



# IDS WORKING PAPER

Volume **2016** No **464**

## **Power, Violence, Citizenship and Agency: A Review of the Literature**

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January 2016

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IDS Working Paper 464  
© Institute of Development Studies 2016  
ISSN: 2040-0209 ISBN: 978-1-78118-288-8

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# **Power, Violence, Citizenship and Agency: A Review of the Literature**

Marjoke Oosterom

## **Summary**

This Working Paper comprises a literature review that was carried out to inform the formulation of a research project on power, violence, citizenship and agency, which addresses how social actors react to complex, violence-prone contexts. It reviews recent literature on citizen agency, social agency, leadership, violence and conflict from various disciplines including security studies, conflict studies, social theory, psychology, anthropology, development studies and gender studies. It focuses on the way that agency is conceptualised in each field. While all the disciplinary areas covered acknowledge that agency exists in complex violent settings, few studies refer to transformative agency for prevention or transformation of violent conflict, instead framing agency in terms of participating in violent activities, coping mechanisms for sustaining life in violent circumstances, or maintaining 'ordinary life' during conflict. The only disciplinary areas in which a more theoretical understanding of transformative agency is being developed are in gender studies and development studies, which also address issues of identity and power.

**Keywords:** agency; violence; conflict; power; citizenship

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# Contents

Summary, keywords and author note	3
Acknowledgements	5
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1 Central concepts</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Structure and agency	7
1.2 Power	8
1.3 Violence	9
1.3.1 Forms of violence	9
1.3.2 Frameworks for analysing violence	10
1.4 Legitimacy	12
<b>2 Security studies</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Political settlements	13
2.1.1 Definitions	13
2.1.2 Political settlements, institutions and the social contract	14
2.1.3 DFID's approach to political settlements	15
2.2 The liberal peace thesis	16
2.3 Fragile states	17
2.4 Human security	17
<b>3 Conflict studies</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1 Agency in micro-level conflict studies	19
3.2 Transformation of institutions during conflict	20
3.2.1 Hybrid forms of governance	20
3.2.2 Social institutions before, throughout and after war	21
3.2.3 Shadow economies	23
<b>4 Leadership studies</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1 Transformative leadership framework	24
4.2 Civic and political leadership	25
4.3 Leadership and conflict resolution	26
4.3.1 Conflict specialists as leaders	26
4.3.2 Deepening dialogue through reflective processes	28
<b>5 Anthropology</b>	<b>29</b>
5.1 Agency in the ethnography of violent settings	29
5.2 Violent conflict as process and part of other structures in life	29
5.3 Agency and silence	30
<b>6 Development studies</b>	<b>31</b>
6.1 Agency and violence in development studies	31
6.2 Conflict–development nexus	32
6.3 Social capital and conflict	33
6.4 Horizontal inequalities	33
6.5 Urban violence	33
<b>7 Gender studies</b>	<b>34</b>
7.1 Women as actors in violence	35
7.2 Agency in terms of coping or negotiation	35
7.3 Role of women in peace building	36

<b>8</b>	<b>Conflict transformation, reconciliation and transitional justice</b>	<b>37</b>
8.1	Conflict transformation	37
8.2	Transitional justice	38
<b>9</b>	<b>Sociology and social theory</b>	<b>38</b>
9.1	Social theory and urban violence	38
<b>10</b>	<b>Psychology and psychosocial approaches</b>	<b>40</b>
10.1	Agency in psychology	40
10.2	Peace psychology	40
10.3	Body, mind and emotions	41
10.4	Social and community psychology	43
10.5	Mental health, trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder and agency	44
	<b>References</b>	<b>47</b>

## Acknowledgements

This literature review developed from 2010 to 2013, over the course of the programme. The feedback from all researchers working on the project are gratefully acknowledged: Rosemary McGee, Mariz Tadros, Jethro Pettit and Patta Scott Villiers. Many thanks to Karen Brock for editing the paper.

# Introduction

This Working Paper comprises a literature review carried out to inform the formulation of a research project on power, violence, citizenship and agency. The research addresses how social actors react to complex, violence-prone contexts, and questions include:

- How do immersed social actors exercise agency and use citizen engagement strategies to realise their rights or transform conflict? How do their reactions confirm or negate the legitimacy of powerful actors and structures, tacitly or consciously?
- What hinders or facilitates the efforts of immersed social actors to engage with the conflict?
- What is the role of external actors in catalysing or restraining both violence and the agency to transform violence?
- How can international social actors (aid donors, INGOs and others) best interact with these expressions of agency in the interests of preventing and reducing violence?

The Working Paper reviews recent literature on citizen agency, social agency, leadership, violence and conflict from various disciplines. The first stage of the review was carried out in 2010 and included the fields of security studies, conflict studies, social theory, psychology and mental health studies, anthropology, development studies and gender studies. In 2013, a second stage reviewed literature from leadership studies, political settlements (a subset of security studies), and transformation of institutions (a subset of conflict studies).

The 2010 review examined how ‘agency’ – where possible, in relation to violence and conflict – is conceptualised in each discipline. A quick search of the 2007–10 volumes of key journals in each disciplinary area identified the most recent studies of agency, violence, war and conflict. The most recent and relevant articles and books were reviewed in depth.

The 2013 review searched for relevant articles on agency and leadership in the 2010–13 issues of the following journals: *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, *Journal of Research in Peace*, *Gender and Development*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Peace and Change*, *Peace, Security and Development*, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, and *Peace and Conflict Review*.

Due to the number and extent of disciplinary areas that had to be covered, this is still a ‘light’ review of how agency is studied from various disciplinary angles. It is likely that certain key authors were not included, even though they have made significant contributions to understanding agency in violence-prone settings. Keeping these limitations in mind, the following preliminary conclusions can be made:

- All of the disciplinary areas covered acknowledge that agency exists in complex violent settings. However, the type of agency referred to is not ‘transformative agency’ leading to the ‘realisation of rights’, and the ‘prevention or transformation of violent conflict’. Instead, most of the literature reviewed refers to agency in terms of participating in violent activities (either voluntarily or through some form of coercion); coping mechanisms for sustaining life in violent circumstances; or maintaining ‘ordinary life’ during conflict. Barter (2012) summarises and describes these types of agency.
- In the literature reviewed, agency usually refers to individual ‘human agency’, rather than collective ‘social agency’ or ‘citizen agency’, although there is some reference to a political form of agency where civilians negotiate with armed actors.
- Examples of citizen agency are piecemeal and scattered in numerous empirical studies, and have not resulted in a coherent theory of citizen agency in complex violent settings.
- Little work has been done on the linkages between local-level initiatives and effects at higher levels. The traditional areas of security studies and conflict analysis have not generally address the local level at all.

- Social agency is often assumed; phrases such as ‘peace building’ and ‘conflict transformation’ implicitly include the assumption that agency for the better is possible.
- The only disciplinary areas in which a more theoretical understanding of transformative agency is being developed are in gender studies and development studies, which also address issues of identity and power.

The paper starts by introducing its central concepts. It is then organised according to major disciplinary areas: security studies and international relations; conflict studies; leadership studies; anthropology; development studies; gender studies; social theory; psychology and mental health. Interdisciplinary approaches to studying social agency in violent settings can be found in security studies, conflict studies, development studies and gender studies. In these fields, political scientists, economists and social scientists bring together their views on what makes social interaction possible. However, there is still a gap between academics explaining collective action from various angles and those analysing conflict.

# 1 Central concepts

## 1.1 Structure and agency

A central theme in social theory is the relationship between the individual and society. The traditional debate centres on whether agency shapes or is shaped by structure. Some scholars favour the dominance of society in shaping individual agency, while others argue it is individual agency that creates the patterns of social life (Elliott 2009). In short, scholars tend to argue for ‘society first’, or for ‘humans first’.

Another central debate is what informs behaviour. The dominant rational choice theory, originally developed by economists, depicts humans as individuals who rationally calculate costs and benefits. This paradigm has been challenged by social theorists who propose a more integrated view that takes into account the role of emotions and feelings, the internalisation of socio-cultural norms, and power.

‘Structuralism’ was the dominant paradigm of the 1960s; structuralists argued that human beings live within large political, cultural and socio-economic structures which heavily influence – indeed, even determine – their behaviour, individual choices, beliefs and decisions (Elliott 2009). In this view, structures provide coherence, order and meaning to social interactions.

Theorists who emphasise agency – in personal motives, emotions and reasoning – argue that collective behaviour is the sum of individual actions. In response, structuralists emphasise that modern institutions and organisations explain how individuals comply with the collective (Elliott 2009).

Current debates on structure and agency in all social and human sciences are heavily influenced by the work of modern social theorists Giddens and Bourdieu, who reacted against the rigid ‘dualism’ of individual agency and structure and argued for thinking of an on-going interaction between agents and structure.

Giddens insists that social theory should go beyond the dualism, and his solution is a theory of ‘structuration’ which emphasises the duality of agents and structure (Giddens 1984). He conceptualises society as a process of structuration, in which human actions simultaneously structure and are structured by society (Giddens 1984; Kaspersen 2000). Central to his work is the notion of social practice and how practices are ordered across space and time. Habitual practices are the products of systemic structures as well as of an individual agent.

Giddens thinks of the 'active flow of social life,' rather than a fixed or given society, and of human action as a 'continuous flow', while recognising that human practices are themselves structured and that part of them can be reproduced in society (Elliott 2009). Social practice is depicted as an on-going movement in which agent, power, action, structure, systems, time and space interact to constitute practice (Kaspersen 2000).

The agent is Giddens' point of departure. Human agents are knowledgeable and have the capacity to reflect upon what they do, to understand what they do while doing it (Giddens 1984). Their knowledge is constituted by practical consciousness (the things we know without explicitly expressing them), discursive consciousness (the things we explicitly express), and sub-conscious knowledge. Discursive knowledge is achieved by the agent's capacity to reflect, either on their own or through social interaction. By emphasising the knowledgeable agent, Giddens argues against the idea that structure determines action.

Agency is conceptualised as a process, rather than as a series of distinct actions. Most agency is intentional and has purpose. Three key aspects of agency are: the reflexive monitoring of action (the ability of an agent to evaluate the relationship between their own actions, the actions of others and the circumstances); the rationalisation of action (the ability to evaluate the relation between an action and the reason behind it); and motivation for potential action. Through these processes of agency, many practices become routines and are reproduced. Motivation for action is quite different from monitoring and rationalising action, and is important in agents taking actions outside established routines.

Even though agency is intentional, it can have both expected and unexpected or unintended outcomes. Agents often have limited knowledge of their own condition, and may be unaware of the consequences of their actions; Giddens argues that this is evidence that history is not a rational, progressive process. Unintended consequences become new conditions for further actions. Thus the course of history can change in unpredictable ways.

Giddens explains structure as the 'rules and resources' that agents use in creating and reproducing social life (Kaspersen 2000). Rules guide social action as procedures, forming part of our practical consciousness. We are able to live our lives by applying the right rules to different social contexts.

Like Giddens, Bourdieu emphasises how social conditions influence and are influenced by social actors (Bourdieu 1977). He also agrees that actors have the ability to consciously or unconsciously reflect on their actions. Bourdieu, however, places more emphasis than Giddens on the way that power affects the individual, not only in interpersonal relations but also in deeply personal, embodied feelings and emotions.

Giddens' understanding of structure is that is not as impersonal and external as earlier structuralists claimed. Instead, society is a constant product of the human practices of talking, acting and doing. This is a radical departure from mainstream sociological accounts that view structure as an inevitable constraint; according to, Giddens structures can be both enabling and constraining.

Applying these concepts to violence and conflict means asking about the particularities of structure and agency in a conflict setting, and examining the interplay between the two.

## **1.2 Power**

In Chapter 15 of his edited volume on power, Haugaard proposes a theory of power that is part of a general theory of social order (Haugaard 2002). He argues that people possess 'natural power', which is the capacity for action based on an individual's understanding of how nature works. A person has 'social power' by virtue of their membership of society, and this is shaped partly by the predictability of other people's behaviour. Haugaard makes a distinction between goals and structures, and uses this to explain different two types of



conflict in society. The first is over specific goals that reproduce social structures. The second is deeper, over structure itself, and challenges the existing social order.

To Bourdieu, power is present in all fields, but there is also a specific 'meta-field' of power that operates in two ways (Navarro 2006): it shapes relationships in all other fields, and represents the dominant class. A struggle for power – over both resources and symbolic power – is at the heart of all social relations. Symbolic capital is a form of power, which can be exercised through a shared belief about the relative positions of agents in a field, how their position is seen by others and deemed legitimate. Symbolic power is a legitimating form of power involving the consent or complicity of others (Hillier and Rooksby 2002).

To Giddens, agents have transformative capacity in that they have the power to intervene or to refrain from an intervention ('to act otherwise'). Agency refers to the capacity of human beings to change things and is therefore related to power.

### **1.3 Violence**

People develop different coping strategies in response to the different forms of violence they encounter. There is increasing awareness about the interconnectedness of different forms of violence, and any analysis of violence needs to include the relationships between types of violence and the processes that lead from one to another.

#### **1.3.1 Forms of violence**

Definitions of violence, conflict and war are extensively discussed in the literature, from direct lethal violence to poverty as a form of structural violence. Furthermore, there are normative debates about the extent to which the use of violence by non-state actors is tolerable. The gives some helpful starting points for developing an understanding of violence in all its forms:

Arendt's classic work *On Violence* (1970) distinguishes power, force, violence, strength and authority.

Wood (2008) discusses a 'repertoire' of violent acts, arguing that patterns of violence vary across contexts, and that the social effects and meanings of violence also depend on the socio-cultural context. Wood suggests that there is a lack of understanding of how various forms and patterns of violence shape other social processes.

