THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN TRANSFORMING CONFLICT

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the role of youth in transforming conflicts through a multi-layered study of grassroots youth movements adopting conflict transformational approaches in conflict zones across the world. Thus, it highlights certain attributes unique to youth that enhance their capacity and legitimacy in transforming conflict. The highlighted attributes include a lesser impact by entrenched hate, an inherent potential for long-term engagement, and a desire for purpose and a cause to make a difference. These characteristics of youth will be evaluated in relation to transforming conflict through an exploration of grassroots youth movements worldwide. These movements have generated increased legitimacy through positively impacting their communities by using these unique characteristics of youth, which enable strategic and crucial engagement in transforming conflict.

The research strategy used in this thesis consists of an analysis of scholarly work exploring the role of youth in peace building, a quantitative analysis of the growing youth demographic and their plight in conflict zones, and a qualitative analysis of five strategies used by youth movements in specific conflict zones, highlighting the pivotal role youth play. Data is collected from interviews, newspapers, and published reports. I will also
glean from my own experience as the founder and president of Sri Lanka Unites, a youth movement in post-war Sri Lanka.

This thesis challenges the arguments that youth movements are inconsequential and the role youth play in transforming conflict is ceremonial at best and destructive at worst. Some view governments, international organizations, and political and economic elites as the only stakeholders yielding the capacity to drive national change and create durable solutions to conflict. However, these higher echelons of society, though able to deal with the symptoms of conflict, typically have neither the reach, capacity, nor longevity in approach to identify or address a conflict’s root causes. Grassroots youth movements that have adopted conflict transformational approaches have enhanced their relevance and capacity by using innovative methods to expose, challenge, and transform the root causes of conflict. Therefore, they increase the possibility of durable solutions for and reconciliation of communities and nations devastated by conflict.
This is for Adrian and Ophelia De Visser, my beloved parents. They taught me the values of love, peace, community, and equality.
CONTENTS

Figures ................................................................................................................................. v

Tables ................................................................................................................................. vi

Preface ............................................................................................................................... vii

Chapter 1: Introduction ....................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2: Youth Demographic and their plight in conflict ............................................... 8

Chapter 3: Opportunities and Challenges of youth leadership........................................... 19
  3.1 SWOT of Youth Leadership ....................................................................................... 19
  3.2 Strengths .................................................................................................................. 20
    3.2.1 Less jaded by hate and open mindedness ......................................................... 21
    3.2.2 Youth are seeking for a positive cause and purpose ......................................... 28
  3.3 Weaknesses ............................................................................................................. 33
    3.3.1 Limited ability for strategic non reactionary change ...................................... 36
  3.4 Opportunities ......................................................................................................... 38
    3.4.1 Need for sustainable and long term solutions .................................................. 38
    3.4.2 The Opportunity Cost ...................................................................................... 40
  3.5 Threats .................................................................................................................... 42

Chapter 4: Conflict Transformation and the increased legitimacy of youth ...................... 45
  4.1 Definition and Key Attributes of Conflict Transformation ....................................... 52
    4.1.1 Crisis is an opportunity ................................................................................... 53
    4.1.2 Lenses ............................................................................................................ 56
    4.1.3 Addressing deeper issues .............................................................................. 60
    4.1.4 Long Term Engagement .............................................................................. 64
  4.2 Reconciliation ......................................................................................................... 68

Chapter 5: Points of Engagement .................................................................................... 77
  5.1 What does this engagement look like? ...................................................................... 77
  5.2 Integration ............................................................................................................... 79
    5.2.1 The theoretical framework for integration ...................................................... 80
    5.2.2 Congo Unites .................................................................................................. 82
  5.3 Influence ................................................................................................................. 88
    5.3.1 Theoretical framework of strategy of influence .............................................. 89
    5.3.2 April 6th Movement – Egypt ......................................................................... 89
5.4 Justice ................................................................................................................................. 92
   5.4.1 Theoretical Framework for the Strategies of Restorative Justice .... 93
   5.4.2 Fambul Tok: Community Healing in Sierra Leone .................. 95
5.5 Education ............................................................................................................................. 97
   5.5.1 Theoretical Framework for the Strategies in Education .......... 98
   5.5.2 Afghans for Progressive Thinking ............................................... 99
5.6 Emotional Health .............................................................................................................. 100
   5.6.1 Theoretical framework for Trauma Healing .............................. 102
   5.6.2 Healing and rebuilding our communities - HROC - Rwanda ...... 104
5.7 Summary ......................................................................................................................... 106

Chapter 6: Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 108
   6.1 Research Findings ....................................................................................................... 109
   6.2 Recommendations ...................................................................................................... 111
   6.3 Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 111

Appendix A: Iceberg illustration part 2 ......................................................................... 115
   A.1 Platform of engagement for youth movements .............................................. 115

Appendix B: Iceberg illustration part 3 ........................................................................... 116
   B.1 The result of long term engagement of the deeper issues. ............................ 116

Work Cited ............................................................................................................................ 117
FIGURES

Figure 2.1 : World Youth Population ................................................................. 9
Figure 2.2: Percentage of world population under the age of 25 ....................... 9
Figure 2.3 : Percentage below the age of 25 living in the developing world......... 9
Figure 2.4 : World Median Ages ....................................................................... 10
Figure 3.1 : Research among peace activist on the idealistic nature of Youth ... 32
Figure 3.2 : Values invested during youth and its impact ................................. 40
Figure 3.3 : Extremist and violent movements recruiting youth ....................... 43
Figure 4.1 Peace Building Pyramid ................................................................. 52
Figure 4.2 Crisis = Danger and Opportunity ................................................. 53
Figure 5.1 : Points of engagement .................................................................. 78
Figure 5.2: Highlighted movements across the world ....................................... 107
Figure A.1: Iceberg illustration part 2 ....................................................... 120
Figure B.1: Iceberg illustration part 3 ....................................................... 121
TABLES

Table 1: Youth Populations in Transitional Situations. ................................................. 15

Table 2 Resolution and Transformation: A Brief Comparison of Perspective .............. 67
PREFACE

Being born and raised in the midst of a violent conflict has had a profound impact on my life. Growing up in Sri Lanka during the height of civil war made it impossible not to ask questions such as, “Why should our nation suffer in this manner?” and, “Why are we committing such atrocities against each other?” As a young child, I didn’t understand the complexities of the war, but I did understand one reality - a minority of extremists on either side of the ethnic divide brainwashed and manipulated youth into violence. Youth were therefore seen as the problem of society, the violent, the illogical. The reality was that these youth were not presented with an alternative. They were made to believe that violence was the only option.

