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# Whose future? Local ownership in peace processes

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*Diana Francis*

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## I. A personal introduction

I am uplifted by the deep questioning and radically humane agendas that have characterised the opening of this conference. [*I can change this opening if it doesn't fit the style of the publication.*] Simon Fisher's presentation yesterday made me feel less like a lonely John the Baptist, 'crying in the wilderness' about the need to take power seriously, about the important role of nonviolent resistance in conflict transformation and about the need for us to challenge militarism itself, as the biggest driver of violent conflict. These have been the themes of my three books.<sup>1</sup>

I grew up in activist circles and was raised with a belief in global solidarity, that is, in support for local actors around the world engaged in nonviolent struggles for peace and justice. In those circles, it was taken for granted that peace and justice went together, and in order to get rid of the immense injustice and cruelty of war it was necessary to find ethical and effective ways of standing up for what was right. In this, Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King were our models. But when nonviolent 'people power' was used in the Philippines (in 1986) to bring down the dictator President Marcos, and then when both the apartheid regime in South Africa and the entire Soviet empire were swept away by that same power, we thought that now, at last, it would be taken seriously and belief in militarism would recede. Alas, the full significance of those events has, it seems, still not been registered.

The Arab Spring and all that has followed have reopened the debate. As now, we had to recognise in those earlier days that even where oppressive regimes were removed by nonviolent movements or unarmed uprisings, what followed could and did prove disappointing. In the former Soviet empire new sufferings were experienced by those marginalised in the scramble to embrace market capitalism and new conflicts arose from the Soviet ashes, as people searched for identity and meaning. Demagogues stepped into the power vacuum and exploited and manipulated popular feelings to mobilise support for themselves. It had proved much easier to remove tyranny than to create peace.

In this context I (and others like me) began to recognise the importance of the growing field of Conflict Resolution, with its emphasis on mutual accommodation and coexistence. At the same time I remained acutely aware

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, Diana. *People, Peace and Power: Conflict Transformation in Action*. London: Pluto Press, 2002, *Rethinking War and Peace*. London: Pluto Press, 2004 and *From Pacification to Peacebuilding: A Call to Global Transformation*. London: Pluto Press, 2010.

that where power asymmetries were great and structural violence was a reality, nonviolent struggle remained a vital precursor to resolution, since no dictatorial regime whose power is not challenged is likely to negotiate with those it controls. The theme of my doctoral research (which provided the basis for my first book) was the value of respect as the litmus test for the theory and practice of conflict transformation, across cultures. Respect, as I saw it, involved acknowledging the right of ordinary people in a given place to participate in power and responsibility for the common good.

This meant that local ownership was and is, for me, a given: a moral, conceptual and practical imperative. Moral, because it is people's right to determine their own future; conceptual, because any notion of positive peace must include democracy as its foundation; practical, because peace between people can be created and sustained only by those people themselves. They may be able to use help from outside, but it will be brought into being essentially by their will and action and, although outside perspectives can help, it is they who most intuitively, intimately and thoroughly understand their own situation and what it requires.

## **II. Experiences of local ownership: freedom and small budgets**

My early experience of working directly with local peace actors made the principles of solidarity and support seem obvious and straightforward. Yugoslav members of the European human rights network, the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, appealed to fellow members for support as they prepared to do all they could to stop the march of war, and in response to this appeal, in 1992 the London-based CCCRTE was formed (Committee for Conflict Resolution Training in Europe – later the CCTS<sup>2</sup>).

I was first involved in work with a group of local activists at the Centre for Anti-War Action in Belgrade, Serbia, who had long been resisting the warmongering of President Milosevic and now wanted to try and bridge the growing chasm between citizens identified as different from each other – Serb Croat, Bosnian, Roma and so on. The group already knew plenty about mobilisation and campaigning and almost all of them were professional psychologists. Now they wanted to learn about the theory and practice of Conflict Resolution. I was one of two trainers who ran a couple or week-

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<sup>2</sup> CCTS – Committee for Conflict Transformation Support. <http://www.c-r.org/ccts/>

long workshops for them, initially, and they quickly formed a new organisation within the Centre, under the acronym MOST (which means 'bridge' in what was then Serbo-Croat).

