.2.3 Concluding discussion

Most interlocutors confirmed that life in contemporary Kathmandu is indeed characterized by many of the defining conditions of a "no war, no peace"-society, i.e. poverty, political turbulence, widespread inequality, high levels of crime and unemployment, and unsatisfying service delivery. These are some of the same conditions that have frequently been identified as the root causes of the civil war in Nepal. From this, one might conclude that the risk for civil war recidivism is

palpable.

Significantly however, the interlocutors that I spoke to generally exhibited a strong belief in the agency of the Nepali people to change the political situation, should that prove necessary. These voices signaled confidence in democratic governance, and hope in the younger generations of politicians who are currently in the process of replacing the old *garde* of politicians. Public optimism about the democratic and peaceful future of Nepal appears to be strong, despite the adverse conditions of political and everyday life. I argue that these "subtle factors"²³ are likely to have a restraining influence on civil war recidivism, to a certain extent even in the face of the root causes of the conflict remaining unaddressed.

Having said that, it is important to note that civil war recidivism is influenced by a multitude of factors, and that the above may not necessarily be *the* compelling factor that restrains a return to organized violence in Nepal. Moreover, as noted in section 5.1.2, the political activity of many Nepali citizens is currently limited by the constant struggle for everyday basic necessities. Given this, the popular political agency referred to above may be more fruitfully conceived of as a latent *potential*, rather than as a manifest feature of popular activity in Nepal. Nonetheless, I argue that this is an interesting finding which warrants more in-depth studies in Nepal and elsewhere on the role of popular political agency and awareness in restraining a return to civil war.

5.3 How do people in contemporary Nepal envision sustainable peace?

In this section I will begin to sketch the outlines of what everyday, post-liberal, peace in Nepal might entail, by focusing on the needs and perceptions of people in

²³ See: Mac Ginty 2008: 107.

their everyday experiences of life in post-conflict Nepal. This is not intended to paint a complete picture of post-liberal peace in Nepal²⁴, but should merely be taken as subjective expressions of "imagined peace"²⁵.

5.3.1 Visions of peace in Kathmandu

Several interlocutors in Kathmandu expressed the view that the current situation in Nepal should not in fact be called peace. While it was acknowledged that most large-scale violence had ended in the country, many of the interlocutors carried a sense that peace should entail more than that in order to qualify as real, or sustainable, peace. One of the main flaws of the current peace was identified as the general lack of improvement for people in their daily lives, as several interlocutors described how their everyday lives were consumed in a struggle for basic necessities such as water, food and fuel²⁶. Accordingly, for most interlocutors sustainable peace entailed living in a society in which there is not a harsh struggle for basic resources.

Furthermore, many interlocutors identified the fact that Nepal remains a structurally unequal society as one of the main obstacles to reaching sustainable peace. Interlocutor statements such as the following is indicative of this position:

If people are mainstreamed, if people are considered as secondary citizens of a country, if citizens have to stay in a very remote part of the country so that they don't have the same opportunities [...]. Such problems should be addressed in maintaining peace
(Interview 6).

From this statement, one can discern a vision of peace which is informed by a conception of social justice. It expresses a concern that as long as people are

24 In fact, any attempts at constructing a singular version of post-liberal peace would be antithetical to the basic assumptions of post-liberal peace understood as embracing and protecting difference. See: Richmond 2009: 568.

25 See: Mac Ginty 2008: 97-98.

26 This theme was further elaborated on in section 5.1.2.

treated differently and have unequal opportunities based on for example in which district of Nepal they live, there is not going to be sustainable peace in the country.

Several interlocutors also noted that in order for sustainable peace to be built in Nepal, the political leaders must improve their ability to work together for a common purpose²⁷. Thus, many interlocutors identified the need for a stable national political system based on democratic principles of cooperation and compromise as essential for building sustainable peace. As expressed by an interlocutor: "The parties [...] should come to consensus, all parties, in order to get a fresh mandate and to bring peace" (Interview 4).

Moreover, several interlocutors held the opinion that in order to create peace, not only must the political leaders find a way of improving their democratic practices, but they must also decentralize some of their power to the district and local levels. The following statement of an interlocutor is indicative of this position: "I think the major problem in Nepali politics is decentralization of power [...] The power delivery to local level is essential, in my view" (Interview 6). This notion was articulated by multiple interlocutors, who saw decentralization of power as a means to address the structural inequalities in the country, and as such a transition towards a peace worthy of its name. This position contains an appreciation that peace can not be built solely from the top, but must also be anchored in local contexts and political structures.

Finally, it was stressed by several interlocutors that in order for peacebuilding operations to be successful, the meaning of peace must be derived from the particular contexts in which it is to be built. For an "outsider" to be able to understand peace in a local context, he or she must "go to the places, talk to the people, see their lifestyle, and only then can you understand how they are affected by the environmental, economic, political situation" (Interview 1), as an interlocutor expressed it.

²⁷ This issue was further elaborated on in sections 5.1.2 and 5.2.1.