This led me to pioneer a youth movement for hope and reconciliation named Sri Lanka Unites - a movement that provided youth with an alternate to violence and an opportunity to lead our nation towards peace and reconciliation. Sri Lanka Unites has now become an international youth movement for transforming conflict in war zones across the world. The movement is now established as a non-profit named Global Unites. This thesis is my effort to further understand the vital role youth can play in transforming their societies, making a transition from once being labeled as the problem to becoming a crucial asset for durable solutions. This thesis also affirms that youth movements and leaders should be set in their rightful place, recognized for their pivotal, central role in transforming their societies through the transformation of conflict.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for preserving my life while growing up in the midst of war and for giving me an opportunity to serve Him and my beloved country, Sri Lanka. I would also like to acknowledge my family for standing by me during my journey to work with and alongside youth in conflict zones across the world, especially my parents, who taught me many great values and provided me a broad worldview. I also want to acknowledge my fiancée, Shruthi, for inspiring me and encouraging me every step of the way. I would like to acknowledge the University of Notre Dame for the privilege of pursuing my graduate studies in this prestigious institution. My special gratitude to the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, my professors who have inspired and invested in me, and the staff at Kroc who have worked passionately to ensure our experience at the institute has been a memorable and formative one. I would like to make special mention of Dr. John Paul Lederach, Dr. Cortright, Dr. Lopez, Dr. St.Ville, and Dr. Bolton. I want especially to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Philpott, for his wisdom and guidance as I embarked on working on my thesis. I also want to thank Mrs. Dale Sprowl, Mr. Josh Yoder for helping me edit this document. Writing this thesis in my second language was made possible by their support and patience.
CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

The jury is divided on the issues. Are youth an asset or a liability to peacebuilding? Do they contribute to the solution or the problem? Do they have a positive or negative role to play? Whatever their role is, do they lead or are they led? These questions are not uncommon in conflict zones, or anywhere else for that matter. The mystery of youth and the role they play is ambiguous to many. To further complicate the narrative, different cultures and regions define “youth” at various age ranges. The fundamental principal here would be to understand an age category most impacted by, influenced by, and involved in the midst of violence. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, youth are defined as individuals of ages 10 – 24, a standard adopted by the UNFPA in their 2014 state of the world report. (UNFPA) Regardless of what position one might have concerning the issues of youth in conflict and peacebuilding, there is no shortage on the range of opinions. The extremes shift from an ultra-romantic notion of youth (“they are the future, they can heal the world”) to quite the opposite (“they are the generation that destroys society and our nation”). Whatever the perception towards the role of youth in the midst of conflict may be, they are most certainly viewed as part of the conflict narrative. On the other hand, from the Arab Spring to the 2008 United States elections, from new policies for reconciliation in Columbia to non-violent demands for good governance in DRC, youth are active and engaged agents of change. Youth across the world have taken many steps towards creating
movements to promote positive change in their communities.

However, a growing perspective reveals time and time again the propensity of youth to be manipulated towards violence and unleash negative outcomes to broader society. Even today in Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, Myanmar, and DRC, extremist groups brainwash and manipulate vulnerable youth to lead atrocities and propagate violence. The growing populations of youth in the developing world, especially youth in conflict zones, are further plagued with limited resources, the complexities of war zones, and the brutal experience of victimization and manipulation; these have contributed to a spike in the involvement of youth in propagating violence. Such environments have proven to be the perfect breeding grounds for radicalization and manipulation of youth by extremist factions with various political agendas.

President Herbert Hoover once said, “Older men declare war. But it is youth that must fight and die.” (Britannica) Can the pendulum shift? Can youth in conflict zones across the world break the mold of being defined as victims, vulnerable and volatile, and transform to build a new ideal as agents of positive change? Can they lead their communities through non-violence to equality and reconciliation? Can youth be seen as an asset to transforming conflict? Do they have the credibility, the resources, and the social capital to influence society? Is it possible for youth to set new standards of engaging conflict through dialogue, nonviolence, and development? The thesis of this paper affirms that despite the dire circumstances into which they are born and the growing tendencies of being swept into violence, youth have the capacity to play a pioneering and pivotal role in transforming conflict.
Firstly, this paper will take a close look at the growing demographic of youth in conflict zones. It will also analyze the realities into which these youth are born. A failure to understand the circumstances, challenges, and atrocities youth face in these communities could lead to a superficial notion of their capacity to inspire positive change. A closer look at the causal factors is essential in order to understand why youth are lured into a life of violence and thus perpetuate the culture of violence. These same causal factors will be examined as opportunities for engagement to recruit youth as agents of positive change, and movements that have adopted this approach will be highlighted.

Next, the thesis will look at the specific attributes youth as a demographic possess - attributes that enhance their capacity and legitimacy to be agents of durable change and, thus, fortify the notion that youth are pivotal in transforming conflict. The first attribute centers on youth having the capacity to overcome inherited sentiments and be more open to change. Youth in conflict zones often inherit prejudice and hate from older generations. However, despite intense indoctrination and a culture of being taught to hate the “other”, these formative years of their lives still contain a fledgling capacity for a broader perspective, an undying curiosity to think critically and be open to different narratives. Therefore, a unique opportunity to be crucial agents in transforming conflict is inherently created. Another attribute unique to youth that increases their legitimacy of being agents of change is youthful exuberance and passion for change, the drive to experience a reality more pleasant than what was inherited; these are often the same notions that drive certain youth to embrace violence. The passion for a cause, an ambition, and a dream are all fundamental emotions of adolescence. Humanity’s own naturally inherent thirst to evolve and progress lies within a new generation of societies around the
world. Tapping into this passion, exuberance, optimism, and commitment is a crucial step in the journey towards transforming conflict, thus further establishing the capacity of youth to play a pivotal and pioneering role in it. The final attribute is steeped in a logical reality, the life span of youth. An obvious but crucial fact, youth more than any other demographic have the capacity for their engagement in transforming conflict to outlast the generations before them, thus giving them the potential to lead change into completion. As conventional wisdom suggests, conflicts do indeed need years of engagement to see strong signs of change. Social movements do not occur overnight; neither do these movements accomplish monumental change during a limited time frame. In the words of Nobel peace prize winner, Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