A couple of Committee members had already begun work with activists in Osijek, Croatia, where, as in Belgrade, an organisation was formed (the Centre for Peace, Human Rights and Nonviolence) as a base for concerted action. Later, opportunities were created by CCCRTE for activists and local trainers from groups around the region to meet and reflect together, learning from each other's ideas and experiences and creating bridges between each other. It was such opportunities for time out, exchange and refreshment that mattered as much as anything to hard-pressed activists, along with the sense of being 'accompanied' by people from outside the region at a time of stress, danger and isolation. Having the chance to participate in processes organised and facilitated by others, whether they were focussed on their own organisational issues, external challenges or personal struggles to avoid burnout and sustain commitment, were hugely appreciated. It also gave them space to address the inevitable tensions that were sometimes felt between them.

It is hard to imagine now that a small, unstructured committee, funded by very small grants and supported by only a few hours a week of paid administration, could undertake this kind of work. With hindsight it seems like a luxury to have had the freedom to be simply and directly responsive to local activists and their needs, without the necessity of formulating a cogently presented and detailed programme, with inputs and outputs, budgets and projected impacts.

Yet at this latter end of my career as a consultant I again have the privilege of working in a similarly responsive way, as part of a voluntary group that is assisting local peacemakers in South East Asia. Once again our work arose from a local invitation to play a supportive role and we respond to specific *ad hoc* requests, never knowing what the next bit of our work will be, or whether the call will come next week or in three months' time.

We are fortunate to be mostly retired or semi-retired people, with sufficient income to work without pay and enough time to commit ourselves to this work. We notice how much it is appreciated that we give our services for nothing and are aware that this is taken as a special sign of our sincerity. And it is clear on both sides that ours is indeed a role of service, not of leadership – let alone command (though we offer our opinions and ideas if asked). We bring no money with us that could make our partners beholden

to us. Our travel and secretarial support are paid for out of subscriptions to the membership organisation of which we are a part.

### III. The power of money to enable and constrain

Contrast that freedom with the constraints and pressures of working within a typical INGO, which must be accountable to its donors – often government departments – for the way in which it spends its money and for the ‘product’ of that spending. Yet these are the organisations that can enable people to do this work for a living, and so to commit themselves to it full time and in their prime! Such organisations can also enable work to be undertaken on a much larger scale and more intensively, and offer financial support for local action. But the non-financial costs are high.

Firstly, the money that is channelled through INGOs by large donors has an influence on their choice of people to work with. For many reasons, ‘partnering’ local NGOs is their preferred option. If their work has a relevant focus for the particular INGO’s strategy, they seem like natural partners and provide the kind of structure that an INGO can relate to. And from the side of local NGOs, the promise of funding streams and other support is often very welcome. It can reassure them about their own future and well-funded outsiders have the capacity to help them respond to changing circumstances.

However, INGOs bring with them their own agendas and they in turn are constrained by the objectives of their own donors. The power of money is such that what was intended as a partnership can end up feeling like external control. The experience of relative power in these relationships, particularly when it is combined with the shadows of an imperial past, can make it seem like neo-colonialism and poison relationships. Partners can end up feeling like clients or servants and the ‘beneficiaries’ of their efforts, in being so designated are framed as passive objects of condescension in a hierarchical chain.

Since the INGOs have sought out partners who can be instrumental in delivering the projects and programmes for which they have received their funds, they will find it difficult to follow an unpredictable local lead in response to unforeseen events. This means that once they have become dependent on outside money, the priorities of local partners can become subservient to those of the INGOs supporting them, their agendas distorted

or subverted and their very nature as organisations changed by external demands. I was told by one Nigerian colleague of a small group of village women who established themselves as an important resource for peace-making within their locality. They were ‘noticed’ by an INGO, which offered them money to expand their work. Once they had accepted this offer of a grant, they were (understandably) required to employ a qualified person to account for it and a manager to manage the way it was spent. Later they were told that all those working for what was now an Organisation would need to have relevant qualifications. Soon not one of the original members was left.