5.3.2 Concluding discussion

The interlocutors that were interviewed for this study suggest that peace must be grounded in the everyday needs of people in post-conflict societies in order to be sustainable. This entails the desirability of designing peacebuilding operations that directly address these needs. As shown above, the interlocutors of this study focus much of their criticism of the current situation in Nepal on the low levels of everyday development for common people in Nepal, as well as the structural inequalities within the country. Given this, one might for example suggest that peacebuilding agencies increasingly take on the task of providing basic social welfare mechanisms in Nepal²⁸.

Moreover, several interlocutors highlighted the problems with the political culture in Nepal as a major obstacle to achieving sustainable peace, which could be taken as an argument for a more politically active role of international peacebuilding agencies in Nepali politics. However, at the same time many interlocutors expressed a strong hesitation about international involvement in the national politics of Nepal²⁹. Therefore, the case for a more active political role of international peacebuilding agencies such as the UN does not seem to resonate well with the wishes of the interlocutors that were interviewed in this study. Instead, the post-liberal argument³⁰ can be fruitfully made that international peacebuilding actors increasingly engage in reciprocal dialogue with local people in their everyday context, to better understand how support can be directed towards the political needs of these populations, without taking on an overly directive role.

28 This general argument is also made by Richmond 2009: 580.

29 As we saw in section 5.1.2.

30 See: Richmond 2009: 576, 579 and Richmond 2010: 691.

6. Summary and concluding discussion

This thesis has argued that the contrasting perspectives on the Nepali peace process can largely be attributed to the disjuncture between the top-down technocratic perspective of the liberal peacebuilding approach on the one hand, and the bottom-up perspective of everyday experiences in post-conflict Nepal on the other. Moreover, it has been found that everyday life in Kathmandu is characterized by many of the distinguishing conditions of a "no war, no peace"-society. Significantly however, there appears to be socio-cultural factors that currently restrain a return to civil war, as public optimism about the democratic and peaceful future of Nepal remains strong despite the adverse conditions of political and everyday life. Finally, it has been argued that sustainable peace in contemporary Nepal remains elusive to the common Nepali citizen, in the face of a lack of everyday development, national political progress, and socio-economic equality.

Notwithstanding how positive the identification of potentially pacifying socio-cultural factors in Nepal is, one should contemplate how these factors might be weakened by the "no war, no peace"-situation that many Nepali people are currently facing. Under these circumstances, I argue that it would be wise not to assume that these factors can place a permanent restraint on large-scale organized violence in the country. Thus, it should be ensured that current peacebuilding operations swiftly address the socio-economic and political grievances of the population in order to avoid the erosion of this pacifist momentum. As suggested in this thesis, international peacebuilding agencies could preferably engage in

comprehensive, perhaps selectively distributed, social welfare provision in Nepal. Additionally, it would be advisable that these agencies increasingly enter into reciprocal dialogue with local populations on how they might otherwise contribute to producing conditions for sustainable peace, rather than to continue working according to the liberal peace "blueprint".

Although this study largely confirms the validity of Richmond's arguments about the need to move beyond traditional conceptions of the liberal peace, there are still some critical points to raise here. First of all – in terms of policy relevance, Richmond's conceptualization of post-liberal peace is *per definition* weak. This entails that studies in specific post-conflict societies need to be conducted in order for his arguments to have any bearing on concrete peace policy. Further, the post-liberal peace framework can easily be (mis-)read as an idealization of the local population, which might prove problematic in the face of violence-prone or anti-democratic local forces³¹. Although this reading is arguably not the intention of Richmond, a research agenda on post-liberal peace must engage critically with these issues in order not to become uncritically biased towards the local.

In addition to the above, the research implications of this thesis are plentiful. First, more comprehensive studies should be conducted in order to substantiate and develop the findings of this preliminary study. Such studies would preferably involve a larger number of interlocutors, as well as cover broader geographic locations of Nepal.

Secondly, one might fruitfully conceive of studies which seek to better understand what Mac Ginty refers to as conflict-restraining factors of a "subtle quality" (2008: 107) amongst the populace. What are the constitutive elements of these socio-cultural factors? How might it be possible to build upon these to expand and anchor them as part of a national pacifist culture?

Finally, it is imperative to study how international peacebuilding actors could be made more receptive to local needs and to increasingly engage in dialogue with local populations in Nepal. The current research agenda on hybridity in relation to

31 See: Donais 2009:12-13

peacebuilding is promising in this regard³², however, it would gain from being complemented by more studies in specific post-conflict settings such as Nepal.

32 See for example: Richmond 2012 and Mac Ginty 2010b

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7.4 List of Interviews

Interview 1, 2013-04-26.

Interview 2, 2013-04-30.

Interview 3, 2013-05-02.

Interview 4, 2013-05-02.

Interview 5, 2013-05-05.

Interview 6, 2013-05-07.

Interview 7, 2013-05-07.

Interview 8, 2013-05-09.

Interview 9, 2013-05-13.

Interview 10, 2013-05-14.

Interview 11, 2013-05-14.

Annex 1

Interview Guide.

Topics to be covered during the interviews:

1. Social identity and brief life story of the interlocutor.
2. Personal views and experiences of national politics since the first democratic movement in 1990 (Jana Andolan).
3. Personal views and experiences of the conflict between 1996-2006.
4. Personal views and experiences of the peacebuilding process that started in 2006.
5. Personal reflections on life prior to and after the official Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006.
6. Final thoughts, critique, comments, and recommendations for the research.