- Bourdieu's 'symbolic violence' (discussed above) is intrinsically linked to power relations, and refers to violence consciously or unconsciously experienced by a social agent with their complicity. Bourdieu used the example of masculine domination as a typical example of symbolic violence, an illustration that is further elaborated in feminist theory. Symbolic violence "is not merely physical violence but the ways in which certain gendered norms, values and dominant discourses come to be accepted as 'natural', 'normal' or the 'way things are'." (Powell 2008: 173).
- Galtung (1964) distinguishes between 'positive peace' and 'negative peace'. Negative peace refers to the absence of direct violence, but positive peace is more than this, referring to a situation where the state and other potentially conflicting groups collaborate, and their relationships are supportive of society. This framing is widely used in peace and conflict studies today.
- Galtung also introduced the concept of 'structural violence' and defined violence as "those factors that cause people's actual physical and mental realisations to be below their potential realisations", which is sometimes the result of social and political structures (Galtung 2969: 168). Lubkemann summarises subsequent elaborations 'structural violence' as "extreme degrees of social inequality that prevent the socially marginalised from achieving a particular threshold of living conditions", criticising the reality that 'threshold' is usually defined by outsiders (2008: 111).

- Kalyvas provides an extensive description of concepts of violence, covering a wide array of literature (Kalyvas 2006).
- Kaldor (2007a: 1) sees human security as “freedom from fear and freedom from want”.
- Sen (2006) focuses on how people have multiple identities in relation to violent; in his more recent work (2006, 2008) he discusses the relationship between culture, identities, inequality and violence. Others (Broch Due 2005; Scheper Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Schmidt and Schroeder 2001) have used anthropological understandings to discuss the relationship between identity and violence.

### **1.3.2 Frameworks for analysing violence**

#### **Framework 1: The violence chain**

The violence chain framework (Moser and Horn 2011) was developed for Urban Tipping Point (UTP) project of the Global Urban Research Centre at the University of Manchester, funded by the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council and Department for International Development (DFID). UTP’s concept and methods papers and case studies (Dili, Patna, Nairobi and Santiago) can be found at [www.urbantippingpoint.org](http://www.urbantippingpoint.org)

The framework focuses on the ‘tipping point’ of violence – the moment when violence breaks out at a large scale, when small behavioural shifts result in radically altered circumstances. The UTP project examined quantitative variables (increase in poverty, number of youth, levels of political exclusion, thresholds of gender-based insecurity) and qualitative variables (certain contextual factors, the involvement of specific actors in violence-related processes) to understand the circumstances that lead to a tipping point (Moser and Horn 2011). The term ‘violence chain’ is used to describe the way that different types of violence generated by tipping points interact, and have a knock-on effect. The concept is based on the notion of a commodity or value chain, underlining the idea that violence operates systematically and involves a range of processes.

Although ‘chain’ is used as a metaphor for connectedness, it suggests a series or particular order of processes, and that the chain may ‘break’ if one of the components is taken out. For studying types of violence, it may be better to speak of a ‘web’ or ‘system,’ since the elimination of one type does not mean the end of other types.

In this framework are three levels of analysis in studying a violence chain:

- Components of the violence chain: different types of violence (political, institutional, economic, socio-economic and social) can be identified and visualised in ‘road maps’ (Moser and Horn 2011).
- How different types of violence articulate: causal relationships between types of violence can be identified in flow diagrams, by drawing the chain and mapping institutions and organisations linked to violence.
- How types of violence are embedded in institutional settings: studying the role of institutions in structuring the relationships between different types of violence.

On the of the UTP violence chain case studies (Omenya and Lubaale 2012) focuses on urban violence in Nairobi, Kenya. Using participatory violence appraisal (PVA) techniques, researchers distinguished six main types of violence, and rich definitions of each; for example, political violence is not only physical, but also about ‘negative and hate speech’. Although political violence is very significant, in everyday life, many citizens encounter domestic and economic violence, often between landlords and tenant. Types of violence are spatially linked and there are ‘hotspots’.

Timeline exercises stressed the importance of the historical political context, with events as far back as the 1920s and inter-ethnic relations vital for understanding contemporary forms of violence. Matrices and discussions about the roles of institutions were especially important for producing insights about what made conflict tip into violence. The behaviour of politicians (inciting youth, hiring youth to unleash violence) and elders (training youth on tribalism, justifying violence as a means) came out strongly. Criminal gangs, generally associated with violence, were also perceived as institutions that stopped violence, secured certain areas and protected residents.

A number of violence chains were identified, including: political party differences tipping into political violence, involving political leaders and their relationships with youth; interethnic violence exacerbated by misrepresentation of information provided by the media and simplistic interpretation of events; violence chains within the family; and ethnic violence resulting in political violence.

### **Key reading**

Moser's UTP methodology paper (2012) gives a very accessible overview of the principles of participatory violence appraisal (PVA) and techniques used to identify tipping points, violence chains and solutions.

### **Framework 2: Types and perpetrators of violence**

Steenkamp (2011) offers a framework for the analysis of different types of violence in a post-war period, which is based on the perpetrators and types of violence.

In post-conflict societies, and also after political settlements, political violence often continues and forms of non-political violence increase. Steenkamp emphasises the interconnectedness of these types of violence: "The interconnectedness is found in: a) the causes of violence (the war and its associated political violence create conditions that stimulate violence) and b) the perpetrators of violence (insofar as the perpetrators of political violence are often also the perpetrators of other forms of violence)" (2011: 377).

It is not just war that causes violence: Steenkamp argues that the dual processes of conflict and peacemaking determine who the perpetrators of post-settlement violence are, and the types of violence they use. Conflict and peace process create structural conditions that stimulate the use of violence. High levels of political violence during conflict create structural change and stimulate the rise of violent actors, which are conducive factors to the rise of other types of violence.

One of the structural conditions created during war and peace transitions is the 'war-crime nexus', the intimate link between political actors and criminal networks, both of which benefit from economic opportunities of a war. These networks persist and support violence after a political settlement.

Steenkamp's framework distinguishes political, economic and social violence and argues that they are interconnected because of their shared origins. The perpetrators of violence use all three types during a conflict and peace processes, but there are shifts in the types of violence that prevail.

Political violence "affects the distribution of political power in society and aims to change macro-level political relationships" (2011: 366). This is the prevalent type of violence during conflict, but continues in post-conflict scenarios. Its perpetrators are often militarist entities, frequently those that did not agree with peace dividends or those who feel excluded from the settlement; they become 'spoilers' of a peace accord.

Economic violence – “the use of force to influence profit-driven, market-related activities, relationships and behaviour” (2011: 367) – refers to war economies and the relationship between post-war situations and organised crime.

Social violence – “violence used in the pursuit of social power” (2011: 368) – is used to change power relations between communities, groups or individuals and to maintain social order/control. One cause of social violence is lack of trust in the capacities of the state to offer protection, which leads communities to develop mechanisms and institutions to protect themselves. Steenkamp mentions that this type of violence often has a gendered dimension, as when men using violence as a response to their marginalisation leads. But all types of violence are also gendered in the sense that their effects are different for men and women.

Steenkamp also identifies four levels of violence that cut across the political, social and economic domains: international (involving international actors such as industry, private military companies and organised crime networks); state (involving security apparatuses, police, army and intelligence agencies acting outside the rule of law); community (involving non-state armed actors such as militias, vigilantes, gangs, and mobs engaged in violent riots); and individual (economic and social violence perpetrated by individuals that is not part of a broader, collective agenda).

As knowledge deepened on the interconnectedness of political and other types of violence – in particular, violence that is related to organised crime in post-conflict situations – efforts are under way to develop a ‘general theory of violence’.

### **Key reading**

‘Is a General Theory of Violence Possible?’, special issue of the *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 3: 1 (2009)

## **1.4 Legitimacy**

Legitimacy refers to the non-coerced acceptance of the state by its people, and the capacity of the state to effectively represent its citizens (Fabra Mata and Ziaja 2009: 6). It is important to see legitimacy as the product of a process of legitimation.

According to the World Development Report (WDR) 2011, the resolution of conflict lies in strengthening legitimate institutions – in particular those which provide citizens with security, justice and jobs – and governance. The accountability of institutions is seen as an important way of avoiding violence. The WDR defines legitimacy as the “broad-based belief that social, economic, or political arrangements and outcomes are proper and just” (World Bank 2011: xvi), but also as the “responsiveness of institutions [...] it is used as shorthand for capacity, inclusion and accountability” (2011: 84).

The report distinguishes different types or sources of legitimacy: political (accountability), process (using democratic mechanisms for citizen voice), performance (of core functions like security, economic oversight and services, and justice), and international (recognition by the international community). The role of citizens is seen as relevant mainly for political legitimacy, where the report emphasises that political processes should include voices of all citizens equally and offer mechanisms to resolve disputes, including for complaints against the state.

The Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in a 2010 report entitled *The State’s Legitimacy in Fragile Situations* (OECD 2010), calls for a more empirically grounded and people-centred perspective on legitimacy, stating that:

*The starting point should be to focus on the actual processes of state–society interaction in a specific context.* This is crucial to understanding how state capacity emerges, and how ideas of legitimacy influence people’s willingness to engage with the state.

(OECD 2010: 8, original italics)

In the OECD document, legitimacy is not a by-product of state capacity or of service provision. State capacity and legitimacy are interdependent; a lack of legitimacy can undermine efforts to build state capacity, thus deepening state fragility. A lack of state capacity may further erode its legitimacy. The report highlights the very different understandings of legitimacy held outside western countries and points out that people in different places prioritise different sources of legitimacy. Local realities in many contexts mean that there are hybrid forms of formal and customary institutional authority. Donors should therefore “start by seeking a much better understanding of local people’s (diverse) perceptions and beliefs about what constitutes legitimate political authority” (2010: 11). This can be challenging, because donors themselves can be perceived as illegitimate, and local understandings of legitimacy may not suit donor agendas.

This grounded conceptualisation of legitimacy is a step forward in bringing citizens back into the equation. But it could be taken a step further. Although citizen perceptions of legitimacy are emphasised, their actions and the processes of legitimation they contribute to are not fully appreciated.

## 2 Security studies

Security studies has traditionally paid very little attention to human and social agency, because of its focus on the nation state. In this field, agency often refers to the ability of the state to protect its own territory and sovereignty; only relatively recently has it also come to include the state’s capacity to protect its subjects.

Recent developments in the field of security studies and international relations leave room for local-level agency; critics of the liberal peace thesis, and both advocates and critics of human security all stress the importance of local-level actors. Although this has contributed significantly to understanding of how local populations experience insecurity, there is still a lack of understanding of power dynamics and the ways in which local actors can actually drive social change.

This section summarises four streams of thinking in security studies: political settlements, the liberal peace thesis, the human security debate, and the fragile state debate.

### 2.1 Political settlements

#### 2.1.1 Definitions

There is a range of different definitions of political settlements.

For the DFID, political settlements are:

...the expression of a common understanding, usually forged between elites, about how power is organised and exercised. They include formal institutions for managing political and economic relations, such as electoral processes, peace agreements, parliaments, constitutions and market regulations. But they also include informal, often

unarticulated agreements that underpin a political system, such as deals between elites on the division of spoils. Political settlements establish the basic rules governing economic relations and resource allocation.  
(DFID 2010: 22)

Khan (2010) defines political settlement as the balance or distribution of power between contending social groups or classes, on which any state is based. It is the foundation of the social order; a compatible, viable and sustainable combination of power and institutions. This definition focuses on bargaining within and between elites, between elite and non-elite classes and social groups, and between different social groups in society.

Laws (2012), in a conceptual review of the term political settlement, sums up a list of recent definitions and demonstrates the lack of clarity around the concept, arguing that this affects governments, donors and international organisations, and may result in diverse and perhaps contradictory interventions. There is a tendency to treat the terms political settlement, peace agreement and elite pacts/bargains as interchangeable.

Moore (2012) suggests that definitions of political settlement vary along at least two dimensions:

- 1) The extent to which we are talking of 'political deals' among small, contending political elites, or broader processes that involve a wider range of political actors.
  - 2) The extent to which a 'settlement' refers simply to a pact or agreement, that might be violated tomorrow, or to institutionalised political practices that develop real staying power in the longer term.
- (Moore 2012: no page)

He doubts whether the term is going to help in understanding conflicts and their resolution.

Various disciplines have used the concept in different ways. Until recently, the conflict studies literature used a narrow definition of political settlement, referring either to the resolution of a war, or to any peaceful, non-violent agreement between contending parties (Di John and Putzel 2009). But historical political economists have always used the term to study power relations. According to Di John and Putzel, the term had no pedigree in political theory, but nonetheless political theories on social contracts have informed thinking on political settlements. Current understandings of political settlement tend to emphasise them as a process of 'bargaining among elites' that influences the balance of power.

### **2.1.2 Political settlements, institutions and the social contract**

Khan's work captures two important strands of thinking about political settlements: theories of elite bargaining, and of the relationship between the social contract and political institutions. Political settlements can explain the nature, functioning and performance of formal and informal institutions. Khan argues that political institutions regulate the distribution of power:

We define this as the relative holding power of different groups and organizations contesting the distribution of resources. (...) A political settlement emerges when the distribution of benefits supported by its institutions is consistent with the distribution of power in society, and the economic and political outcomes of these institutions are sustainable over time.  
(Khan 2010: 1)

According to Khan, in the western, Weberian states there is a direct relationship between formal political institutions and the distribution of power, and these institutions can therefore

be enforced successfully. But in much of the developing world, the operation of informal institutions such as patron–client relationships – which can be viewed as clientelist political settlements – influence the nature and functioning of formal institutions in such a way that they shape the actual balance of power. To Khan, an analysis of political settlements helps to explain why seemingly similar institutions perform very differently across countries. Laws (2012) argues that the political settlement – in terms of the balance of power between elites – influences how institutions perform, but political settlements are also defined by institutions, events and the behaviour of political actors.

To Khan, an analysis of political settlement involves examining on one hand the compatibility between institutions, and on the other, the distribution of power and economic benefits among powerful groups. Elites will strive for economic benefits and try to shape institutions to that end, while institutions affect the distribution of power. Elites will comply with the institutional order as long as they gain a sufficient share of the benefits. A political settlement emerges once the distribution of power and institutions are compatible, viable and sustainable. Economic viability means that there is enough production to avoid economic crisis, and political viability means that the levels of conflict and violence in society do not threaten core institutional arrangements. Sustainability refers to the minimum in economic performance and political stability that keeps society going over time.