#### **IV. Creating the basis for genuine partnership**

These problems cannot be eliminated but, if they are acknowledged and care and sensitivity are applied, partnerships can be genuine and can work pretty well for all concerned. To be authentic they need to be based on

- mutual respect, based on thorough knowledge of each other’s organisational ethos and identity
- a clear commitment to honesty
- explicitly articulated and shared or compatible values, goals and needs
- shared (and ongoing) analysis, agreed strategy and clearly negotiated roles
- mutual trust and a sense of (positive) interdependence
- joint, participatory evaluation whose main purpose is to learn from and strengthen what is done
- commitment to living, working and sometimes changing together

Like all relationships, peace partnerships are demanding, requiring time and serious commitment. Since local circumstances are always complex and constantly changing, if the tail is not to wag the dog, international partners as well as local organisations may need to change their strategies as events unfold. To be able to do that, they need to build relationships of trust with their donors, along with a shared understanding of the need for flexibility and some risk-taking, and clarity about what can and cannot be promised. Some donors already understand the dilemmas inherent in attempts to predict and are willing to be highly flexible. Others, carrying on their shoulders the weight of governmental and other institutions, find it more

difficult to be so responsive. Nevertheless, we need to help them see that if peace is to be locally owned, and support for local actors is to be effective, responsiveness is precisely what is needed.<sup>3</sup>

## V. Varied roles and changing circumstances

There is a wide range of roles, both impartial and partial, that local actors can and do play in helping to create peace, depending on the stage or current nature of a conflict, and the priorities and profile of the individuals, groups and organisations in question. They may be human rights protectors, ‘trouble shooters’, educators, bridge-builders, communicators, mediators, quiet advocates or public campaigners, and their focus, priorities and even their essential role may change with the situation.

In partnerships this can create the need for hard decisions to be made. For instance, a caring and effective INGO had a longstanding partnership with a local organisation whose mission was to foster coexistence between competing ethnic groups. After a *coup d’etat*, the whole landscape was changed, and in the new context the local organisation took the clear and radical decision to become an advocacy group, campaigning rather than bridge-building. Having heard the rationale of its members and after careful deliberation on its own side, the INGO decided to stay in the partnership on this new basis.

In another country the same INGO had worked for many years with IDP organisations as its main partners, calculating that they could play a key political role in creating a peace constituency for political settlement with the territory they had been obliged to leave. However, new circumstances arose in which the IDPs’ overwhelming focus was on responding to the more immediate needs of their own people. Since such work was beyond the INGO’s own organisational remit to partner, after much heartache its staff told their IDP partners that this was the conclusion they had reached, explaining that they very much respected their colleagues’ priorities but that they no longer overlapped sufficiently with their own and that the level of partnership would need to be reduced. They promised to do all they could to help them find alternative partnerships and funding sources where

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<sup>3</sup> See Juliet Prager and Bridget Walker. ‘Funding Conflict Transformation: Money, Power and Accountability’, in *CCTS Review* no. 25, November 2004. <http://www.ccr.org/ccts/ccts25/review25.pdf>

necessary. It was a difficult transition for all concerned, but the relationship remained intact and now has taken on a new lease of life.

## VI. Beyond the world of NGOs

Such are the dilemmas of responsible NGO partnerships. But beyond the already complex relationships between international and local NGOs lie the challenges of working with other civilian elements and institutions within a given society. These include

- tribal structures and traditional leaders
- ‘connectors’ – those who can make links between one group or community and another
- religious congregations and leaders and inter-religious bodies
- educators and students
- trade unions
- student unions
- local government politicians and employees
- national politicians and political parties
- community leaders
- journalists of various kinds and
- women’s leaders and organisations

## VII. Gender and peace

It always seems wrong to list women as just one more social category, given that they constitute half of the entire adult population. However, since they are so often largely invisible in and/or absent from the other groups listed, and since they do play gender-specific roles in many societies, it is necessary to connect with and support them as such, for instance in their own specific organisations. It is vital that they should not be excluded from key processes by dominant gender norms, both because they have important roles to play in bringing about change (whether or not these roles are public ones) and because the inclusion of traditionally marginalised groups in the process of creating peace will enable them to help ensure that peace, when it comes, is inclusive of their perspective, needs and capacity to contribute. Violence may on occasion be stopped without any reference to most of

civilian society. By contrast, making peace that is worthy of the name requires the inclusion and involvement of all sorts of people and social sectors.