There is no short cut or simple prescription for healing the wounds and divisions of a society in the aftermath of sustained violence. Creating trust and understanding between former enemies is a supremely difficult challenge. It is, however, an essential one to address in the process of building a lasting peace. Examining the painful past, acknowledging it and understanding it, and above all transcending it together, is the best way to guarantee that it does not – and cannot – happen again…This involves a very long and painful journey, addressing the pain and suffering of the victims, understanding the motivations of offenders, bringing together estranged communities, trying to find a path to justice, truth and, ultimately, peace. (Bloomsfield, 1)

Transforming conflict and healing a nation truly takes a generation. Such longevity in engagement is literally only a possibility for the youth of a nation. Hence, the early involvement of youth in engaging with the pressing issues that cause conflict not only helps orient them to the realities, but also provides them a lifetime of work towards constructive
change. McEvoy-Levy, a long-time advocate for the stronger role of youth in peacebuilding suggests, “The new generation of leaders, facilitators, and stakeholders will emerge from among the current cohort of young people; thus, their engagement, insight and even leadership in peacebuilding and the shaping of the political attitudes and skills in the post conflict period has crucial long term implications.” (McEvoy-Levy 7) Therein, the legitimacy of their involvement is enhanced.

The thesis will then move towards looking at current global experiences in conflict response. From the era of Johan Galtung, the father of peacebuilding, to the post world war nation-building strategy, to recent liberal peace notions, the world has seen ebbs and flows in its understanding of how to transform conflict. The lures of the growing youth demographic to conflict, startling increases in non-state actors, increasingly destructive weapons, ethno-religious wars, and acts of terror have all changed the face of violence. Such changes have also begged the need for new approaches to address conflict. The liberal peace and conflict resolutions approaches have fallen short of finding durable solutions. The failure to look beyond the symptoms of conflict and engage for durable solutions has been among the reasons for growing criticism. Thus, just peace and Conflict Transformational models, which in essence look towards engaging root causes and seek to engage more long-term towards durable solutions, have increased in recognition. Largely due to its grassroots, bottom-up emphasis, the legitimacy of youth as pivotal actors in transforming conflict has increased further. The Conflict Transformational approach will be explored as a theoretical framework that not only legitimizes youth engagement as pivotal and pioneering, but also complements the positive attributes of youth to enhance the approach.
Finally, this thesis will look at youth movements and initiatives within conflict zones that have grown in their legitimacy within their local spheres of influence. Embracing the philosophy of Conflict Transformation to identify root causes and engage them from the “bottom up” to ensure durable solutions, these initiatives stand as testaments that youth movements and their actions are not inconsequential but in fact play a pioneering and pivotal role in transforming conflict. This paper will look at five case studies and strategies, embodying a Conflict Transformational approach, which youth movements have used. In addition, this paper will take a closer look at the work of Sri Lanka Unites, which will serve as a foundational case study intertwined throughout the paper to enhance the argument of the thesis. These case studies and approaches will stand as evidence to the pioneering and vital role youth play in transforming societies and even creating a resistance to further conflict. The conclusion of this thesis seeks to enhance the consideration of activists, policy makers, citizens in conflict, and academics alike to see the intrinsic value in affirming and supporting youth-led movements for conflict transformation as a key strategy of global peacebuilding.

In summary, this thesis will focus on the role of youth in conflict zones with the backdrop of the following realities. Youth (under 25) are the largest demographic in the world, especially in conflict zones. Non-state actors have placed increased interest in recruiting youth in such regions of conflict. In this current era, liberal peace models have come under criticism while alternate grassroots, bottom-up approaches have arisen that are well suited for youth involvement, thereby increasing their legitimacy. Within this backdrop of today’s world, this thesis will look at youth in conflict zones and their unique attributes that make them attractive for both causes of transforming conflict and expand it.
This reality makes the presence of youth in peacebuilding and conflict transformation critical not only for enhancing peace, but also for creating a resistance to the further propagation of violence.
CHAPTER 2:
YOUTH DEMOGRAPHIC AND THEIR PLIGHT IN CONFLICT

This chapter seeks to understand the current realities youth in conflict zones have to encounter. It is impossible to make notions or conclusions about the role of youth if they are not based within the context into which the youth of conflict zones are born. These circumstances have strong implications; they inform the manner in which we view youth and, more importantly, how they view themselves and the role they play in transforming conflict. First and foremost, youth are born into an increasingly younger world. The population of youth has been growing in staggering proportions across the developing world. The statistics consistently reveal that one in four people on earth are below the age of twenty-five. The population of youth across the globe is at an all-time high. A closer look at the data indicates that the growing youth population is augmented in the developing world, including conflict zones across the world. Even though the population of adolescents and young adults has decreased in the developed world, the developing nations have seen significant spikes in the younger blood of their population. Dan Kedmey in his recent TIME article states, “The UN Population Fund estimates that the global population of young people between the ages of 10-24 has hit 1.8 billion, a historic high. The world population reached 7 billion this year and forty-three percent of those 7 billion are under the age of 25” (Kedmey).
Figure 2.1: World Youth Population

Figure 2.2: Percentage of world population under the age of 25

Figure 2.3: 90% of the world’s population below the age of 25 live in the developing world.
The valuable resource of an emerging young generation is a sacred responsibility of the world. If mismanaged or neglected, this growing population can result in a global crisis. However, if the world responds to the needs and creates a strong foundation for these youth, it will indeed launch global society to new heights. The margin for error is small, but the potential for success will in many ways define the future of our world. The potential is palpable in relation to the global economy, environment, innovation and the focus of this paper - transforming conflict. Kedmey continues to emphasize in the report that, “Never again is there likely to be such potential for economic and social progress.” However, the
author warns this demographic surge could also have “the potential to destabilize nations unless young people can secure access to health services, education and jobs” (Kedmey). A closer look at the statistics reveals that over 89% of the world’s youth population lives in the less developed world, where the challenges are most acute. Boasting nearly 9 out of 10 of the world’s young people, these countries are on the verge of either benefiting from the population’s spike or spiraling into further strife. India alone has a youth population of 356 million. (Kedmey) According to the African Economic Outlook report, the African continent has over 200 million people aged between 15 and 24 (the youth bracket); Africa has the youngest population in the world. The current trend indicates that this figure will double by 2045. Thus, many pundits are calling on governments and donors to invest in this population’s education, employment, and health, particularly sexual and reproductive health. Therein lies the concern; most of the growing youth population represents the developing world and conflict zones.