Laws (2012) emphasises that a political settlement is not ‘just a form’ of social contract between state and society, because both are so internally diverse. Peace agreements and elite pacts are one-off events that occur as are part of the on-going processes of negotiating power. Political settlements are produced by both formal and informal bargaining processes between elites, but the vertical relationships between elites and their constituencies matter in these processes.

### **2.1.3 DFID’s approach to political settlements<sup>1</sup>**

DFID’s (2010) paper *Building Peaceful States and Societies* explains how peace building and state building are at the centre of their integrated approach to interventions in fragile and conflict-affected countries. DFID’s approach has four objectives, the second of which addresses political settlement:

1. Address the causes and effects of conflict and fragility, and build conflict resolution mechanisms. This is the ‘lens’ to analyse the context and identify priorities within other objectives.
2. Support inclusive political settlements and processes.
3. Develop core state functions: security, law and justice, and financial and macro-economic management.
4. Respond to public expectations. The state must meet expectations, particularly concerning employment, security, public services, human rights and democratic processes, in order to maintain stability and legitimacy.

The first, second and third objectives constitute three ‘domains’ of interventions, and together these should address the causes and effects of conflict and fragility, which are visualised in a diagram as three circles that overlap in the middle. If successful, this would improve state–society relations, which the document defines as “interactions between state institutions and societal groups to negotiate how public authority is exercised and how it can be influenced by people” (2010: 15).

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<sup>1</sup> Two of case studies (on Egypt and Kenya) in the ‘Power, Violence, Citizenship and Agency’ research project were conducted within the ‘Addressing and Mitigating Violence’ thematic area of IDS’s ‘Strengthening Evidence-based Policy’ programme, funded by the UK Department for International Development. This is why relatively high profile is given in this literature review to DFID and the way it frames and approaches these issues.

DFID sees a peace agreement as distinct from a political settlement, but acknowledges that an inclusive peace process and agreement can lay the foundation for a new political settlement (2010: 15). DFID's understanding of political settlements is that they are on-going processes of negotiation about the distribution of power and resources between more and less powerful actors, and that the exclusion of certain actors from these processes can lead to instability and conflict:

Political settlements define how political and economic power is organised. Exclusionary settlements are more likely to lead to instability. Supporting inclusive settlements means understanding the incentives of the elites and identifying when and how to empower different actors to push for a broader settlement. Peace processes provide windows of opportunity to reshape existing settlements, but may not address underlying power dynamics. Support to democratic and political processes can help promote more inclusive decision making.  
(DFID 2010: 7)

## **2.2 The liberal peace thesis**

The liberal peace thesis was based on the premise that there was little conflict among democracies and that therefore countries moving from war to peace should establish liberal democracies and market economies. But in the post-Cold War world order, intra-state wars – rather than inter-state wars – increasingly threatened the security of civilians.

These 'new wars' were different in terms of their goals, methods of warfare and financing (Christie 2010). Underdevelopment was seen as one of the causes of instability and insecurity. Solutions were still sought in liberalism; proponents of the liberal peace thesis continued to argue that development could be brought about and security enhanced by market capitalism and liberal democratic governance (Christie 2010; Duffield 2001). Key actors for peace-building in this model are states, international organisations and financial institutions.

The liberal peace thesis has been heavily criticised for being western and hegemonic, and giving western states the power to define security and responses to insecurity. It is a very state-centred conceptualisation of security, leaving little room for human experience, local context or agency (Richmond 2010). It reinforces the central role of the state, its sovereignty, state institutions and the international system even while these are interrogated in the field of international relations.

Critics demand attention for local-level agency in peace building, arguing that more space should be given to local forms of peace making and reconciliation to compensate for failures of the dominant western models. However, they also warn of the risk of romanticising local forms of peace building and say that endogenous processes should be interrogated (MacGinty 2008). Although this approach advocates for incorporation of local idioms and peace building, it does not look at how social agents are actually able to drive the process, or how they articulate themselves.

New ideas have emerged around 'post-liberal forms of peace' and its politics, in which everyday practices and agency, rights, identity and customs are recognised (Richmond 2010). Local-level agency links to higher levels, enabling political mobilisation around day-to-day issues and building legitimate institutions. A focus on everyday realities helps us to recognise 'hidden' agency in the form of resistance. The everyday is a space where individuals and communities develop strategies to engage with the state or other actors, a site where politicisation, solidarity, agency but also passivity is present.

One idea focused on local-level agency is prospect theory (Costin and Hare 2006), which aims to make sense of how decisions are made under conditions of risk. Originally used to



explain when states deter or behave aggressively in the international state system, prospect theory assumes that people tend to be risk-averse for gains and risk-acceptant for losses.

### 2.3 Fragile states

State fragility is usually described according to whether a state can deliver security to its citizens and maintain its monopoly on the use of force, deliver basic services, and maintain political legitimacy (Brinkerhoff 2007).

Stewart and Brown define a fragile state as a state that is “failing, or at risk of failing, with respect to authority, comprehensive service entitlements or legitimacy” (2009: 3). In this definition, there is an authority failure if the state fails to protect its citizens from any kind of violence. In relation to legitimacy and the absence of legitimate governance, the state fails if its citizens do not perceive it to be legitimate and just, and if it is not democratic. The fragile state label is applied to conflict, non-conflict and post-conflict settings. It is important to note that the label ‘fragility’ may not apply to a state as a whole, but that there may be territorial ‘pockets of fragility’.

As is the case with the liberal peace thesis, this approach is also state-centred. It emphasises state-building and the consolidation of state institutions at national level – such as legislative bodies, the constitution, elections, and the rule of law (Brinkerhoff 2007; Luckham, Kaldor and Goetz 2003).

Critiques of this approach are also similar to critiques of the liberal thesis, that the framing of fragile state discussions is too state-oriented. Creating democratic institutions does not necessarily lead to democratic, inclusive politics. It is more important to understand state–citizen relations, involving issues such as citizenship, democratic accountability and socio-political processes in wider society (Galtung and Tisné 2009; Luckham *et al.* 2003). Ensuring that citizen perspectives on government institutions that affect their lives is the point of departure would deepen this understanding (Eyben and Ladbury 2006).

#### Further reading

State Failure, State Collapse and State Reconstruction: Concepts, Lessons and Strategies’, special issue of *Development and Change*, 35: 5 (2002) questions the predominant institutionalist understandings of the state.

### 2.4 Human security

Human security is a popular conceptualisation of security which resulted from the critique that approaches to conflict and security policies still reflected out-of-date strategies to end wars in which states are the main actors (Kaldor 2007a and b). The 1994 *Human Development Report* stated that security was being interpreted far too narrowly, and that human beings, rather than states, should be central to the concept of security (UNDP 1994). Human security was intended to break away from the state-focused approach and place people at the heart of security thinking.

The concept human security developed in two directions (Kaldor 2007a). One is that it concerns the security of human beings, and that individuals and communities should be protected against any form of political violence. In this view, threats to security come from the violence of genocides, or the violent acts committed by abusive states, terrorists and militant groups (HSN 2005). A wider approach is endorsed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which emphasises the importance of development and the interconnectedness of different securities, like material and physical security. In this view, threats to security can be economic, political and socio-cultural, and include underdevelopment. UNDP distinguishes chronic threats such as hunger and poverty from

emergencies that constitute sudden disruptions of daily life (1994: 23). This notion of human security is further expanded by including protection from threats to human dignity.

These views of security imply a 'bottom-up approach'; people affected by conflict not only have the right to be involved in the processes and operations the local security situation that will influence their lives, but are also the most valuable source of information about local security (Kaldor 2007a). Their ideas must therefore be incorporated into the planning and design of any intervention.

The concept of human security is still a liberal project in the sense that it implies that a pluralist state and market economy are the best ways to enhance the security of individuals (Christie 2010). It has been criticised on the grounds that both states and markets can be a threat to the security of individuals and their communities (Bastian 2004).

Advocates say the concept allows the inclusion of a wide range of issues that cause insecurity, by shifting away the focus from the state. Critics respond that this deprives the term of meaning, and that 'security' almost becomes a synonym for development (Luckham 2009).

Others argue that the bottom-up approach implied by taking a human security approach is a very limited view on agency; people can provide their input, but security is still something that is 'given' to them, and they are not seen as agents capable of changing their situation (Hoogensen and Stuvoy 2006). There is a lively debate on the extent to which the human security framework allows for human agency, and whether it has challenged or reinforced existing power hierarchies (Chandler 2008).

An attempt to shift the human security debate to include local level experiences of conflict and insecurity is illustrated by the 2009 IDS Bulletin *Transforming Security and Development in an Unequal World*, which emphasises that insecurity is unequally distributed and that different people struggle not only to cope but also to assert their rights (Luckham 2009). Two of the articles discuss examples of social agency, but without theorising how social agency becomes possible.

Feminist critiques of the human security approach have also highlighted issues of power, identity and agency, and provided more substance to the 'bottom-up' ideal of human security. Hoogensen and Stuvoy (2006) argue that structural relations of 'dominance and non-dominance' are largely ignored in security studies, that social and political exclusion must be better understood, and that security must be linked to empowerment of the individual.

Although the use of the prefix 'human' suggests that insecurity is experienced by all human beings universally, feminists have argued that men and women experience conflict very differently according to the power they have and their constructed roles in society (Christie 2010). Hudson points out that "The term 'human' is presented as though it were gender-neutral, but very often it is an expression of the masculine" (2006: 5).

A gendered approach to security acknowledges that it is context specific and structurally dependent. Insecurities are often rooted in social structures, and not only caused by the state. Power structures in society can thus reproduce insecurity.

A key manifestation of agency is 'resistance' to prevailing power imbalances, but how people act to overcome difference is not at the forefront of empirical studies. Case studies in this field are discussed in the section on gender in this review.

### **Further reading**

'Human Security, Well-being and Sustainability', a special issue of the *Journal of International Development* 19.4 (2007)

## 3 Conflict studies

The field of conflict studies is constituted by a wide array of scholars and disciplines. Many look at the causes of and responses to violent conflict, while at the same time making valuable contributions to definitions of violence, conflict and war in their many forms. Conflict analysis frameworks go into the actions of each actor in a conflict, thus paying attention to agency. This section will look at the sub-set of conflict studies in which local-level agency figures more prominently.

### 3.1 Agency in micro-level conflict studies

The idea of challenging violence as a form of agency has not been much addressed in micro-level conflict studies. An exception is Barter (2012) who describes three overlapping strategies – flight, voice and support – that civilians use to deal with violence, based on Hirschman's typology of exit, voice and loyalty. Flight refers to migration away from violence or the threat of violence. She outlines three categories of voice: defiance, everyday resistance, and engagement. Defiance, which is the most visible and confrontational form of voice, is expressed through protests, reporting violations, liaising with international actors, and challenging the authority of armed actors in declared peace zones. Everyday resistance is often symbolic, requires less coordination than defiance and is less risky, but may have the potential for social change and undermine the legitimacy of armed groups. Engagement concerns negotiation between civilians and armed actors, and has the aim of enhancing security. Support blurs the line between civilian and combatant; this entails providing goods or information, often for one's own protection.

Survival or coping as a form of agency has been studied by scholars examining how people survive in settings of violence and conflict (Justino 2009). Agency is reflected in the way that people adjust their livelihood strategies to their context. Furthermore, there is a substantial body of literature that discusses the micro-level effects of violent conflict on household welfare, health, participation and performance in education, and well-being. Two research networks – Microcon and the Households in Conflict Network – have delivered numerous case studies showing these dynamics at household level.

Agency can also be demonstrated through participation in violence. There is more understanding of why people decide to participate in armed conflict or give various forms of support to fighting groups – whether deliberate, forced, or out of self-protection; The way civilians continue organising collectively or are capable of social mobilisation in the midst of violent conflict is less well understood (Justino 2010; Wood 2008).

Justino (2010) summarises theorising on people's participation or non-participation in violent conflict:

Traditional political science research has theorised the behaviour of local populations as a dual choice between participating or not. Participation in armed groups was then analysed as a collective action problem (Olson 1965). Recent literature has revealed more nuanced forms of behaviour that do not necessarily involve the participation in direct acts of violence, such as the provision of information (Kalyvas 2007), the supply of shelter, food or other goods and services (Wood 2003) and forms of resistance (Goodwin 2001; Petersen 2001). Participation may also not entail a collective action problem when it is forced (Blattman and Annan 2008; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008) or when the alternative to non-participation is death (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007) or extreme destitution (Justino 2009).  
(Justino 2010)

Kalyvas, Shapiro and Masoud (2008) try to integrate the study of order and the study of violence. They point out that both 'camps' are splintered, not only in terms of thematic focus, disciplinary boundaries and methodologies, but also in terms of fundamental assumptions about the nature of human beings. Most contributions are about explaining violence and not on how social agency at local level contributes to attaining peace. Where the maintenance of order is discussed, it is mainly state-centred.

### **3.2 Transformation of institutions during conflict**

There is an increasing awareness that violent conflict can transform existing socio-political networks, arrangements and institutions, or generate new types of institutions altogether. This is important for the study of citizenship, because these institutions may offer new ways for expressing citizen agency or generate new forms of leadership and authority. But they may also offer some actors the opportunity to exercise control over others. The transformation of institutions thus needs to be analysed through a power lens in order to understand who gains and who loses, and how power relations operate in ways that sustain or reduce conflict.

A number of studies focus on the networks and institutions that constitute a war economy. They highlight how actors gain power and authority through the economic networks they form, and how the structural conditions of a war or conflict make the formation of such networks possible. Some actors have economic interests in sustaining conflicts, and these dynamics can cause political settlements to fail. Socio-political agency is clearly visible in situations where the state is nearly or completely dysfunctional and where other, non-state forms of governance emerge.

The literature on institutions shows that there is often a strong relationship between forms of authority and the distribution of economic assets, control over resources, trade and the informal economies. This literature pays little attention, however, to how citizens perceive the behaviour of important actors in these networks, or to the issue of legitimacy.