In many ‘traditional’ societies women already have important roles in peacemaking. Since these roles are often not exercised within decision-making social and political circles, it may be necessary for them to build on this fact to make themselves heard at those levels too. While it is inappropriate for outsiders to try and foist their own norms on another society, in my experience there are always women working to address entrenched gender norms that exclude them and to bring about changes in attitudes and systems that imprison both women and men. And when women and men work together the prospects of change are greatly enhanced. Supporting these efforts can be important, so long as it is done in sensitive ways that will not add to resistance and jeopardise their impact. Most of us, wherever we live and in whatever circles we move, have our own gender work to pursue, so we know some of the problems.<sup>4</sup>

### VIII. Working with armed groups

Supporting peace processes among armed groups is perhaps more problematic than working with civil society, since it can be seen as rewarding or dignifying violence. From my perspective I make no *ipso facto* moral distinction between state and non-state armed actors. The fact in either case is that those who are using violence are the ones can stop doing so. Often they are themselves trapped in the war dynamic, looking for ways out but lacking the confidence or the sense of direction to find them.

In this as in all things, I believe it is good to be transparent about one’s values, aware of one’s own flawed humanity, and unconditionally respectful of other persons – aware of their ideals and their vulnerability as well as their cruelty and selfishness, whether actual or potential.

Sometimes local actors have the credibility to work with armed groups and their leaders. But the involvement of non-governmental outsiders may be seen as adding gravitas and providing guarantors of impartiality. They may also act as unofficial mediators or help one, both or all parties to build their

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<sup>4</sup> See Diana Francis, ‘Gender and Conflict Transformation’, a discussion paper in *CCTS Review* no. 23, February 2004, pp. 1 – 12. <http://www.c-r.org/ccts/ccts23/index.htm>

capacity for constructive negotiation. (Often there is a need to enable the less experienced to gain skill and confidence to risk setting aside their arms and stepping into this new arena.) However, it is most likely that such outsiders will be enabled to make the contacts and gain the trust to help in these ways through the established contacts and trustworthiness of local actors, who themselves have earned this currency.

In the end, the motivation for change, however encouraged, will have to come from within the armed groups themselves. They will have to be ready to give up much – identity, status, income, power and a way of life – and to take great personal risks in the process, accepting that the outcome will be unknown. It is easy to see why support, understanding and the counsel of those who have nothing to gain (whether insiders or outsiders) can mean a great deal to them. So can the manifest wishes of the ‘ordinary people’ on whose behalf they claim to fight, which is why, ideally, a process towards accommodation between armed groups will be accompanied by the activities of civil society to mobilise pressure for peace.

## **IX. Popular ownership and pressure**

In bringing violent actors to the table and keeping them there, it is vital to erode grassroots support for violence and mobilise popular opinion in favour of peace.

In Serbia, President Milosevic relied very much on the support he received from the countryside, which more than neutralised the ongoing challenges that came from the city-based anti-war movement. (He was eventually overthrown when the Otpor movement against him mobilised ordinary working people around the country.) Conversely, the Oslo Peace Accord failed not only because the Israeli government failed to honour its terms but also because the Palestinian population at large was not behind it, understandably feeling that they had been sold out.

Although lip service is often paid to the idea of mobilising a ‘peace constituency’, the organisation of the kind of large-scale public events that this can require is outside the range of most NGOs (who are often reluctant to take on any public profile that could be regarded as political) and cannot be instigated by outside organisations. Yet I have seen local activists involving tribal and religious leaders, arranging church services for thousands, addressing public rallies and producing other key speakers,

packing a large stadium full of spectators for friendly football matches between rival ‘underground groups’, and producing tee shirts and badges for people to show their support for the peace process in question.

These are overwhelmingly ‘insider’ affairs and although messages of support from trusted outsiders may be welcome, along with *ad hoc* financial help to defray costs, any external input can risk giving rise to the accusation that the organisers are encouraging foreign interference.

A peace constituency can bring its influence to bear on governments and non-governmental groups alike, since all rely in some way on ‘the people’, whether for moral support, quiescence, shelter and supplies, labour, fighters or taxes, although the power of governments and other armed groups to coerce is liable to sap the will for direct resistance to the military, as against public demonstrations for peace. Even the psychological and social pressure to be loyal to one’s identity group can be very considerable. Still, public attitudes and behaviour can make a difference, in a way that NGOs themselves cannot, and whether or not INGOs can make a positive difference in this area they should not neglect it in their analysis.