Limited resources and the harsh realities of growing up in the midst of conflict have already tipped the scale towards unfavorable outcomes from the growing younger demographic. Providing the right foundation for the next generation becomes overwhelming and nearly impossible in the context of poverty, and even worse in the midst of conflict. In fact, these atmospheres are more favorable to further the existing structural violence and inequality. The inability to provide education, employment, and health services, the basic foundations necessary to harness the potential of the younger demographic, threatens to have an adverse impact on the future of these countries and the world in general. Alexander Chikwanda, Zambia’s finance minister, puts it succinctly:
“Youth unemployment is a ticking time bomb,” which now appears to be perilously close to exploding (Ighobor).

The existing concerns fade in comparison to a context in which violent conflict is factored into the mix. The World Youth Report from 2003 further proves this reality: “Warfare magnifies existing impoverishment and despair. Between 1989 and 2000 there were 111 reported armed conflicts; seven involved fighting between States, and the remainder were internal disputes. All were characterized by the use of light weapons and small arms as well as decentralized fighting groups” (World Youth Report, 373). The involvement of youth in these conflicts and the direct and indirect impact on their lives is indisputable. Thus, it further justifies the concern for the growing population of youth in these countries that have been marred by violence. The manner in which these countries in the developing world and especially conflict zones have fared in the treatment of their youth helps predict future. Unfortunately, the track record does not look promising for the future. In fact, most studies depict that women and children bear the greatest burden of war. The statistics suggest that for every one soldier who has died, ten civilian casualties have been reported (UNDESA, 374). For those who manage to save their lives from the clutches of violence, life as a survivor is filled with heart-wrenching circumstances. Young men find themselves serving as child soldiers while young women are forced to be sex slaves. Once violence finally ends, the survivor’s tale is further devastated by the hindered re-entrance into society as a result of stigma, collapsed educational opportunity and potential, post traumatic stress disorder, and a general inability to function in “regular” society. These all are manifestations of the haunting reality of war and its brutal impact on a nation’s youth. According to UNDESA:
Civilian casualties as a proportion of the total number of casualties of armed conflict have risen from 5 per cent during the First World War to more than 80 per cent today, and most of those affected are women and children. In the past decade, 2 million children have been killed as a result of armed conflict, and 6 million have been disabled, mainly through mutilation and landmine explosions. A total of 12 million have been left homeless, more than 1 million orphaned or separated from their parents, and more than 10 million psychologically traumatized. (374)

The devastating impact of conflict on youth impacts every element of their growth. In addition, it leaves them more vulnerable to be used by radical factions, thus creating a vicious cycle of violence. The horror is personified by the fact that as adults they continuing the cycle and impose the same treatment on a new generation. This embodies the dilemma of victims becoming perpetrators:

Youth are often a targeted group during conflict. Young people’s participation in armed hostilities is facilitated through the trade of small arms and light weapons. The dearth of opportunities in their communities often leads them to gravitate towards violent conflict and acts of terrorism. Many are successfully mobilized through the ideologies of war. As victims and witnesses, they cannot help but be affected by the grim realities surrounding them. (World Youth Report, 389)

Thus, concerns arising from the growing demographic of youth in conflict zones across the world heighten. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a nation that has lost nearly 6 million people in war along with being referred to as the rape capital of the world, over 29 million youth will begin life in this context. In Cambodia, a nation that is marred by violence and which has lost 3 million people to genocide, over 10 million youth embark on their journey to adulthood. In Pakistan, a nation torn apart by violence, over 22 million
youth will take on the responsibility for their nation’s future. In Somalia, a nation that has
been ravaged by famine, war, and extremism, over 1.9 million youth are taking ranks as
their nation’s next generation (CIA Fact book). The list goes on, and the numbers are
staggering. A closer look at population demographics in transitional states across the world
indicates the following realities.
Youth playing a pivotal role in transforming conflict may seem unlikely, especially in light of the fact that their primary role has been that of victim or perpetrator in conflict zones across the world. However, it is important to understand that the growing demographic of youth also represents an opportunity to transform these societies. Engaging youth and inspiring them to play a role in transforming conflict is not only crucial for outcomes, but their involvement in peacebuilding detracts from what likely could have
been involvement in furthering violence. Therefore, this paper seeks to dig deeper to understand what it means to be a youth in the midst of conflict. Therein, the argument can be built that youth are pivotal in transforming conflict not merely despite their horrendous experiences in violence, but to a certain extent because of those realities they face. Actively engaging and welcoming youth to play a role in transforming conflict is a pivotal approach. It serves as a form of offense that turns out to be the best defense against the further drift of youth into violence, McEvoy-Levy writes. “If sustainable peace is to be achieved, neither a policy of saving nor containing is a sufficient or a practical response to the challenge that so many young people face in post war environments” (6). In an environment where the risk of being radicalized and manipulated by extremists to violence is so prominent, it is crucial to create a foundation for the positive involvement of youth in society. The grave significance of this risk in regions of conflict underscores the importance of mobilizing new generations for peace. The need is significant and urgent, for it both affords youth in conflict the possibility to forge a new identity while also protecting society in general from the devastation of misguided youth.