#### **3.2.1 Hybrid forms of governance**

Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers (2005 and 2008) discuss the ideas of a political 'war complex' with reference to the discuss conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), suggesting that it is often misunderstood as simply being driven by greed, with different rebel groups exploiting the region's natural resources. They argue instead that micro-level dynamics play an important role in sustaining the conflict and have led to a series of social transformations. These dynamics constitute a 'war complex': the shifting relations between different actors – militias, local entrepreneurs, actors in the local administration, the military, and military actors from Rwanda and Uganda – produce a "politico-military power game" focused on informal trade networks in DRC and across the border to Uganda (2005: 8). At the local level, citizens and elites devise strategies to sustain their lives in the midst of crisis and insecurity, contributing to the emergence of informal trade networks and arrangements with armed actors (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2008).

Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers demonstrate that variation in these power games leads to different types of order across eastern DRC (2005, 2008). In some cases, competition over access to resources continues, leading to ongoing insecurity. But in most cases, militias, local administration and local entrepreneurs formed an alliance, in which the entrepreneurs share some of their profits in return for protection and mobility. At the same time, they hold some power to mediate between militias and those actors in control of natural resources. Participating actors find mutual benefits in these relationships, and would be reluctant to give them up. These relationships produce systems of governance and regulatory mechanisms for local markets and service delivery, and have impacts on other forms of authority and leadership (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2005:11–12). Although the militias created their

own governance mechanisms, they would also often make use of the administrative structures that existed prior to the war.

Younger people have become increasingly dependent on participation in these trade networks, and the gains to be made offer them a social identity of 'having'. The authority of customary leaders has, to a great extent, been replaced by that of the many militias that operate in rural areas. Customary leaders were often forced to support these armed actors, which led to a further erosion of their authority and associated norms of solidarity, and of their role in decision-making.

These developments are a product of their historical context. Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers show how some of the strategies used by the militias developed as a consequence of, or in response to, the patrimonialism and the decentralised patronage networks that formed a divide-and-rule system in the post-colonial regime of Mobutu Sese Seko. This underlines the importance of the historical dimension of this conflict.

Other ideas about the political war complex include Lund's (2006a) notion of 'twilight institutions', which evolved from debates on processes of state formation and how public authority works against the background of state failure and possible collapse. When state institutions start failing, 'twilight institutions' start operating between the domains of public and private, state and society. Public authority is approached 'from below' and examined by looking at the interface between forms of authority and practices of ordinary people (Lund 2006b). Diverse institutions apart from the state can yield de facto public authority. "Public authority become the amalgamated result of the exercise of power by a variety of local institutions, conjugated with the idea of the state" (Lund 2006a: 686).

Wheeler (2009) describes how armed non-state actors can become intermediaries, or gate-keepers, between the citizens and the state in the favelas of Brazilian cities. Here, various militias, which fight against existing drug cartels, are in control.

Several authors discuss how 'traditional' leaders continued functioning during violent conflict, and the subsequent legitimacy issues of both state and non-state institutions (Hagmann and Hoehne 2008; Jackson 2005; Kyed and Buur 2006; Pouligny 2005). These studies highlight the importance of elites and local leaders in local forms of agency in these settings.

### **Key reading**

*IDS Bulletin* 44.1 (2013) presents the outcomes of a research programme on multi-level networked governance in Africa.

*Development and Change* 37.1 (2006), special issue on twilight institutions, with case studies from Burundi, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Mozambique, Benin, Ghana and Zambia.

### **3.2.2 Social institutions before, throughout and after war**

Social institutions and social processes are both transformed by war.

Writing about the war in Mozambique, Lubkemann (2008) stresses that the social struggles and relationships people had before the war shaped how they responded to it. He criticises Nordstrom (1997) for a book about the war that presented people as if they had no history, as if everything had begun when the war started. He argues that people's behaviour during the war was informed not only by their history, but by their ideas about what was important for their future social life. For example, many Mozambican men migrated to South Africa and Zimbabwe, often having lives and families in more than one place. Lubkemann observed that men's social behaviour was focused on maintaining and investing in social relationships for the future, when the war ended. They tried to maintain relationships with relatives over large

distances; although many did not see their relatives for years, they used social networks to connect to home.

Lubkemann also shows how social institutions, like that of the ancestor, were transformed during the war. People's relationship to home was important in terms of becoming the 'ancestor' for future generations. Cultural norms prescribed that an ancestor should be buried in their home area and so the spirits stay with their offspring. This posed a challenge to the migrant men, but they developed ideas and social practices that started to legitimise a process that allowed for an ancestor to be buried elsewhere.

Wood (2008) describes six social processes that are important in violent conflict settings: political mobilisation (by state and armed non-state actors); military socialisation of combatants; polarisation of social identities; militarisation of local authority; transformation of gender roles; and the fragmentation of local political economy. She argues that the strategies of armed actors and the modes of violence they employ shape these processes, showing how different manifestations of violence in Sierra Leone, Peru, El Salvador and Sri Lanka shape these social processes differently, and how this consequently affects social networks. Violent conflict can destroy existing social networks or break them into separate sub-networks, or create new networks, including those that link citizens to formal or informal political leaders.

Wood's accounts of political mobilisation are particularly important for providing clues on how social agency is 'facilitated'. Forms of mobilisation vary, in particular according to whether the population supports an insurgent group or not. Pre-existing networks can play a role in either supporting insurgency or protecting against insurgents. Local elites are often able to mobilise their networks, in particular through kin, clans or patronage relationships. In some cases, they mobilise around the issues at stake, but many are motivated by other local and personal interests.

Although Wood describes these processes mainly to show how the relationship between civilians and combatants develops, it can also be used to inform thinking about how social networks function to overcome situations of violence.

Humanitarian aid in conflict situations is often a factor which influences the transformation of social processes, and much has been written about the risks of humanitarian aid becoming directly linked to war economies. Nordstrom (1997, 2004) has shown that this entanglement is not just about the humanitarian goods, but also about the people and networks that come with aid interventions.

Munive and Jakobsen (2012) examine the persistence of patrimonial relationships after the conflict in Liberia, showing how mechanisms of power and authority operate in a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) intervention which offered education, skill training and financial support to young ex-combatants. 'Youth' was defined as a 'risk category'; based on 'greed logic' and the assumption that only economic factors spur armed mobilisation, the DDR intervention focused solely on providing young people with livelihoods and prospects. But neither other motives for taking up arms, nor the patrimonial relationships between commanders and youth that structured social life, were addressed by the DDR intervention.

Numerous commanders gained powerful positions in other sectors after the war, which enabled them to act as power brokers and mediators between the DDR participants and service providers. The authors refer to this situation as the 'post-war DDR economy'.

Former local commanders became gatekeepers, because they were tasked with 'validating' the names of the youth that entered the programme. The same patrimonial relationships that existed during the war were used for the DDR intervention. These networks between commanders and young people were based on loyalty, reciprocity, reliance, debt and

obligation. Commanders expanded their network of followers through the DDR intervention and strengthened their 'wealth in people', a concept that Bledsoe (1980) uses to describe the founding principle of patrimonial authority. In practice, commanders enlisted many non-combatant young people, in exchange for loyalty and a share of programme benefits.

To illustrate the strength of these ties, when conflict erupted in Ivory Coast in 2011, some of the commanders mobilised 'their youth' to fight, and other commanders used their supporters to occupy rubber plantations. This illustrates the resilience of such relationships, and the way that they can be reconstituted in different contexts.

The way that the DDR programme played out in practice also had implications at the national level. Instead of the estimated 38,000 beneficiaries, the programme ended up by enrolling over 100,000 young people. For international aid actors, this number legitimised the government's request to the UN for a peace-keeping mission, and more funds for DDR.

It should be recognised that the transformation of social processes that occurs through conflict can be either productive or destructive. Sexsmith (2009) contrasts Somalia, where endogenous institutions of trust and reciprocity were preserved during conflict, and contributed to economic coordination and conflict mediation, with Sierra Leone, where the intrusion of patrimonial networks into community life contributed to the development of youth networks based on social misconduct and opportunism, causing social collapse.

### **3.2.3 Shadow economies**

It is often assumed that, in times of civil war, rural communities 'retreat into subsistence' and no longer engage in wage labour. Cramer (2006), however, shows that during the war in Mozambique, rural people engaged in new economic networks that had emerged, and thus had new access to cash.

Nordstrom (2004) focuses on informal arrangements that emerge during war, referring to them as 'extra-state' or 'shadow' institutions or 'shadows', which can persist during cease fires or in post-conflict situations. Her conceptualisation of shadows is informed by De Certeau's (1984) work on invisible and visible cities, and Augé's (1995) on non-places, which resonates with the idea that the shadows of war are not a fixed place, but rather are fluid and dynamic.

The shadow economies that emerge in conflict situations include trade networks that can stretch from the local to the international level. The persistence of such networks and arrangements can in some places explain the failure of peace agreements and rapidly rising crime figures. Nordstrom also outlines the "politics of invisibility" (2004: 34) that disguises shadow economies: the discourses of powerful actors revolve around the necessity of violence and war, distracting the attention away from how they benefit from them economically. Nordstrom emphasises that the words used to describe the shadows (i.e. clandestine, informal, illegal, underground) make it sound as if the spaces of the shadows are separated from 'formal life' as two different realms. However, she argues that "the shadows exist in the midst of formal state society and the minutiae of day-to-day living" (2004: 36). They exist within formal life of government offices, humanitarian organisations and military bases.

Nordstrom argues that an analysis of violent conflict needs to include these shadows, "the complex sets of cross-state economic and political linkages that move outside formally recognised state-based channels" (2004: 106). She lists a number of key characteristics of the shadows, suggesting that they are more than just networks, but that they are networks of power, and that they generate and constitute culture since they are governed by rules, codes of conduct, and principles. Shadow networks are international and cut across ethnic and linguistic collectivities. While other authors have framed such networks in terms of 'informal', 'illicit' or 'illegal', Nordstrom argues that they coexist and that each exists within the other.

She therefore uses the term 'non-formal' to describe them, because 'informal' is often used to refer to small-scale, low-tech subsistence economic activities, and some of these shadow networks are more powerful and carry out more transactions than states. The legal and illegal often intersect, and actors use their networks for in both domains.

Nordstrom cites a number of examples from her ethnographic work about how local people, humanitarian workers and government officials participate in these networks. They do not see themselves as 'smugglers' or 'criminals', but instead as people getting by in the complex setting of a war. They are part of a web of relationships that link shadow transactions, business development and political power.

In post-conflict settings, even if there is technically 'peace' due to a political settlement, state and society continue to operate through the institutions that were generated in and by the war. In this transition phase, old and new forms of authority may coalesce and produce hybrid forms of governance. An understanding of how the shadows persist helps to explain post-war phenomena such as rising crime figures, violence and on-going human rights violations (2004: 145).

Changes of government do not necessarily alter entrenched bureaucracies or systems of governance and industry. Many of those running these institutions remain unchanged, and those involved in extra-state political and economic networks can continue to do so, guided by unchanged norms and principles. Those that leave the formal sector can continue operating in non-formal networks, whose flexible nature can respond to and accommodate the political settlement. Most citizens keep their jobs and those groups involved in illegal transfers and violations can continue with them, since new government policies are seldom able to assign enough staff to new, formal implementing agencies. Even those that were ousted, such as military officials, may move to new positions of authority where their actions continue unchanged, and thus violence becomes institutionalised, as "old habits infuse new systems. This holds across government offices, security forces, educational institutions and powerful business interests" (2004: 150).

## 4 Leadership studies

A number of the articles reviewed referred to leadership in mediation and dialogue. A number of articles were selected from the *SAGE Handbook on Political and Civic Leadership* (Couto 2010) that discuss the dynamics between leaders and their constituents, and the characteristics of leadership.

Dominant perspectives on leadership have shifted from a focus on the individual attributes of leaders to a more relational approach, and from an authoritarian to an enabling perspective. Traditional theories of leadership emphasised the hierarchical relationship between leaders and 'followers', but currently "leadership is seen not as a set of characteristics embedded in a person, but rather as a process in which leadership is co-constructed, emerging from the interaction in which people take part" (Kuttner 2011: 110).

Many leadership frameworks have been developed, or which 'transformative leadership' is most relevant to questions of citizenship and agency. It must be noted that most scholarship in this area is in the field of organisational management in western countries, and there is little work on who such transformative leadership might play out in different cultural settings.

### 4.1 Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership concerns the interaction between leaders and their constituencies, and the motivating and inspirational role of leaders who see the 'wants' of their constituents



as legitimate needs. The leader acts as a role model and encourages others to engage in meeting shared goals. The first transformative leadership framework, which other scholars have used as a point of departure, was developed by Burns (1978).

Referring to Burns (1978) and various other authors, Sun and Anderson (2012) summarise the key aspects of transformational leadership and aim to advance the framework by relating it to civic leadership. Burns (1978) emphasises the interactive relationship between the leader and others. Sun and Anderson emphasise the importance of the ability of leaders to be inspirational, to show concern for the community at large, and inspire collective organising to service the community. The dimension to work for the good of the larger society is what relates transformational leadership to community citizenship. Sun and Anderson argue that the transformational leadership framework needs to be complemented with an additional construct called 'civic capacity', which consists of three components: civic drive, civic connections and civic pragmatism. They suggest that the ability to be highly trustworthy, as the result of being trusted by others, is a new form of civic capacity that occurs at the individual leader level.

Civic drive refers to the desire and motivation to be involved with social issues and to see new social opportunities. Integrative leaders need to have civic drive and be social entrepreneurs who have the ability to see new opportunities for creating public value.

Similar to civic capital at the community level, which is the network of cultural and social institutions that can be mobilised for joint actions, civic connections at the individual leader level refers to the social capital found in the leader's internal and external social networks that specifically enables and promotes the success of the collaboration.

Civic pragmatism refers to the ability to translate social opportunities into practical reality by pragmatically leveraging structures and mechanisms for collaboration.