## X. Influencing governments

It can happen that INGOs have greater access to national governments than do in-country NGOs, but it can be problematic to seek to influence them, whether directly or through (for instance) facilitating dialogue at levels close to the governmental. Not only is it vital that any influence exerted does not undermine that of local actors: attempts to have an impact on political policy can sour relationships with governments and even lead to expulsion on the grounds of political interference. The risks and potential benefits should therefore be carefully assessed. Occasionally, external actors who are willing to keep a very low profile may be able to provide ‘good offices’, quietly and informally, as trusted intermediaries, precisely because they are outsiders without vested interests. They may also be able to offer training that is relevant to good governance or ‘technical assistance’ in examining policy options.

Mostly, however, it is governments who relate to other governments, and in doing so they tend to pursue their own national interests. All too often the agendas of the big powers are hegemonic rather than altruistic and their favoured methods military rather than peaceable (as with the current **[shall I**

**adjust tenses in this paragraph *post hoc*?] bombardment in Libya<sup>5</sup>.** Whatever the rhetoric, this militates against local ownership. That is why those involved in the current Syrian democracy struggle are making it clear that they do not want military intervention by the so-called ‘international community’, but rather political support at the international level. In spite of all the suffering entailed, they want to own their own process.

## XI. Asymmetrical conflict, partisan roles and the values of nonviolence

Recent events in the Middle East and North Africa have forcibly confronted us with the too little acknowledged reality to which I referred in my introduction: that struggle for justice has a vital role in conflict transformation. Therefore impartiality is not the only valid or necessary role in bringing it about. There are many situations in which there is a moral imperative to stand up for what is right in the face of tyranny in one form or another. Though even here there may still at some point be a need for impartial functions, such as mediation, and the values of unconditional respect for other human beings holds good, it is also appropriate for people and organisations outside as well as inside the situation to take sides with those who oppose cruelty and injustice.

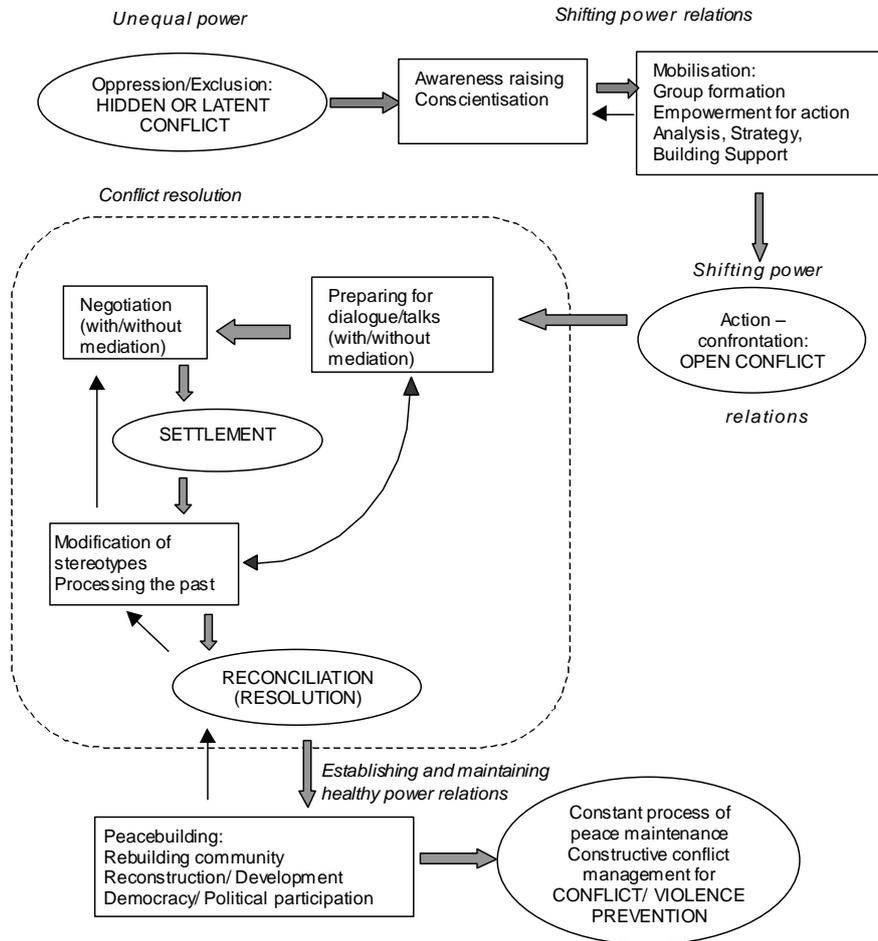
Once again there is a need for clarity about values. ‘Conflict transformation’ and ‘peace’ are not value-free concepts. By definition they exclude violence. Those of us who espouse them are by implication partisan for nonviolence, in action and in systems. Logically this puts us on the side of resistance to war itself and to tyranny of every kind. As Brian Wren so powerfully expresses it, we