Hence the journey begins. The facts suggest that the risk of a large youth population outweighs the potential. Indeed, the stronger possibility is that the growth of a younger demographic will enhance the cycle of violence and cause it to expand further. In the midst of this grim reality, however, an even deeper truth glimmers hope. Though possible to elude the naked eye, the truth is not restrained. This truth, this hope, is none other than the capacity of youth to take matters into their own hands, to positively influence society, and to go beyond the parameters of being defined as victims, vulnerable and volatile. McEvoy-Levy affirms this notion as she writes, “Involving young people in building peace can give
them hope. If the enemy of peace is despair, hope is an important pillar upon which to build a sustainable peace.” (216)

The ability of youth to lead and be resilient for change remains, despite the odds stacked against them. The inherited turmoil, prejudice, and devastation are all fruits of failure of a previous generation. This failure could also serve as a reason for the resolve of a new generation to create a better future and build a stronger foundation for their children. The notion that youth as a demographic cannot thrive if systems are not in place and will succumb to and further the cycle of violence is all based on the assumption that they are not given autonomy and freedom to make their own decisions. This assumption is based on a patriarchal understanding of a youth posture that receives and does not conceive an alternate possibility. Though having been a prevalent occurrence, this narrative can change - the pendulum can shift.

Youth represent the highest aspirations for humanity. In the context of our world and in the midst of conflicts with overwhelming challenges, representing the failures of previous generations, it is time to “Let them lead”. The thesis will build on this ideology to prove that youth play a pivotal role in transforming conflict - not a ceremonial role but, rather, a pioneering role for sustainable change. The mere fact that youth in conflict zones are born into a negative environment, are deprived of positive investments in their future, and grow up in the midst of great uncertainty, means that, by default, the onus for change is on them. If sustainable solutions are born from within the communities themselves, these youth are their communities’ best chance for a different reality. Their leadership is the central hope for strategic peacebuilding where it matters the most. In the words of President Truman, “men and women make history and not the other way around. In periods
where there is no leadership, society stand stills. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better.” (Truman)

In the context of a conflict zone, there most certainly is a void of positive leadership. In such a void, society deteriorates, and it takes courageous young men and women to take a stand for change. The mantle of leadership in the midst of these circumstances has fallen on them and, hence, they are pivotal for transforming conflict. The next chapter will take a closer look at the strengths and weakness they possess and their unique attributes that enhance their ability to lead the transformation of conflict.
CHAPTER 3:
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP

The notion that, despite their circumstances, youth can defeat the odds stacked against them could be seen as “wishful thinking”. Therefore, the claim that youth are pivotal in transforming conflict cannot be based on “potential”. It requires a closer analysis of the Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) of youth as a demographic to play a critical role in transforming conflict. Thus, identifying certain indisputable characteristics supporting the thesis that youth play a positive role is crucial to bolster the argument. The following is an analysis of certain key attributes possessed by youth.

3.1 SWOT of Youth Leadership

In her book Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning, Lisa Schirch incorporates a business practice into peacebuilding. She writes, “Businesses often conduct a ‘SWOT’ analysis before designing a new product or project. In the same way, peacebuilding actors should conduct this analysis before planning and designing peacebuilding” (Schirch 63). In other words, Schirch’s model asks the following question: “Given the conflict assessment, what are the SWOTs of youth to bring to peacebuilding in the conflict–affected context?” (Schirch). Thus far, this thesis has assessed the realities of
conflict zones and looked at the impact of conflict on youth. This next section seeks to explore the true potential within the attributes of youth through a SWOT analysis of youth as peacebuilding actors.

3.2 Strengths

Having examined the evidence of the realities youth face and the various manners in which they are victimized, manipulated, and used, it may seem impossible to see the strengths that youth possess to contribute positively, let alone play a crucial role, in transforming conflict. However, a closer look indicates not only great strength within youth, but also unique and critical attributes to cause durable change. These attributes are not manifested despite the conflict, but rather because of the conflict. Analyzing the attributes of youth in comparison to adults helps reveal significant differences that enhance the argument for the legitimate and pivotal role youth play in transforming conflict. Johan Galtung writes:

Youth are more idealists, adults more realists. …Youth may be more open, adults more closed. Are these two different points or two different ways of saying the same thing? To be young is to have less past and more future, less trauma suffered and inflicted and more hope. That means a combination of less knowledge and less experience, in principle making youth more free to dream ideals and less impeded by useful knowledge and less experience that adults. But knowledge can also harden into inflexible mind-sets, and experience can harden into inflexible habits. Moreover, adults may simply have given up, setting at a low level of ideas and ideals. But as we grow older, generalizing from experience may gain the upper hand. (McEvoy-Levy 262)
The wider parameters of a youth’s worldview in comparison to that of adults allows for an ability to understand and imagine new realities, different from those set in their parents’ perception. This type of worldview serves as a goldmine where the treasure of durable solutions that can arise from within the conflict may lie.

3.2.1 Less jaded by hate and more open minded

Among the most profound and beneficial strengths to transforming conflict that youth possess is the fact that their hate and prejudice against their enemies are usually entirely inherited and, therefore, less entrenched than that of older generations. In conflicts that have lasted more than a decade, most youth don’t have any experiences of their own that led to the conflict; rather, they were born into the conflict and inherited the prejudice. Within the context into which they were born, it was their duty to fall in line with the community’s position and act accordingly. According to Caryl Stern of the Anti-Defamation League:

No child is born a bigot. Hate is learned and there is no doubt it can be unlearned. Leading experts on child development argue that the problem begins as early as preschool, where children have already learned stereotypes or acquired negative attitudes toward “others.” The process of countering those negatives with positives begins at an early age. (36)
The learned practices of hate are comparatively new within the psyche of youth; this is in comparison to the older generations, who are more entrenched in prejudice and hate against the opposing community. Therefore, as Stern argues, it can be unlearned. This is both strength and an opportunity unique to the youth demographic in various conflict zones. In a context like Sri Lanka, DRC, Somalia, or even Kenya, where an entire generation was born into war or tension across ethnic, religious, or tribal lines, these youth inherited prejudice. Their bigotry and hate is not the result of a direct experience. Therefore, this provides such youth with the capacity to critically question the reasons for the violence, understand the grievances of the other community, and work toward reconciliation. Even in a situation where the new generation has been involved in the violence, gaining their own experiences that cause them to become prejudicial and hateful against the opposing community, not being part of the origins of the conflict and not fully understanding the grievances can help these youth break away from the cycle of violence and ask critical, yet life-giving questions.