### **Further reading**

Ncube, L.B. (2010) 'Ubuntu: A Transformative Leadership Philosophy', *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 4.3: 77–82

Page, S.B. (2010) 'Integrative Leadership for Collaborative Governance: Civic Engagement in Seattle', *The Leadership Quarterly* 21: 246–263

## **4.2 Civic and political leadership**

Leadership studies continue to be dominated by a focus on management principles and people in positions of authority, rather than civic or political leadership and the politics involved in them (Couto 2010). The equation of leadership with authority has led to an emphasis on power over others, at the expense of the power within individuals and how it is exercised for others. Whoever takes action on behalf of themselves, for what they want to be or do, engages in leadership, and this does not require a position of authority. A central question posed by the authors of the two volumes of the *SAGE Handbook on Political and Civic Leadership* is therefore 'power for what purpose?'

One purpose is political leadership, which provides direction and meaning when the purpose, interests and identity of a political community are at stake. In political communities there can be constituted and non-constituted leadership: those with formal power and authority, and those without it. Couto observes that 'the invitation to examine politics through the lens of leadership includes the view of power in its many dimensions and the political nature of symbols, myths and other factors that provide legitimation – a realm of truth and right – to the processes, institutions, tools and tasks of authority' (Couto 2010: 9).

Scholars from several disciplines have attempted to distinguish authority from leadership. Heifetz (2010) explains that formal authority is granted by election or a selection process, and that the powers of this position are formally defined. Each position, whether high or low, has a degree of authority, but the degree in which someone has informal authority greatly influences how they can successfully exercise their formal authority. Informal authority is conferred by citizens, constituents or consumers and is constituted by the trust people have in the leader, admiration, and whether the leader represents their values.

Why, if so much can be analysed in terms of formal and informal authority, is a concept of leadership needed? Heifetz relates this to problems which require collective action. Leadership occurs in situations where adaptive work is required to respond to a challenge, when an individual, or groups of individuals, mobilise others to take collective action on a collective problem. Those in authority often fail to play this role, which is taken up by a variety of people with and without authority.

### **4.3 Leadership and conflict resolution**

The field of conflict resolution has given a great deal of attention to the role and skills of mediators and facilitators, and to the design and implementation of dialogues. Kuttner (2011) draws linkages between different schools of conflict resolution and leadership studies, examining the role of leaders in conducting dialogues. Leaders in conflict situations often play a role in 'dispute settlement' of some sort, but 'dialogue' is something different.

The following concepts are relevant for this sub-set of literature:

- Dialogue is a process that has the purpose of enhancing intergroup understanding and relationship building (not healing, negotiation, mediation or agreement) (Corry 2012: 55). It is "a set of communication processes that enables partisans locked in divisive conflict over identity, values, or world views to have fresh conversations that lead to expanded perception, deeper understanding, mutual respect for the personhood of the other, and new ways of communicating across deep differences" (Stains 2012: 36–37).
- Intergroup dialogue (IGD) differs from 'ordinary' dialogue in that it focuses on "building lasting relationships and alliances for system change, (...) its explicit foci on the realities of privilege and oppression, the impact of race and ethnicity and other social group identities on one's life experiences and behaviour, and its call for collaborative action" (Lensen, Chesler and Brown 2012: 423).

#### **4.3.1 Conflict specialists as leaders**

Kuttner (2011) lists a number of recent trends in leadership studies, similar to those in the field of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). ADR is one of the streams of conflict resolution that is applied to organisational settings, companies and teams.

Leadership studies and ADR both move away from hierarchical structures. This reflects a shift in society: older generations were brought up with the norm of respect, and not challenging, authority. By contrast, younger generations have been taught to take responsibility, be confident and to question authority when necessary. Leadership has therefore shifted from being based on authoritarian principles to being based on democratic values. Citizens feel they should not just rely on leaders, but also trust their own capacities. Decisions used to be made hierarchically, but now leaders need to be enabling, to step back and not just give orders. This is one of the foundations of ADR.

From the ADR perspective, mediators and leaders should both be 'supporters' and shape conditions in which others can thrive. They need to motivate others to make charge; the leader is no longer 'the problem solver'. "In both leadership and ADR scholarship", Kuttner

observes, “the emphasised skill is to empower others to take ownership of their life situation and help them in their personal growth” (2011: 107).

In both leadership studies and ADR, the world is viewed as being structured in networks where people are interdependent; they know that cooperation is necessary. Both fields stress a relational approach, focusing on the dynamics of interaction rather than the individual interests of actors. They emphasise a shift from vertical to horizontal decision-making, which requires people to coordinate across organisations and networks. This demands improved communication skills. Leaders have to be good listeners and open to the viewpoints of others, especially because decision-making has become more complex. The skills required to achieve this are problem solving, relationship building, consensus building and the fostering of team work. Uncertainty must be accepted as a means to decentralise power and empower others; it is acknowledged that leaders will not have all answers ready, but must allow new knowledge to emerge from interactions within networks.

Conflict has a role in creating change, but leaders are rarely trained in how to let (non-violent) conflict surface and lead others through it in order to promote positive change. A recurrent theme regarding civic leadership is that leaders deliberately use conflicts to structure political environments. Maximising dissonance could lead to informed decision making.

Instead of training leaders/managers in conflict resolution skills (which is widely discussed in the literature), Kuttner wants to know whether and how conflict specialists (those helping employers and employees to resolve conflict) can develop their skills as leaders. Often, conflicting parties want something other than just a neutral actor; neutrality would limit the abilities of mediators to be influential in situation of conflict and social tension (Mayer 2004).

This points at the difference between leaders and conflict specialists or mediators: mediators are not ‘primary parties’ from within the setting. Some ADR scholars use leadership literature to critique concepts such as neutrality and impartiality, and want to bring in insights on leadership skills to both challenge and improve the mediator’s identity. Assuming a leadership role would be more effective in certain situations. This group of scholars wants the mediator to be more proactive, to set the conditions for change, to encourage others to actively participate in the process, create spaces for dialogue, and encourage collective action.

Kuttner (2011) states that both mediation/negotiation and leadership can be taught, and that skills are developed by learning and practicing. He concludes with a set of ‘leadership themes’ that would improve the role of the mediator, calling for:

- adaptive leadership, to help define the gaps between values and reality and to guide a learning process that evaluates values and helps people change their priorities, in order to overcome the view that problems are merely ‘technical’ and can be solved with ‘know how’
- identification of leadership potential more widely than just positions of formal authority
- training on personality traits
- strengthening integrity, authenticity, and self-awareness about values, beliefs and principles
- inspirational motivation, with leaders providing challenges and meaning for engagement, proposing shared goals and focusing on the best in people, in order to inspire commitment and action
- risk-taking, as part of developing innovative ways of doing.

### **4.3.2 Deepening dialogue through reflective processes**

Stains (2012) explains how reflection can help to overcome a person's initial reaction to conflict or threat, the fight/flight/freeze response. This reactive process that is triggered physically, especially when a situation reminds us of a previous experience of a threat or fear over which we had no control. In the midst of conflict, people can feel caught in a "visual and emotional tunnel" (2012: 38) and forget about their capacity for engagement. Self-reflective processes can help people to break out of this cycle.

Stains suggests including structured and facilitated moments of reflection prior to and during a dialogue process in order to enhance the ability of participants to connect with others and stimulate learning about the self, the other and the relationship between them. The reactive fight/flight/freeze response is generated by self-protective parts of the brain, but reflective processes activate the parts of the brain that strengthen curiosity, choice-making and observation. Stains refers to other studies that have shown that people are more willing and able to understand others when they develop more sophisticated understandings of themselves (2012: 41), and suggests that four moments of reflection would be helpful: a pre-session interview with a facilitator; pre-session solitary reflection; in-session reflection, using different methods, and reflection in between sessions.

Lensen, Chesler and Brown (2012) describe the design of an intergroup dialogue process in Coastal City, one of the whitest communities in the USA, where tensions existed between the predominantly white police department and the coloured minorities of the town, and racial conflicts had developed between majority and minority groups. Co-facilitators from both communities were trained to carry out community-based inter-group dialogues (IGDs) (Lensen *et al.* 2012).

The programme sought to develop of a cadre of community volunteers to co-facilitate the IGD. Four design components were part of each phase: experiential learning; power balancing; work on our own '-isms' all the time; and mentoring. The first phase involved engaging community leaders, informing them of IGD, and starting a round of applications to become facilitators. During the second phase, volunteers participated in a three-day IGD – focused on race and ethnicity, personal explorations of group identities, and intersections of ethnic identity and other social categories – to understand the process. This included an exercise during which participants shared experiences of being a 'victim', 'bystander' or 'perpetrator' in oppressive situations, and how their identity influenced that role. The third phase involved participants learning and practicing IGD theories, methods and activities, including communication and facilitation skills, in learning workshop. In the final phase, the participants worked in cross-race pairs to carry out six to eight weekly IGD meetings, with coaching and mentoring from one of the study's authors.

Post-programme assessments showed that two years after the IGD, the co-facilitators reported that the programme had deep impact on their lives and on how they perceived their communities. Although there had been few resources to carry out a community-level assessment, anecdotal evidence suggested positive outcomes in community relations.

# 5 Anthropology

## 5.1 Agency in the ethnography of violent settings

Agency can be identified in the ways that citizens cope with violence, and their strategising – often pre-emptive and risk averse – and decision making, especially about migrating away from an area in response to conflict. Ethnographic accounts show how people assess their surroundings and the experiences of other important social actors and neighbours carefully, reflecting on their own positioning and that of others. Groups are not homogenous, and strategies can vary for those from different social strata.

Vigh (2006) introduces the concept of ‘social navigation’ to describe how people deal with insecurity, and multiple authorities in warzones. Agents ‘move’ based on their evaluation of their past experience and knowledge, their present environment and opportunities therein and ideas about future developments, while the environment itself is continuously in flux, unstable and dangerous. Vigh expresses this as “motion within motion” (2006).

Nordstrom (1997) shows how people demonstrate creativity in survival, often taking considerable risks. However, she argues against the idea that creativity depends on violence, as if people become most creative when they encounter destruction and death. In social theory, an association between violence and creativity is often found, as if “the phoenix is rising from the ashes” (1997: 15). She shows that people are forced to be creative to survive, but that this is creativity under adverse conditions.

Nordstrom gives numerous examples of people who had the courage to stay in a war zone and help others, creating new institutions of care and compassion as forms of creative resistance against war. This has helped them to have a sense of identity and agency, and has produced political cultures that denounce the use of violence. Nordstrom also calls many of the survival tactics acts of resistance, and forms of political agency. People denounce and delegitimise acts of violence as they resist being killed. Nevertheless, Lubkemann warns that “it is problematic to reduce local political agency to a function of local social interests (...) individuals simultaneously occupied many different social roles, which could inform their interests in different and sometimes mutually contradictory ways.” (Lubkemann 2008: 152). Local perceptions of conflict and the attributes of the fighting parties inform behaviour, even if perceptions are not in line with reality due to lack of information.

As stated above, existing socio-political structures shape and mediate local manifestations of violent conflict (e.g. violence can be the result of a conflict between fighting factions, but also of ‘old’ rivalries between social groups), as well as the decision-making and coping strategies of individuals and families (Lubkemann 2008; Wood 2008).

## 5.2 Violent conflict as process and part of other structures in life

In early anthropological debates, war and violent conflict were seen as problematic for theoretical frameworks which stated that all social processes were geared towards reproducing and maintaining a form of order. Later, anthropologists argued that war and conflict should not be seen as ‘discontinuities’, abnormal situations or as dichotomous to normal life and peace (Chabal and Daloz 2006; Lubkemann 2008; Scheper, Hughes and Bourgois 2004). Rather, conflict and violence are part of life like other social phenomena people have to deal with.

For some, a violent situation will become the ‘normal way of life’; to others it may even bring opportunities (Shaw 2003). Of course, conflict situations are different and they will limit, accelerate or generate other social processes, but the boundaries between conflict, stability and peace are not clear-cut.

Anthropologists have challenged the view that violence can be reduced to a form of rational action, and is instrumental to attaining certain goals (Stewart and Strathern 2002), stressing symbolic interpretations of violence, and its political and psychological functions (Beneduce, Jourdan, Raeymaekers and Vlassenroot 2006).

Historically, studies of violent conflict looked at intra- and inter-group violence, whereas an interest in organised political violence in which the state is an actor started only in the 1980s. Since then, ethnographers have explored how politically motivated violence has been socially organised, and can result from socio-political conditions in society.

Anthropologists have come up with terms such as warscape (Nordstrom 1997), war as social condition (Lubkemann 2008), and landscapes of power relations (Halstead 2008) to discuss the particular realities and life in the midst of violence and conflict, e.g. the structure. Conflict-related events that became part of life form an additional structure, while fluctuating in intensity.

Scholars emphasise that people living in conflict areas do not just experience war-related struggles, but also the problems they were already facing before the violent conflict arrived on their doorstep. Problems such as drought and famine continue to play a role, and social problems such as inter-clan rivalries, patron-client relations and patriarchal structures continue to exist. Social structures and networks that existed prior to the war affect people's behaviour and agency during and after conflict (Lubkemann 2008; Wood 2008). Others say that anthropological research on conflicts focuses too much on the violent events, while people living in conflict zones continue to focus on the mundane processes of life (Kelly 2008).

Studying war and conflict as social processes opens up awareness for a continuum of conflict-related practices, from non-violent tactics to aggressive actions. By thinking of organised political violence along this continuum, anthropologists have argued for seeing violent conflict as part of a "range of social possibilities, made through social action, and something that can be moderated by social action, rather than viewed as so exceptional as to require 'special' explanatory effort" (Lubkemann 2008: 107).

It is therefore important to follow social processes and relationships and study how they develop and alter during and after violent conflict, and how the terms of these processes and relations are reconstituted under conditions of violent conflict, when social innovations can take place. It is also important to study the reasons that people choose not to participate in violent conflict (Kelly 2008).

Linking individual experiences to discourses in wider society happens, but not automatically. Halstead (2008) describes how victims turn into agents in post-war Guyana by recounting their stories in the public sphere.

### **5.3 Agency and silence**

The concept of silence appears frequently in ethnographic work on conflict, often in relation to the research process. But silence is also feature of how people respond to war, and a tactic for surviving violent situations.