- Say no to peace
- If what they mean by peace
- Is the quiet stillness of fear
- The silence of broken spirits
- The unborn hopes of the oppressed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/diana-francis-celia-mckeeon/story-of-moral-abandon>

<sup>6</sup> For both verses, see the beginning of Chapter 5 in *Rethinking War and Peace* (p. 103), whose subject is ‘Opposing Evil and Standing Up for Good’.



In the ‘latent conflict’ of deeply oppressive situations, the power imbalance between oppressors and oppressed is such that the latter have no chance of being taken seriously in the demands or requests they make, so no opportunities for ‘conflict resolution’. In order for this power relationship to be transformed, the passivity of the oppressed will have to be turned into assertive action.

I have represented in the diagram below<sup>7</sup> the process by which such latent conflict can be surfaced and transformed to the point where resolution is possible and genuine peace can be built.

The transformation process begins when some individual or group starts to reflect upon, understand and articulate what is happening to them, and encourage others to do the same: a process described in the liberation language of Latin America as ‘conscientisation’.

This process will, if it generates sufficient determination, lead to the formation of groups committed to change. Their first task will be to continue the process of reflection and analysis, formulating a common purpose and strategy, then developing coordinated networks as they begin to take action to build support and so increase their relative power. Though some oppressed groups choose the road of revolutionary violence, for others that is not an option or at least is not where they begin. For most people in any society – specifically, children, women, old people and the very poor – it remains beyond the realms of possibility. And for some it is a matter of clear strategic choice and/ or principle to act nonviolently. (This is the option implicit in the term ‘conflict transformation’.)

As their power and visibility increases, as their voice begins to be heard, these groups will increasingly be seen as a threat by those in power, so a stage of open confrontation becomes inevitable – a stage which may well involve repressive measures, including physical violence, on the part of the oppressive power holders, even if the oppressed group have acted nonviolently. (Sometimes at this point nonviolent resistance will turn to violence.) During this stage of open conflict, the power relationship between the opposing parties will change, as a result of their ongoing confrontation, and other developments may take place within the parties or in the wider environment.

Even if the confrontation takes the form of armed conflict, eventually a road back to dialogue has to be found. Once the oppressed group has increased its relative power or leverage sufficiently, they can expect to be taken seriously as partners in dialogue. At this stage it is possible to begin the processes grouped together and described as ‘conflict resolution’, in which communications are somehow restored and settlements reached.

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<sup>7</sup> *People, Peace and Power: Conflict Transformation in Action*, p. 49.

## XII. Developing the praxis of nonviolent people power

But of course this theoretical model is just that. As we have been reminded all too recently, oppressive regimes have a tenacious will to survive and powerful armies to use against their people. Like violent revolutions, nonviolent uprisings may also be crushed, just as wars – always devastating – always have losers. Moreover, the sense of alienation that drives revolutions does not automatically make them representative of a whole population or their causes and outcomes just. While ‘people power’ sounds like democracy *par excellence* we need some sound principles to distinguish it from mob rule. There is a considerable body of existing literature on the subject of nonviolent power,<sup>8</sup> but there remains a vast and largely unexplored hinterland of moral and practical questions to address. It is vital for us to begin to explore these with determination and to learn systematically from existing experience.

We must also learn by beginning to include the development of nonviolent people power in our own practice, whether as local actors or supporters from outside. Although the diagram above has been in use for more than a decade, the theory it represents has still not been translated by many organisations into practical policy and action, though there are notable exceptions.<sup>9</sup> Though this may be frustrating, at the practical level it is not hard to understand. Working systematically with and within movements is bound to be difficult, given their informality and fluidity. In many ways it is easier for other movements to engage with them with informal solidarity than for an INGO or even a local NGO. Applying managerial tools and processes to such work is well nigh impossible, and donors would have to accept a degree of risk exceeding that associated with most of the work we are currently engaged with.