Sri Lanka Unites, a youth movement for hope and reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka, led an informal research survey among its nation’s youth. The purpose of the research was to see the perception youth had about their opposing ethnic groups. The research indicated that 90% of the responders had a negative perception of the opposing ethnicity. However, when asked the question, “Have you had an interaction with a person outside your ethnic group?” over 90% of those surveyed did not have a friendship or even a direct interaction with someone outside their ethnicity. How do you have negative impressions of an entire people group if you haven’t had any interaction outside your own
community? The answer rested in what they were taught by their parents or other adults in their ethnic community. The prejudice was almost entirely inherited, not a result of experience. Therefore, these youth had room to have a rational conversation, incorporate critical questions, and even consider the opponent’s perspective. In the most successful situations, they even challenged their own community’s justifications for extended violence and hatred. This reality rings true in conflict zones across the world. The fuel of violence and extremism is the ignorance of the masses. However, this crisis can also be viewed as an opportunity. The fact that most prejudice and enticement to extremism is based on a foundation of inherited prejudice creates room for it to be challenged and uprooted by real life experiences. Broadening one’s worldview through outside exposure creates a resistance to the rhetoric of extremism.

Johan Galtung explores the relationship between youth and peacebuilding, examining how youth approach peacebuilding differently than other age demographics. Galtung defines the creativity (the focus of the fifth chapter) and open-mindedness of youth to “transcend” structures and attitudes, which promote conflict as their greatest strength in peacebuilding (Mays 8). Youth, given the right experiences, can have the crucial perspective that brings light and hope in the midst of conflict. In an article for Devex International on lessons from youth and peacebuilding in Lebanon, Oriana Wuerth writes, “Given young peoples’ openness, energy and creativity, they are especially well-positioned to come up with new ideas to address community problems. They can play a vital role in the peacebuilding process by modeling alternatives to violence and showing that change can be made peaceful” (Wuerth 3). The “openness” Wuerth refers to is due to not being
fully convinced by the indoctrination received by an older generation. Being “less jaded and more open” enhances the capacity of youth to think of alternate solutions and approaches to dealing with conflict. Many extremist groups spend large amounts of their resources brainwashing youth, draining their ability to think for themselves and ask critical questions. The exploration of their openness or a lack of passionate hate towards the “enemy” is seen as treason and betrayal. Such intense reaction is due not only to the level of hatred these extremists possess, but also to a fear that they could lose control over the youth in their community.

The strength of openness and being less jaded by hate is best enhanced through real life experiences that question the inherited narrative. This strength remains dormant when youth in conflict are left segregated, robbed of the opportunity to explore their desire to fully understand the reason for the conflict, the perspective of the opposing group, etc. Like most people, youth dislike being lectured on the importance of transforming conflict. Framing activities as “reconciliation, unity, and conflict resolution” or discussing sensitive issues, such as ethnic and sectarian tensions or political violence, without building trust can be counterproductive and push youth away (Wuerth 3). Indoctrinating youth for conflict transformation, unity, or reconciliation is not a suitable approach to detoxify hate and inspire youth to pioneer change. However, creating an environment where critical questions can be asked and new experiences can thrive will fan into flame the strength of youth to be more open to another perspective and less jaded by hate.

After the end of the 28 yearlong war in Sri Lanka in 2009, Sri Lanka Unites organized a national future leaders’ conference. The purpose of the conference was to bring
together promising young leaders from schools across the island. These students were the prefects and student government leaders of their schools. Together, they represented all the ethnic, religious, and socio-economic groups of the country, as well as all its districts. Most schools in Sri Lanka remain segregated across ethnic lines; even schools that have students from all the ethnic communities of the country are segregated by language medium. Thus, most students, with the rare exception of those in a few districts, don’t have significant relationships across ethnic and religious lines. In fact, a Sri Lanka Unites study confirmed that over 70% of youth in Sri Lanka did not have a friend outside of their ethnic or religious group. (Sri Lanka Unites)

In such a context, the inherited prejudices were held deeply and never challenged. A conference that would bring students from various communities and mix them up, integrating individuals with students from all other communities, was a difficult and uncomfortable proposition. Students were placed in groups with twenty-five other student leaders who represented twenty-five districts. They shared rooms, showers, and meals, experienced sports activities and learning exercises together, and listened to plenary sessions with one another. They learned to overcome their language barriers and go beyond their inherited prejudices. This was extremely difficult for most given the fact that it was contrary to decades of conditioned bigotry. This same exercise with adults could prove disastrous. However, after the first day or two, with sports, music, and dance experiences helping to break the tension, the common humanity prevailed. These students, once enemies by birthright, were now proving their unique attribute of openness as friendships arose from hearts and minds less entrenched in hate than those of previous
generations. Such moments stood to affirm the right of such youth to claim roles of leadership in the work of conflict transformation.

The following are some of the comments from students that help further depict their capacity to think critically and form new relationships. Since 2009, Sri Lanka Unites has organized six such conferences, which have witnessed over 2200 student leaders break away from inherited prejudice and build new roads for their courageous journey to understanding.

Majunla Basnayaka, a Sinhalese student leader from the Kegalle district, states:

My people looked down on the Tamil culture and the ideas they had. I've heard my people say, "It would be best if these Tamils disappeared." I had a similar mindset, but these conferences have changed me entirely. It didn't take me long to realize that they [Tamil students] are just like me. I am inspired by our common humanity, and, for the first time in my life, I wanted to know what for the grievances on their side. (Sri Lanka Unites, 2012)

These words came from a 17 year old after four days of interaction with the “opposing community” - a realization that still seems to elude his parents’ generation after 28 years of war and 6 years in post-war Sri Lanka.

Panchalingam Ajith, a Tamil student leader from Mullaitivu district states:

All my life, I hated Sinhalese, never really met any Sinhalese outside the army, but I hated them. My sister was a colonel for the separatist rebel forces. She died in the war and that fueled my hate. I came to the conference not knowing what to expect, but I found that there were Sinhalese students who wanted to know about my perspective, my grievances, and were willing to stand up for my rights. That made me want to know their story and learn how I could stand for their rights. For the first time in my life, I was proud to be Sri Lanka. (Sri Lanka Unites, 2012)
Once again, after an entire lifetime at war, at 17 years of age with even a few experiences, this youth had the capacity to ask the greater questions that depicted broader understanding and a commitment to change.