Silence is associated with disempowerment of the marginalised; the 'culture of silence' is a key concept in the work of Freire (1986). It refers to the various forms of oppression through which the powerful to silence the powerless, producing the internalised image on the side of the powerless that the unequal power relations are not to be challenged. Negative self-images, often first created by the powerful, lead people to think they are incapable and unworthy of taking control of their own lives and the way that they are governed. Gaventa (1982) builds on the notion of a 'culture of silence' and analyses how different dimensions of power operate directly and indirectly to produce quiescence among marginalised people. His

third dimension of power describes how the powerful may directly, and openly, control information and processes of socialisation that make the marginalised think and act in the interest of the powerful. This indirectly creates a situation in which the less powerful cannot develop a critical political consciousness about their own situation. This reflects a psychological adaptation to living without power.

In contexts of violence, silence is often a tactic for survival, and becomes part of a survival mindset (Green 1999; Scheper Hughes 2004; Wood 2003). It helps to navigate insecurity and the actions of the powerful, but can also remain an important protective strategy after conflict (Uvin 2009; Wood 2003). Wood discusses how silence operates in interviews, signalling protective behaviour (2003: 39). People's narratives of the past leave "strategic ambiguities" (Warren 1998 in Wood 2003: 39). Green discusses a legacy of silence, and the way that the effects of terror are not only experienced individually, but also socially and collectively. In the communities in Guatemala where she carried out her research, silence has become "the idiom of social consensus" (Green 1999: 69). Various authors have demonstrated that silences are strongly gendered (Das 1997; Hume 2010), and in the aftermath of conflict, silences can contribute to the process of the social construction of memories, and reflect gender dynamics. Hume also argues that silences need to be interpreted in their own right; one needs to understand the reasons why people choose to omit facts.

Knowledge and information – about the whereabouts of violent actors, for example, or what is going on at state level – are vital for survival in war settings. A local population has many different ways of knowing about the war, implying that the silences that researchers may encounter have meaning. Nordstrom (1997) explains how exposing knowledge can be a risk; during the Mozambican war, those who knew the movements of Renamo rebels could be suspected of collaboration by Frelimo. There were coded messages in what people did say: for example, they talked about 'not having salt' as a problem during the war, a popular expression for being associated with Renamo. In this context it was important to speak 'correctly' about things, or not to speak at all. People used parables, metaphors and myths to talk about violence. A "non-discursive communication" (1997: 85) had developed among people; behaviours and actions, gestures and looks that people use to tell whether danger was approaching, or who could be trusted. For researchers, Nordstrom argues, it is not just listening that is important, but a seeing and hearing that goes beyond formal discursive analysis.

## 6 Development studies

### 6.1 Agency and violence in development studies

While the work of Bourdieu and Giddens on agency, structure and power is very important in development studies, there are several other important angles on agency in this field which stress the importance of the collective dimension, and how agency can be exercised as a member of a group or political community.

Work on 'spaces for civic engagement' – where agency is exercised and social interactions take place between citizens, and between citizens and state actors – informs thinking on 'safe spaces' in violent-prone settings, where citizens can imagine alternatives, build their confidence, and strategise to address the causes of conflict (add references here).

Agency is also a core concept in the capabilities approach, developed by Sen (1993, 1999), Nussbaum (2000, 2003) and Nussbaum and Sen (1993), where it is related to concerns of the common good and solidarity with marginalised groups. It is also important in approaches

that stress voice and empowerment, mostly associated with Freire (1986), which place power relations at the heart of the debate and see agency as an act of citizenship.

In debates about prerequisites for agency, more recent thinking points to people's capacity to realise and imagine that their lives could be different as a prerequisite for agency. The "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai 2004; Kabeer and Haq 2009) refers to being able to imagine a different type of life, and the capacity of individuals to question the status quo. In many situations this implies overcoming an internalised feeling of powerlessness and inferiority.

The collective dimension is critical for individual citizens to acquire a sense of agency. Taking part in social interactions is essential for becoming conscious of the situation and gaining a sense of solidarity and strength, which can empower citizens to act and claim rights. Furthermore, collective action is much more likely to bring about change than individual action.

Different circumstances require different forms of agency, closely linked to the positioning of the agent vis-à-vis others in their field. Some authors have described the particular forms of agency that is exercised in violent or repressive settings.

Honwana's (2009) account of how former child soldiers behave suggests that they use tactical agency. Child soldiers are often both victims and perpetrators of violence, acting under very particular constraints, and often coerced. Individuals in subordinate positions, who have no power to act independently, will use tactics to create opportunities for survival. Strategic agency requires a power base, which the child soldiers interviewed by Honwana did not possess.

Honwana uses the philosophical insights of De Certeau to distinguish tactics from strategies. De Certeau (1984) defines strategy as the calculation or manipulation of force relationships, which requires a defined physical or social space; in this space, the actor has autonomy to generate relations with an exterior distinct from it. A tactic, on the other hand, is a calculated action taken by someone who lacks autonomy and who is acting in a physical or social space which is not their own.

Scott (1985) describes everyday forms of resistance in terms of the silent practices through which peasant farmers showed their discontent, which had symbolic meanings particular to their contexts.

Isin and Nielsen (2008) describe acts of citizenship which demonstrate that migrants in marginalised positions display acts and understandings of citizenship, even though they were not considered to have citizenship at all. This stresses the importance of studying people's actual behaviour, even if they themselves do not use the discourse of citizenship and rights. Through using the phrase 'acts of citizenship', the authors shift the emphasis from legal and formal citizenship to forms of creative engagement that challenge the socio-political order.

## **6.2 Conflict–development nexus**

The conflict–development nexus has become an increasingly popular theme among scholars and policy makers, especially following Kofi Annan's statement that security and development are inextricably linked (United Nations 2004: vii). This linkage is based on the notion that peace is the best environment for development, and that development is conducive to peace. The 'nexus' provides a possible framework for addressing complex problems, and the substantial resources and political will devoted to it prove that the nexus matters (MacGinty 2008; Stern and Öjendal 2010). However, there are many, diverging ideas about what it means to work on this nexus. On one hand, security policies refer to anti-terrorism, while on the other, the UN speaks of peace and development for everyone across the globe.



Stern and Öjendal present a possible framework for mapping all possible understandings of the security–development nexus, drawing upon accounts of both development and security. They suggest that “a nexus can be understood as a network of connections between disparate ideas, processes or objects; alluding to a nexus implies an infinite number of possible linkages and relations” (2010: 11).

This approach does not conceptualise agency, but is useful for describing the complexity of conflict and violent-prone settings.

### **Further reading**

*Security Dialogue* 41.1 (2010), special issue on the security–development nexus.

## **6.3 Social capital and conflict**

Several authors have studied how different forms of social capital are affected by violent conflict (Colletta and Cullen 2000; Moser and Clark 2001; Moser and McIlwaine, 2001 and 2004; Varshney 2001). Varshney demonstrates there is a link between the structure of civic life in ethnically mixed cities in India and the prevalence of violent riots. When an attack on a mosque sparked violence all over the country, cities where multi-ethnic associations had formed discussion forums at neighbourhood level, the level of violent outbursts was far lower.

Literature provides insights in how social networks work in the midst of conflict and are affected by it. Case studies present some ideas about how these networks can prevent violence.

## **6.4 Horizontal inequalities**

Stewart’s (2005) theory of horizontal inequalities concentrates on explaining the occurrence of violent conflict due to political, social and economic inequalities between culturally defined groups in society. Agency is, in most cases, used to describe participation in violence, but this approach can still provide insights into how conflict transforms social relationships and interactions.

### **Further reading**

*Journal of International Development* 21.4 (2009), special issue on horizontal inequalities in Ghana and Nigeria.

## **6.5 Urban violence**

Within development studies, quite a number of scholars specialise on problems in urban areas, including issues of crime and violence (Jensen 2010; Moser and McIlwaine 2001).

Tabbush (2009) demonstrates how constraints on agency in violent urban settings are gendered by analysing women’s public and hidden narratives of participation in a suburb of Buenos Aires. She identifies the social processes and institutional mechanisms through which certain needs of women are sidelined from the public domain, using the notion of ‘hidden narratives’, based on Scott’s (1985) concept of ‘hidden scripts’:

...hidden narratives allude to the needs and demands that circulate within the private sphere, yet do not find a channel to be transformed into collective demands for state action within the public sphere. The importance of distinguishing between public and hidden narratives then lies in that it illuminates the selective nature of the social construction of needs and their potential for agency.  
(Tabbush 2009: 869)

Despite women being well aware of their rights in terms of accessing material resources from locally managed social programmes, women fall into feelings of despair in relation to their physical security. The way in which they are perceived and ignored by provincial policies and security forces becomes, as discussed above, how they view themselves. Unmediated uptake of this negative identity precludes their ability to make demands, and at a more basic level, their belief in being entitled to physical protection by the state. In this case, marginal identities do not open a possibility for positive affirmations. The result is that in relation to this form of vulnerability, the absence of their sense of 'a right to have rights' (Kabeer 2006) acts in detriment to their possibilities for collective action (Tabbush 2009).

Rostami-Poveya (2009) shows how agency does not necessarily occur inside the conflict area by highlighting the role of diaspora; Afghan women exercise agency through their diaspora in Pakistan and Iran.

## 7 Gender studies

Gender studies is probably the field most directly related to understanding social agency in complex settings of violence and conflict setting. Certain key issues already discussed – power, identity, structure and agency – are central to debates in feminist theory on war and peacebuilding.

Nonetheless, there is not an overarching theoretical framework to explain how collective agency is possible. Rather, various case studies give partial explanations of how identity or power played a role in violence and conflict, how women dealt with a particular power structure or domination, and how they (re)gained a sense of dignity. Real activism can be found in the 'women and peace building' discourse, which is often centred on formal peace negotiations.

Long's interpretation of Giddens theory of structuration and agency is used by Moser and Clark:

The notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion. Within the limits of information, uncertainty and other constraints that exist, social actors are 'knowledgeable' and 'capable'.  
(Long 1992: 31, in Moser and Clark 2001: 5)

Women are actors, socially constructed by their environment and embedded in social relations. Different cultural settings shape identities, including masculine and feminine identities, and this will affect how agency is constituted.

It is widely acknowledged that women and girls suffer disproportionately from violent conflict, largely because of the use sexual violence as instrument of war. Ten to fifteen years ago traditional male–female roles in conflict tended to be endorsed: war and guerrilla conflicts were the domain of men who fight and perpetrate, whereas women were seen solely as victims of violence, often sexual violence (Coulter, Persson and Utas 2008; Denov 2007; Moser and Clark 2001).

Since then, there has been a growing awareness that reality is much more blurred. Feminist theory has contributed the idea that women have multiple roles in conflict situations. Men can be victims, and women can be active in war, whether forced, or of their own volition. Indeed, the distinction between victim and perpetrator is not always clear-cut, as identities are complex and diverse. Furthermore, there is increasing awareness that differences among women and among men cannot be ignored.

A second contribution of feminist scholars is the notion of gendered subjectivity of men and women in violent situation. The effects of violence – at any stage of a conflict and its aftermath – are experienced differently by men and women. Earlier assumptions about women's roles led to inadequate strategies to address their needs and support their empowerment. Scholars have advocated for gender-sensitive approaches to conflict analysis, more awareness for women's security needs, and more participation of women in peace building and peace processes (Denov 2007).

### **7.1 Women as actors in violence**

Women participate in violence when they fight in rebel groups or guerrilla movements. Many join such groups after abduction, and are therefore named victims, although some join voluntarily. Denov (2007) demonstrates women's agency, resilience and resistance in African rebellions, and the difficulties they face when labelled 'victims'. Apart from fighting, they perform a wide range of support activities in rebel groups, but at the same time some try to resist the patriarchal structures of the movements, war abuses and the culture of violence.

During violent conflict, gender roles and power relations are often subject to change. The situation can provide women with opportunities for assuming roles that would not have been tolerated under non-conflict circumstances.

Conflict areas can become spaces where social and economic opportunities arise, which are usually unavailable in safe areas (Utas 2005). During the war in Sierra Leone, women chose to stay in rebel camps, because they benefited from looting in ways that were not possible in normal life, in a society that deprives women (Abdullah, Ibrahim and King 2010). Thus, as much as these events can be traumatic, research shows that violent conflict can generate diverse experiences and feelings, including those of achieving power and acquiring better status and resources. This resonates with anthropological perspectives on conflict that emphasise the social processes of war and violence.

However, acknowledging that women have agency and feel empowered by participating in violence means that some of them may be able to address certain social conventions around gender; but at the same time, their agency is sustaining conflict (Coulter 2008). Furthermore, the circumstances under which agency is exercised (and under which women join armed conflict) need to be taken into account. If the only alternative was to be killed there was not much freedom to choose. People use violence to escape vulnerable positions, and to have at least some security over their life and that of their family members, while at the same time gaining the opportunity to access resources by looting (Coulter 2008).

Women's agency is still tied to social connections. In a comparative case study, Sharoni (2001) describes how women in Israel, Palestine and Northern Ireland were involved in political activism at local level, and how their agency was influenced by their affiliation to their groups (Sharoni 2001).

### **7.2 Agency in terms of coping or negotiation**

As already discussed, agency is often used to describe various coping mechanisms; feminist scholars demonstrate that the gendered subjectivity of men and women counts in coping with violence and conflict. Meertens' (2001) study of Colombia showed how displaced people developed mechanisms to adapt to their new circumstances; women initially suffered more under the impact of displacement, but they then adapted using informal support networks. Since men used to depend heavily on formal institutional support, they adapted much more slowly.

A more transformative form of agency is the capacity of women to negotiate with armed actors, using their gender identity to open up negotiations. In Colombia, women were collectively organising and negotiating with guerrillas to establish 'peace zones' for their

communities, in order to meet basic humanitarian needs (Rojas 2004). Women's organisations were able to negotiate access to roads and markets, and they increasingly took up leadership roles when men joined the fighting, were killed or had to withdraw from such roles in other ways due to conflict.

In current debates, one question is how peace activism by women can at the same time address gender inequalities. During violent conflict, gender roles often change – in some cases, to the benefit of women. However, after conflict things tend to be return to the previous status quo.