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<sup>8</sup> Most notably the work of Gene Sharp, whose work is widely accessible on the internet and is seen to have been influential in the Arab Spring <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/middle-east/Arab-Spring-Revolutions-Follow-Game-Plan-from-1993-Book-123273468.html>

<sup>9</sup> Such as War Resisters International, which has translated its experience into a Nonviolence Handbook that is available on the internet at <http://www.wri-irg.org/pubs/NonviolenceHandbook>

### XIII. Support from ‘internationals’ for local people power

Those who engage in nonviolent defiance against war and injustice risk a great deal themselves and accept the responsibility for doing so. It is their process. Even financial support and training input, when they are substantial and emanate from countries that are seen as having their own agenda in a country or region, can be regarded as interference and so damage the reputation of local activists.<sup>10</sup>

But local actors can be supported by the shared experiences and knowledge of others, whether communicated directly or through books, films and in various forms via the internet. They may value help in the process of preparing themselves as individuals, groups and networks (just as those groups in the former Yugoslavia did in the time described at the beginning of this paper). They could benefit from modest assistance (with no strings attached) in meeting specific expenses, and from the presence of unarmed accompaniers from other countries,<sup>11</sup> who have the courage and have made the time to give to such work but who will need their own preparation, requiring input and finance, and ongoing costs to meet.

### XIV. Work for all of us, in our own localities

If we could at least begin to take these ideas seriously and widen the frame of what we see as necessary for building peace, we would be moving towards a more adequate response to the current global realities of violent conflict. If we really want to change the ways in which conflict is addressed, we must say an equally resounding ‘No’ to the violence of oppression and the violence of military intervention by those who wish to control and stabilise other countries for their own ends, dressing pacification in the clothes of peacebuilding. In Kosovo, where the pretext for war was most

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<sup>10</sup> The Otpor movement (referred to above, p. ) was seen by some to have been compromised by the degree of US support it received. See for instance <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A18395-2000Dec3?language=printer> and the Wikipedia discussion <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otpor!+otpor+US+assistance&ct=clnk>

<sup>11</sup> See the work of Peace Brigades International <http://www.peacebrigades.org.uk/> and Nonviolent Peaceforce <http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/>

convincingly presented<sup>12</sup> and so became the reference point for justifying subsequent wars, then in Afghanistan and Iraq, we have seen the disastrous realities of what has been ‘achieved’. We must deconstruct the age-old myth of the redemptive power of violence, so closely related to dominant constructions of masculinity and the ‘eat-or-be-eaten’ view of life,<sup>13</sup> pointing instead to the reality and value of interdependence.

We must use our influence to help change the way power is understood, so that the power to cooperate for good comes to be seen as more important than the power to dominate, and military violence is identified unequivocally as part of the problem rather than the solution; so that it is recognised that the idea of demilitarisation of countries and relationships needs to be applied, with urgency, to (and by) the most highly militarised and militarising states: those so often referred as the ‘international community’. It is their military and economic power that leads the world in violence. The military-industrial complex is alive and well and the polarities of ‘us and them’ are structured into global military and political alliances. Moreover, new powers are rising in the global South and working to the same model.

It is therefore vital that while we continue to support locally owned peace work in other countries, we must do all we can in our own, to support the development of home-grown policies for global transformation and demilitarise our own minds and societies.<sup>14</sup>

Is it realistic to believe that our world can be transformed? Given the endless spiralling of the arms race, the not only looming but already present environmental crisis and the ever present suffering of the oppressed and marginalised, if humanity is to have a future we must make it possible. Life does not just happen to us: we have agency. It is up to us. This is not a question of optimism but of commitment: something we cannot choose for others – only for ourselves. But one thing is clear: peace, if we can make it, must belong to all of us.

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<sup>12</sup> See Diana Francis, *Lessons from Kosovo/a: Alternatives to War*, published in 2001 by Quaker Peace and Social Witness. <http://www.dianafrancis.info/lessons-from-kosovo-a-alternatives-to-war/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/diana-francis/eat-or-be-eaten-courting-disaster>

<sup>14</sup> Howard Clark. ‘Demilitarising Minds and Societies’. <http://www.c-r.org/ccts/ccts11/newsletter11.pdf>