Sharafi Mihran, a Muslim student leader from Ampara district, states:

As I walked in the conference premises, a student saw my beard and called me “Bin laden”. He and his friend started pointing at me and laughing. I felt, all what I heard in my community of other communities were true - they don’t understand us, they think the worst of us. I didn’t think I would have any positive experience at this conference. Yet, as the days went by, people started seeing me for who I was, not for who they thought I was. I also started realizing that, all my life, I hadn’t gone beyond my community and my belief. I was fasting during the conference because of the holy month. My non-Muslim teammate fasted with me, in solidarity, one day. All I had ever heard was people misunderstood Islam and Muslims, but these students tried to go beyond what they had heard and sought to learn by themselves. I tried to do the same...it was an amazing feeling. When I was about to leave the conference, and sad to leave my friends, the same boy who called me a “Bin laden” came looking for me, shook my hand, and said he was sorry. He said, he didn’t believe all Muslims are terrorists. He had met many Muslim friends at the conference that changed his mind about Muslims and wanted put things right what he had done to me.

Generations of hurt and years of media indoctrination were challenged within the context of an experience across ethno – religious lines. These few examples further fortify the notion that youth have a capacity for openness and are less entrenched in their hate.
3.2.2 Youth are seeking for a positive cause and purpose.

“Young people have less of an interest vested in the status quo than adults and thus have the greatest incentive to push for change.”- Helsing (qtd. in McEvoy-Levy 289)

Youth is often referred to as a time of idealism, a period in life where one looks for a certain sense of perfection in their world. In fact, this same pursuit of idealism led Generation X (born between the 1960’s and the 1980’s) to protest against what they saw as unjust in their world. Generation Y (born between the 1980’s and the year 2000), on the other hand, seems to have a desire for activism, to create new movements, organizations, and initiatives to change what they see as wrong in their world. This new approach to accommodate the idealism of youth has created yet another opportunity for youth-led change. Van Linden and Fertman shed further light on this matter:

This idealism continues through late adolescence, often taking the form of social activism. Many adolescents become involved in social, political, or religious causes giving them an opportunity to explore the ideals and gain experiences in the real world. Idealism begins to diminish near the end of late adolescence. This is a result of increased cognitive capabilities. (Van Linden and Fertman 14)

The diminishing nature of the drive and passion that comes with this idealism means it needs to be harnessed at its peak. Creating an environment for youth to positively engage is essential; the success stories that are ensured as a result of their engagement will provide them with the resilience to persevere for long-term change. The idealism of youth is also seen as an opportunity by extremists to manipulate young minds towards a distorted
perception of what is “right” in society, luring youth into a life of violence. The father of peacebuilding, Johan Galtung, writes:

Youth may be more revolutionary, wanting to change everything here and now, because reality falls so short of their ideals. This may make them pacifist or socialist but could also make them militaristic or fascist. Either way, they would probably stand for a world negating that of their parents. They would often stand as an antithesis of what already is. (McEvoy-Levy 262)

For youth who are born into war and conflict, the “antithesis of what already is” is to transform conflict, committing their life to see change in their nations. The heart of youthful idealism resonates more towards constructive, positive, life-giving, nation-building causes.

Deodat Maharaj, the deputy secretary-general for economic and social development at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London, writes:

Young people are often heralded as the leaders of tomorrow, yet in reality they are already leading important change today. In my work in the Commonwealth, a family of 53 nations, I regularly come across young people who are passionate about strengthening their societies, driving development, and championing democracy. Yet much of their work is undervalued or underappreciated. People under age 30 make up over 60 percent of our 2.2 billion populations. In recognition of their achievements, Commonwealth Day — today, March 9, 2015 — is devoted to the theme “A Young Commonwealth.” This theme, which will guide activities by more than 80 Commonwealth organizations throughout 2015, acknowledges that young people play a vital role in nation building. (Maharaj 1)
The “vital role” youth play in the developing world is largely inspired by their commitment to better society and their passion for a purpose. On the 10th of March 2015, the commonwealth organization highlighted some of the most innovative and impactful initiatives led by youth to transform their societies; their original initiatives positively impacted communities from Tanzania, Pakistan, the Bahamas, and developing nations across the world. These initiatives and thousands of others like them (though different in issues they address and approaches they use) highlight one central theme: the commitment and selfless sacrifice of young people to create change. Broadly speaking, is there any other demographic in society that will work tirelessly without financial incentive, take their own initiative, and even risk their own lives to make a difference in their community? Youthful exuberance, passion, and commitment to make a difference are unique expressions within humanity to refine itself. Other demographics are burdened by responsibilities to their families, held to jaded perspectives of societal change, and over-laden with social-status races that cause them to be limited to the parameters of their own agendas and priorities. Youth are inherently different, thus making them extremely crucial to transforming conflict and leading the charge of peacebuilding in their communities. This passion and drive, along with a boundless optimism, drives youth to see new approaches and advances that eluded the generations before them. Maharaj writes, “Young people are also often best able to propose and implement solutions that shift the needle and have an enduring impact” (Maharaj 2). The ability to cause enduring impact is a fundamental aspect to emphasize regarding the vital role youth are able to play in transforming conflict.
By their very nature, youth are thirsty for a cause and an ideal; they want their life to mean more than the monotony of an average life. They are seeking for purpose, value, and identity. The crucial work of transforming conflict and restoring nations devastated by hate and violence is a supremely attractive purpose that is fancied by the youthful palate and can therefore fuel the imagination and passion of youth. An exuberance that is indeed unique to youth, an ability to risk it all, and a willingness to whole-heartedly take challenges head-on are trademarks of youthfulness, affirming their potential for change.