In Sierra Leone, for example, many women's groups together formed a peace movement, organising demonstrations, campaigns and rallies (Abdullah *et al.* 2010). When the Revolutionary United Forces overthrew the government, women had to change their strategies due to the repression of the new regime. Women went undercover, infiltrating the junta and exposing their activities in diamond smuggling. After the conflict, however, women did not hold a strong position in the public and political sphere, despite their activism and presence in public during the conflict. According to some, this was the result of a lack of strategy to confront patriarchal structures alongside peace activism. Women were more focused on ensuring free and fair elections than on increasing female political leadership.

### **7.3 Role of women in peace building**

A substantial body of literature discusses the work of women's movements in peace activism. Peace building and peace negotiations are traditionally male dominated, and official political processes thus often deny women's agency in reconstruction efforts and hence in the design of post-conflict realities (Moser and Clark 2001).

Nowadays it is acknowledged that women play important roles in peace building, especially at the grassroots level. In Somalia in 2000, women organised into the so-called 'Sixth Clan' and persuaded the leaders of the five main clans to think beyond clan differences (Hudson 2006).

Many cases demonstrate women's organising capacity around formal peace negotiations, from which women themselves are often excluded. Actions include peaceful protests, sit-ins and rallies. However, the fact that these actions happen around official peace talks implies that a formal space had already been created, and the exclusion of women from the negotiation table was often an incentive for mobilisation.

A relatively new question is how to link grassroots-level peace-building activities to higher-level peace processes. Including women in peace processes not only helps to address gender issues, but is also part of improving democratic governance in incorporating female voices that were previously excluded.

# 8 Conflict transformation, reconciliation and transitional justice

## 8.1 Conflict transformation

The conflict transformation approach emerged in the 1990s as part of the 'peace building from below' discourse. It is a reaction to earlier approaches to conflict management and resolution, which emphasised the role of high-level political leaders in making short-term solutions through negotiation. Conflict transformation stresses the long-term nature of the peace-building process, which needs to take place at all levels of society. Addressing the root causes of conflict in society, it involves facilitation among society members and a 'search for common ground'.

The approach is strongly associated with the work of Lederach (1997; 2003) who recognised that conflict is part of life and reality, and cannot simply be denounced as something bad. Rather, the ways in which conflict is expressed need to be transformed, to turn them from violence into peaceful ways of resolving conflict.

Conflict transformation has become the most popular approach among civil society organisations working in conflict areas. There are many case studies, but the approach is not coherent, an effect of many organisations developing their own understanding of conflict transformation.

Although criticised for its lack of analytical substance, in particular for ignoring power relations (Pearce 2005), the approach does provide insights into how conflict transforms social relations, patterns of communication and images of the self and the other.

Agency is assumed in the sense that agents are able to transform their behaviour from violent to peaceful interactions, but the conflict transformation approach has not elaborated a more general theory of agency in these settings. 'Activism' is considered important, but is related to raising awareness about conflict, rather than demanding rights in the midst of conflict.

Despite this approach stressing the importance of multiple levels, there were no examples of how lower-level initiatives have higher-level effects. However Dayton and Kriesberg (2009) present work on intra-state conflicts and conflict transformation, including case studies from various countries.

Turay and English (2008) suggest that there are links between peace education, transformative education and conflict transformation. They propose a transformative model of peace education that has five key sensitivities: diversity, participatory learning, globalised perspectives, indigenous knowing and spiritual underpinnings. Turay defines peace education as "a system or process that enables participants to empower themselves with knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and beliefs which build cultures of peace, nonviolence and sustainability" (2005: 465).

### Further reading

The Berghof Handbook of Conflict Transformation is available online at <http://www.berghof-handbook.net>, and is a platform for academics and practitioners.

Hendrick deepens methods for conflict analysis by linking complexity theory to the conflict transformation approach (Hendrick 2009).

## 8.2 Transitional justice

Reconciliation and transitional justice is a discipline in its own. There is a growing awareness that reconciliation is not just important for individual healing, but for society more broadly to come to terms with its violent past. Psychosocial approaches promote reconciliation for individuals to deal with trauma and regain not only a sense of interpersonal trust, but also dignity and agency. Though reconciliation initiatives mainly prevail at micro level, there have been several attempts to national reconciliation of which South Africa and Rwanda are famous examples.

Another theme that emerged from the review is gender and new debates around symbolic violence, which are not necessarily taking place in violent prone settings and therefore also not included in this review.

### Further reading

Sullivan, D. and Tift, L. (2006) *Handbook of Restorative Justice* Oxford: Routledge International

Oxford Transitional Justice Research at the Centre of Socio-Legal Studies, University of Oxford publishes online working papers at <http://www.csls.ox.ac.uk/otjr.php>

# 9 Sociology and social theory

Bourdieu and Giddens' approaches to structure and agency were briefly described in the introduction. Their notions of structure and agency have been subject to criticism and the agency–structure debate continues to the present day. Debates in contemporary social theory are directed at improved understandings of the interplay between structure and agency, encompassing various themes:

- The ways in which norms and values are reproduced in society, the multiple mechanisms for their transmission (including education, family socialisation and the media) and how these relate to sources of social unity, conflict or consensus.
- Social transformation and how change happens. Most authors take Giddens and Bourdieu as starting point, but more recent work looks at how structuration and agency account for how individuals make choices, and why their choices are meaningful to them (Adams 2006 and 2007; Wood and Bunn 2009).
- Bourdieu's notions of habitus, fields and power have been used extensively in gender studies and feminist theory, by himself and others.
- How to bridge the gap between sociology and psychology; the link between agency, social relations and interactions, and emotions (Barbalet 2001; Elliott 2009)

## 9.1 Social theory and urban violence

In relation to violence and conflict, the most prominent theme being urban violence and life in marginalised neighbourhoods (Blokland 2008; Deuchar and Holligan, 2010). Studies concentrate on life in poor and violent neighbourhoods, idioms of violence, youth gangs, and refraining from and/or participating in violence. A central concern is the role of social networks or social capital in identity formation, coping and maintaining a life in marginalised communities, and gang violence.

Collective efficacy is a construct that captures the willingness to intervene in one's neighbourhood to prevent violence, crime and anti-social behaviour (Harding 2009; Sampson and Wikström 2008), and captures the shared expectations for control that can emerge in a

context of trust and cohesion. Sampson and Wikström also discuss the 'social efficacy' of communities: "the joint capability for action to achieve an intended effect, and hence an active sense of engagement on the part of community residents" (2008:101).

Social organisation theory explains neighbourhood differences in crime and violence levels, but also how residents respond to violence (Harding 2009). Neighbourhoods that have higher levels of collective efficacy have a higher perceived ability to avoid violence and victimisation, by being, for example, better able to control their adolescents (Harding 2009; Sharkey 2006). Social disorganisation theory connects structural forms of community disadvantage with the diminished capacity of social control (Sampson and Wikström 2008).

Sampson and Wikström (2008) use large-scale survey and multi-variate analysis to examine variations in street violence between Stockholm and Chicago. They link measures of structural inequalities – in poverty and housing – with community-level mechanisms that both predict and prohibit violence. They find that structural inequalities are associated with lower levels of collective efficacy and thus higher levels of violence. While earlier approaches focus on the density of social ties for social control, Sampson and Wikström propose a more narrow focus on mechanisms of social control, which can be enhanced by social ties - but argue that these are not a prerequisite: although the density of ties is important, especially those rooted in trust, networks have to be activated in order to be meaningful. The act of exercising control under conditions of trust can explain the occurrence of violence.

Blokland (2008), using Sztompka's concepts of (dis)trust and risk (Sztompka 1999) and Collins' 'matrix of oppression' (Collins 2000), shows that the experience of violence in a marginalised area of an American city is highly gendered, as well as examining how people distinguish different forms of violence and consequently employ various strategies to live with it. Blokland shows how residents of social housing, particularly women, manage risks of violence, pointing to women's 'risk aversion', which includes staying inside the house, withdrawing from social life, and high levels of mistrust when interacting with others.

In Blokland's study, agents of violence were also community members. Consequently, residents' experiences of street violence and their discourses about it contained ambivalences that could not be resolved in the discourse of institutional trying to deal with violence. Engaging in neighbourhood action against crime challenged people's loyalties – especially to male members of their inner circles – and could even reduce household income. Inaction, or addressing fears of violence within a discourse of fate rather than agency, allowed this ambivalence to be ignored. Very few residents thus engaged in the sort of neighbourhood action that institutions advocated. To the residents, street violence was a hazard that one had to put up with: it would not change.

Other authors have shown that while withdrawing from social life can be a way of coping with urban violence for women, participating in social networks can be a strategy for youth (Deuchar and Holligan 2010; Harding 2009). Social networks and their 'civicness' is a recurrent issue, differentiating which social networks prevent youth from engaging in criminal gangs and which facilitate their participation. Harding describes how socialisation of adolescents takes place in violent prone settings of the city of Boston. He summarises the effects of violence for their social space:

Violence in these areas reinforces the neighbourhood as a form of social identity, restricts adolescent boys' pool of potential friends, structures their use of geographic space, and leads younger adolescent boys to greater interaction with older adolescents and young adults on the street. All of these are unintended consequences of boys' strategies for navigating dangerous streets. Older males, particularly those who are

unemployed and out of school, become an important potential source of neighbourhood socialization for these boys and have the power to influence their decision making in domains beyond safety. (Harding 2009: 446).

Adolescents have various protection strategies, which include “travelling in groups, staying close to home, developing a reputation as a tough fighter, and avoiding particular people, locations, and activities that might increase one’s risk of victimisation (...). Many youths employ multiple strategies, while others withdraw from neighbourhood social life entirely” (Harding 2009: 458). They also spend time with older peers who can protect them by direct intervention or reputation; these interactions are at the same time exposing them to local, unconventional, or alternative cultural models, thus affecting their socialisation.

## 10 Psychology and psychosocial approaches

### 10.1 Agency in psychology

Psychologists use the concept of agency to examine how an individual’s capacity to act is shaped by their mind and social context:

Broadly speaking, psychological agency refers to the human capacity for reflective action, and is based on the potential to imagine and create new ways of being and acting in the world. This generative potential is only possible within the collective meanings and social and material relations that shape our lives. (...) it also relates to how we choose to live our lives and the responsibility we have for the decisions we take.

(Frie 2008: vii)

Debates in psychology and psychiatry about the existence of free and autonomous will now acknowledge that the origin of human agency is neither situated solely in the individual nor in their biophysical and socio-cultural context (Frie 2008). As important as social, cultural and biological contexts may be, agency is about imagining alternatives, reflection and creating meaning, and thus potentially creating new ways of being and acting. While social context is part of the focus, it is instrumental to explaining the behaviour of individuals rather than collective agency.

### 10.2 Peace psychology

‘Peace psychology’ is an umbrella term for different strands of the discipline that look at the causes and consequences of violent conflict and war. Important topics in peace psychology are explaining the causes of large-scale violence, individual participation in violence and aggression, conflict resolution, peace movements and peace making, ethnicity, children and family, and feminism. The scope of this field is so wide and studies so varied that it is impossible to summarise and fit in this review, but Blumberg, Hare and Costin (2006) provide a review of all disciplinary approaches.

Several concepts and theoretical constructs can however be highlighted. One such is ‘peace zones’, a recent social phenomenon in conflict settings, which are locations in areas of protracted conflict where actors agree that violence is prohibited and where peace activities are promoted. In some peace zones, structural injustice is addressed, often based on local initiatives and mobilisation (Hancock Mitchell 2007).



Dynamic social psychology is an approach used to investigate social conflict. It uses a mixture of “concepts, methods, and tools associated with dynamical systems and complexity science that were initially developed in mathematics and the natural sciences” (Vallachera, Coleman, Nowakc and Bui-Wrzosinskad, 2010: 113) to understand the way that constructive conflict transforms to destructive conflict, and to seek solutions to intractable conflicts.

Cognitive neuroscience, neurology, neuropsychology and related disciplines have contributed to understanding how decisions and behaviour are influenced by brain functions, neural systems and emotions. In this field, agency does not figure as a key concept. Rather, in cognitive neuroscience and neuropsychology, concepts like behaviour, decision-making, and intentionality are more frequently used, implicitly referring to the concept of agency as used in social theory and psychology.

### 10.3 Body, mind and emotions

Dominant theories in the 1990s assumed that humans are rational beings and that their decision making is based on logical cost-benefit analysis or efficacies (Bechara 2004; Ohira 2010). This notion came to be disputed, and current thinking stresses the importance of the role emotion plays in decision making. Cognitive neurological researchers carry out experiments to examine the parts of the brain involved in the relationship between decision making and emotions.

Several experimental neurological models are based on economic models. Behavioural economists use three classes of ideas: choice under certainty, risk and ambiguity/uncertainty (Bechara 2004). These categories are used for designing experimental tests such as gambling or betting games in which levels of certainty for winning a sum of money can be manipulated. People’s choices are examined in controlled experiments with various degrees of certainty. Neuroscientists have studied how emotions affect these choices by studying active parts of the brain before, during and after making decisions, and in repeated tests. They have also looked at how choices are affected by the emotional response to various degrees of ‘unfair outcomes’ (Ohira 2010).

In a comprehensive review article, Baumeister, Vohs, DeWall and Zhang (2007) discuss how emotion shapes behaviour, as well as social cognition processes, learning and memorising. They argue against the most parsimonious theory that sees emotion as direct causation for behaviour, but promote the view of emotion as a feedback system:

Full-blown, conscious emotional experiences operate to stimulate cognitive behaviour. They facilitate learning lessons and forge new associations between affect and various behavioural responses. Subsequently, these associated affective traces may shape behaviour without having to develop into full-fledged conscious emotion. The outcome of the cognitive processing can also serve as a valuable input into further behaviour even in the same situation that gave rise to the original emotion, if time permits. (...) people learn to anticipate emotional outcomes and behave so as to pursue the emotion they prefer.

(Baumeister *et al.* 2007: 168)

While contemporary cognitive neuroscience is largely based on the Cartesian dualism of body and mind, known as ontic dualism, whereas ‘attribute dualism’ claims that the mental properties of human existence are attributable to certain states of the brain (Garza and Fisher Smith 2009). The relationship between brain, mind and behaviour is highly complex and has always been central to psychology as a discipline but more recently there has been an interest in the brain as the driving force behind behaviour in neurobiological explanations; Garza and Fisher Smith (2009) describe the neurobiological explanatory trend in psychology. They argue that the relationship between mind-brain and mind-body tend to be conceptualised in terms of ontic dualism or attribute dualism, but that both constrain notions

of embodiment. They present the alternative by understanding the body as ‘the inseparable unity of being-in-the-world from which the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body is abstracted’ (2008:519). This alternative surpasses the constraints of dualism and reframes embodiment as intentionally incarnate and ultimately as ‘flesh’.

Damasio’s somatic marker hypothesis (Damasio, Tranel and Damasio 1991) is an attempt to break away from the Cartesian dichotomy. Examining brain activity, its main point is that decisionmaking is a process guided by emotional signals – or ‘somatic states’ – and not simply a rational process. The part of the brain under study is the orbitofrontal cortex, where emotions are incorporated into decisionmaking.

Somatic markers occur after a certain emotional experience which then becomes marked in the brain and leave affective residues in the body. Marker signals arise in bioregulatory processes, including those that express themselves in emotions and feelings. Signals of bodily responses that are represented in the brain are out of awareness, and these processes are called emotion. Certain representations of bodily responses can be consciously monitored and experienced; these are feeling (Ohira 2010).

The signals are generated in anticipation of future events. Research demonstrates that the parts of the brains where emotions are processed is active when taking real-life decisions. Damasio *et al.* showed that somatic and visceral states mapped in the insula cortex of the brain guide decision-making by reducing negative alternatives which are labelled by bodily states and unpleasant feelings associated with risk (Ohira 2010). This has been further developed by Craig (2009, cited in Ohira 2010), who argues that integrated bodily physiological states are represented in the anterior insula.

Damasio and his colleagues prove their theory by comparing the decision-making process of healthy individuals with those who had suffered brain damage. Their test results show that there is a link between abnormalities in emotions and feelings due to brain damage, and impairment in decisionmaking (Bechara, Tranel and Damasio 2000). Lesions in the brain interfere with the normal processing of somatic signals, while sparing most basic cognitive functions, which leads to lower quality decisions. Individuals who suffered brain damage had less ability to generate somatic signals for future events, and they took less effective decisions in the gambling task than healthy participants (Bechara 2004).

More recent research supports the somatic marker hypothesis, showing that it provides a ‘systems-level neuroanatomical’ and cognitive framework for decisionmaking (Bechara 2004: 30), and suggesting that decisionmaking depends in many ways on neural substrates that regulate homeostasis, emotion and feeling. Bechara also shows how emotion-related physiological processes in the body peripheral to the brain influence decision-making. There are several neural routes through which somatic signals appearing in the body can feed back to the brain and thus influence cognition. Evidence suggests that especially the vagus nerves may be the crucial route for somatic signals to affect decisionmaking.

Ohira (2010) argues that the somatic marker hypothesis provides explanations and predictions to be examined for significance of bodily states in decisionmaking. However, so far most findings are correlational. There is still a gap in knowledge about causal mechanisms and how changes in bodily states change decisionmaking, in particular in the situation of uncertainty.

Ohira analyses behaviour in decisionmaking under different levels of uncertainty and the causal mechanisms between bodily states and decisionmaking in repeated tests. His findings demonstrate that bodily responses precede conscious decisionmaking. Test participants’ choices under uncertainty showed some bodily responses – such as enhanced heart rate and blood pressure – but these responses were suppressed by participants in high-uncertainty conditions. This could be interpreted as an “energy saving coping response to an

uncertain situation. Allocation of biological energy in such a situation might be dangerous” (Ohira 2010: 3).

Emotion may influence decisionmaking in helpful and hurtful ways. Ohira suggests that people are able to evaluate a situation and then have some control over emotions, even in situations of high uncertainty. Others (Beer, Knight and D'Esposito 2006) have studied how people evaluate the contextual relevance of emotional information, designing 'betting game' experiments to examine the neural underpinnings for controlling emotional influence when emotional information is explicitly irrelevant, and incorporating such information when it is relevant. Their findings suggest that the neural systems employed when people attempt to prevent or reduce an emotional state may be different from the systems they use when they try to prevent or reduce the impact of an emotional state on decisionmaking.

Studies of how brain activity and emotions respond to uncertainty and risk may provide useful suggestions for thinking about how people respond to violent settings, which are often marked by high levels of uncertainty and unpredictability. However, the type of uncertainty and risk in these studies – for example, losing money in gambling game – are of a very different order to the risk of becoming a victim of violence.

#### **10.4 Social and community psychology**

Social psychology is about how we see ourselves, how we interact with others, how our social environment has an impact on us, and the interaction between the psyche of an individual and their social environment. Although social context is acknowledged, the focus of social and community psychology is on explaining how individuals behave and develop themselves in relation to their wider social and community environment.

The following concepts and theoretical constructs from this field are relevant to the study of violence and agency:

- Identity theory has contributed to knowledge about how we understand ourselves by looking at how the self is linked to social structures through roles. It defines identities as “internalised role expectations, or, alternatively, the meanings people attach to the many roles they play” (Kirkpatrick Johnson and Mollborn 2009: 40). Social expectations about what is appropriate behaviour for people of a certain age and gender become internalised and then crucial to the formation of an individual's identity.
- Cognitive mediators are normative beliefs about aggression and self-efficacy to control aggression (McMahon, Felix, Halpert and Petropoulos 2009).
- Self-efficacy refers to the belief in one's ability to achieve a goal in a particular situation. As a cognitive factor, it is a filter in evaluating a decision whether or not to behave aggressively. It also affects the relationship between an individual and their environment.
- Collective efficacy refers to a combination of social cohesion and community willingness to act and intervene for the common good. Research on collective efficacy and violence prevention stresses the importance of forms of participation and community engagement to strengthen collective endeavours to prevent violence (Bowen, Gwiasda and Brown 2004; Zeldin 2004).
- Empowerment is a popular concept in community psychology, and several authors discuss the 'paths towards' empowerment, focusing on relationship building, interpersonal empowerment and social action for community building (Hyung Hur 2006; Peterson and Schneider 2005; Speer 2000). The components of collective – as opposed to individual – empowerment are social belonging, involvement in community activities, coalition building, the extent of influence in community institutions and cohesion (Hyung Hur 2006).
- Community resilience is a process linking a network of adaptive capacities (resources with dynamic attributes) to adaptation after a disturbance or adversity. It emerges from four sets of capacities: economic development, social capital, information and

communication, and community competence (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche and Pfefferbaum 2008). Claus-Ehlers and Lopez-Levi (2002) present an ecological model of community resilience that incorporates community structures and the cultural values.

Searching journals in social and community psychology for research on violence and agency produced results on urban violence, community violence and engaging communities in violence prevention (Bowen et al. 2004; Zeldin 2004), and participation of marginalised urban youth in violence and the effect of marginalisation identity and well-being. Kirkpatrick Johnson and Mollborn (2009) observe how adolescents that have gone through hardships, including living in violent contexts and in fear for one's safety, experience feeling older (subjective age):

...accelerate subjective aging by altering perceptions of where one is in the life span and by pushing young people into more adultlike responsibilities. When young people witness or experience violence and fear for their safety in their daily lives, it can raise the possibility (and sometimes the reality) of the end of one's life being nearer. ... The harshness of these experiences may also contribute to adult-like decision-making, responsibilities, and stresses.

(Kirkpatrick Johnson and Mollborn 2009: 44)

McMahon *et al.* (2009) study the relationship between exposure to and participation in violence among urban adolescents. They conclude that the more young people are exposed to community violence, the more retaliatory beliefs individuals will develop to support aggression, thus reducing their efficacy in controlling their own aggressive behaviour. Retaliatory beliefs form an important cognitive mediators between exposure to community violence and aggression (McMahon *et al.* 2009).

Some authors discuss the best way of approaching social psychology research in conflict settings. Angucia, Zeelen and Jong (2010) discuss the value of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in studying the reintegration of child soldiers in Northern Uganda, noting that its capacity to create a space for sharing difficult life experiences was particularly relevant in these circumstances: "The experience perspective guided the researchers' interactions in the field; in other words the researchers tried to be conscious of the personal experiences with respondents and situations. This was necessary because of the delicate nature of the issues under research" (Angucia *et al.* 2010: 229).

## **10.5 Mental health, trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder and agency**

There is a substantial body of literature on mental health, war trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other trauma-related disorders. The word 'victim' tends to ignore the agency of individuals, and many in this field speak instead of 'survivors', focusing on the capacities that people have used to survive violence or conflict (Fassin and Rechtman 2009).

There is a strong, almost polarised, debate about the effects of experiencing or witnessing violence between psychologists and psychiatrists on one hand, and sociologists, social psychologists and anthropologists on the other. Debates used to concentrate on ex-combatants or veterans, but there is also growing interest in (post)conflict settings (Kienzler 2008). This section first discusses the consequences of trauma for individual agency, before summarising the debate between psychologists and anthropologists about recovery.

When faced with a life-threatening or otherwise traumatic experience, people will focus on self-protection and survival. Some will try to cope by taking action; others will react with withdrawal, confusion and shock. Not every person will develop the lasting effects associated with PTSD; the nature and duration of the traumatic event affects the outcome (van der Kolk 2003). The symptoms of PTSD can be grouped into three main categories; 'hyperarousal', 'intrusion' and 'constriction' (Herman 2001; van der Kolk 2003):

- Hyperarousal or arousal means that a traumatised person is in constant state of alertness and will continue to feel the threat of a past traumatic event as if it still occurring.
- Intrusion refers to an urge to re-enact the traumatic moment, through intrusive dreams, memories or even actions. Intrusion is a form of self-protection, though it often worsens the post-traumatic syndrome and can lead to disengagement with others.
- Constriction or avoidance refers to a state of surrender or numbness when a person has become completely powerless. Loss of control over a situation is central to a traumatic experience, and responses to this include changed states of consciousness, dissociation and distorted perceptions, feelings of indifference, profound passivity and voluntary suppression of thoughts. When people continue this state in their post-traumatic life, it may lead to individuals restricting their lives through being unable to plan and withdrawing from social interactions.

Psychologists and psychiatrists validate PTSD as a universal and cross-culturally valid disorder, the psychopathological response to trauma and stressors. They emphasise individual treatment, often in the form of cognitive therapy and medication.

According to Clancy and Hamber (2008) traditional psychotherapy assumes that traumatic experience harms not only the individual; survivors of abuse may become abusers themselves, with the risk that society is locked into cycles of violence. Helping the individual thus, by extension, assists the community. Psychotherapy provides individuals with the space to deal with trauma and thus facilitates emotional self-understanding, which is crucial for exercising responsible citizenship (Giddens 1994) and effective participation in development.

Critics of the concept of PTSD question the validity of trauma and PTSD in other cultures (Clancy and Hamber 2008; Kienzler 2008). They argue that the individualistic and positivistic attributes of PTSD obscure the social and non-rational aspects of suffering, and tend to see traumatised people as victims only, ignoring their agency and coping mechanisms. They suggest that the concept cannot make the link between individual suffering and social processes. They criticise psychotherapeutic treatment for being too focused on the individual at the expense of the socio-cultural context of the community, which can play an important role in the healing process. They also suggest that although the psychotherapeutic approach stresses empowerment, it legitimises individuals' non-participation in the political realm because of their mental health challenges.

Psychosocial approaches to trauma, by contrast, stress the link between social agency and mental health and the ongoing interaction between the psychological state of the individual and its social environment. When considering violent conflict, this means looking at how the social-political context shapes the psychological well-being of individuals. Recovery requires understanding of how people are active in the world and in social relations. Social relations need to be regenerated, but probably under new terms (Lykes and Mersky 2006). According to Clancy and Hamber (2008) this approach has therefore direct synergy with development and peace building. Herman notes that:

The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation.  
(Herman 2001: 133)

The fundamental stages of recovery from trauma are establishing safety, reconstructing the story of the traumatic experience and mourning, restoring relationships between survivors and their community, and reconnecting with ordinary life (Herman 2001). The context for recovery needs to be supportive; for individuals, this context is their network of family and

friends, while for traumatised populations or societies, it refers to political commitment that has to prevail to denounces the traumatic events (Herman 2001).

In areas affected by conflict and large-scale political violence, Clancy and Hamber (2008) refers to 'extreme traumatisation' or 'extreme political trauma'. Violent conflict not only affects the well-being and mental health of individuals, it often purposely seeks to destroy social ties, structures and institutions. All strands in psychology acknowledge the devastating effects of war for the social fabric and how this results in mistrust and the freezing of social interactions (Clancy and Hamber 2008; Lykes and Mersky 2006).

To indicate that the suffering is shared, Abramowitz (2005) uses the concept 'collective trauma' and Kleinman 'social suffering' (2001). This line of thinking has led to the important understanding that if trauma is collective, recovery can only be social.

...community rehabilitation often means actively re-inventing community and re-imagining affiliation. It means admitting that the dimensions of trauma are individual as much as collective, and therefore the politics of memory which one intends to pursue should concern both poles of suffering.  
(Beneduce 2007: 57)

Anthropological and psychosocial approaches focus on the community level and include local perspectives on past events. Several authors indicate the relevance of local idioms of distress, and the local disconnections between people and the social context, due to the experience of violence (Abramowitz 2005; Beneduce 2007; Eisenbruch 2007; Pedersen 2008; Theidon 2007). Accepting these perspectives means that assisting traumatised people involves linking their stories to past and ongoing processes in society. It is about providing a space where individuals reconstruct a sense of self and their links to a wider community. An example comes from the period following the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, when psychologists let their clients recall their stories, and together they transferred these testimonies to human rights activists. In this way, the stories became part of a social process and public rejection of the regime (Lykes and Mersky 2006).

This area of work sheds light on how people move from passivity and dissociation to re-linking with others and society in order to become active social agents once again. Although most of this literature examines how individuals go through this process, some authors look at how groups go through this transformation together and are able to act collectively. Secondly, this body of literature acknowledges the agency of survivors by describing numerous case studies of the coping mechanisms they develop.

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