In a recent survey, 50 peace builders working with youth in 20 conflict zones across the world were asked the questions, “Given your experience with youth under age 25 in conflict situations, how do these youth compare to their elders? Do you think youth are more or less likely to be idealistic and are drawn to a cause?” In response, 90.3% answered that youth were likely to be drawn to a cause and be more idealistic. These views come from the perspective of activist and peace builders in countries like Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Rwanda, Congo, Egypt and Afghanistan. Their experiences with youth overwhelmingly suggest that young people are looking for a cause, a purpose, and a platform to live out their idealism. Thus further supports the claim that youth desire to work for a greater cause.
Thich Nhat Hanh, a monk, poet, activist, and the author of *Creating True Peace*, states:

To some, peace and nonviolence is synonymous with passivity and weakness. In truth, practicing peace and nonviolence is far from passive. To practice peace, to make peace alive in us, is to actively cultivate understanding, love, and compassion, even in the face of misperception and conflict. Practicing peace, especially in times of war, requires courage. (Skog ix)

This requirement of courage along with being cognizant of the importance of the work of transforming conflict has the potential to fuel the hearts of youth with conviction.
and set ablaze their passion while causing them to go beyond an emotion and activate their entire being to action and a desire to be part of the change.

The same level of emotional and ideological culmination that drives a youth to strap a bomb around his waist and blow up innocent civilians along with him can be harnessed to be a life-giving source to their communities and change the legacy of their nation. This sense of renewed positive purpose fulfills a desire to live for a cause or an ideal greater than him or her. In fact, the notion of giving life, changing communities, transforming conflict, and changing the history of their nations is far more attractive to young minds than taking lives, destroying their communities, compounding conflict, and devastating their nations. This is especially true considering the fact that all this is possible with a stronger possibility of preserving and enhancing one’s own life in comparison to violence. As will be explored later on during this thesis, many youth are never affirmed for their capacity to play a positive role, and they are sheltered from an alternate narrative to violent engagement. This strength within hearts of youth to go beyond the parameters of their own selfish ambition and live life for a greater cause is a gold mine and nucleus for positive change in conflict zones across the world. This further affirms the notion that youth play a pivotal role in transforming conflict.

3.3 Weaknesses

Romanticizing the strengths of youth in transforming conflict while ignoring the obvious weaknesses is counterproductive to the process. It is essential that the weaknesses
and limitations of the role of youth are acknowledged and addressed. Limited, Credibility, Resources, Experience and Influence

Among the greatest challenges youth face in transforming conflict is the lack of resources, credibility, experience, and influence. This hasn’t stopped certain youth from having a profound influence on their communities and building a reputation of being agents of change. However, the challenge is very real. Many of the conflict zones happen to be patriarchal societies. The father figure and the older generation have a monopoly on the respect and reverence from the broader community. Youth don’t inherit credibility and the respect of their communities to lead change. This stands as a huge barrier in the process of challenging existing norms in their society. The same challenge limits their access to resources, experience, and levels of influence. However, as mentioned above, this does not totally eradicate their ability to have a profound influence. In fact, many youth have used these very limitations as an opportunity to create change in their communities.

Jones writes about this resilience, “Young men and young women have the ability, drive, and character even though the resources are small, have abundant opportunity not only to secure an education in training but rise up to positions of influence and leadership in almost every line of service” (Jones 179). The limitation of credibility is often overcome by building credibility over time. This is accomplished through a long-term engagement. Pascal Muguruka in Congo, born 13th in a family of 14 children, was born in the midst of brutal violence, but he aspired to see change in his community. Pascal dreamt of an opportunity to change his community, which had been devastated by violence, radicalization of youth, bad governance, corruption, and uncertainty. He led a series of campaigns in his community to counter the radicalization of youth, to educate his
community on their constitutional rights, to fight against the abuse of women and the culture of violence that had made rape a weapon of war. All of these initiatives helped him and his teams gain respect and credibility from the broader community. The work he led helped break away from the stigma associated with his youth and give him credibility in his community. This also leads to influence. When the broader society stood helplessly by or ignored the struggles of the community, youth who take a stand are seen as agents of change and are even looked up to for leadership in those areas. This gives these young people influence and increases their capacity to create change. The challenge of limited resources is often overcome by, using the influence gained and credibility to raise funds and support from the community and other local and international organizations. The initiative and leadership of those like Pascal have the capacity to inspire able individuals and organizations to support and help bridge the limitation of resources.

Youth have always held an advantage when it comes to the use of new technologies. The use of technology, especially social media, in a professional and effective manner has helped grassroots activists to gain credibility and expand their influence to attract a broader network, which results in new resources. The use of social media by youth in the Middle East during the Arab Spring was a strong reflection of the capacity of youth to break away from the norms of their limited credibility, influence, resources, and experience and bring down despots. Regimes that have had all of the above-mentioned qualities were brought to their knees by youth who changed the power dynamics and created unthinkable change in their societies. Thus none of the above mentioned limitations disqualify the impact
of youth in their ability to transform conflict. These weaknesses are most certainly realistic, however, they certainly are challenges that can be overcome.

3.3.1 Limited ability for strategic non reactionary change

The very same example used before to depict the legitimacy and viability of youth leadership to transform conflict, can also stand as a question to the sustainability and the capacity for long term thinking of youth leadership. The Arab Spring most certainly caused short-term change and positive outcomes. However, according to many accounts and recent evaluations of those movements, it caused long-term instability and chaos in the region. The reactive thinking of these movements and the lack of a long-term strategy caused much doubt about the actual viability of youth leadership. According to Laremont:

The Arab Spring or Arab Awakening revolts have altered the authoritarian landscape in North Africa but the transitions to democracy are not yet complete. We have new, democratically elected regimes but important questions remain concerning the content of democracy, the role of religion in government, and the protection of dissidents.

The sentiments that youth led change and brought freedom and democracy to their country cannot be fully accepted. Youth movements and activism through the use of social media did overthrow a dictatorship but failed in establishing a stronger framework for a free and fair society. Laremont emphasizes the importance of clarifying what is occurring in the Middle East:
Are we witnessing revolution or revolt? To answer that question we need to ask, have the relationships of power in society, in the economy, and politics fundamentally changed or have the deck chairs in the ships of state been rearranged — without a real impact on power relations? Are we witnessing revolutions or are less significant events such as revolts or coups d’états?

These are extremely legitimate questions given the current realities across the region. The strength of idealism within youth in this context seems to have blinded them to see the realities and the complexities of the context. There is little doubt these dictators with their iron grips on society were unhealthy, and they needed to be overthrown. However, the flimsy alliances that caused the overthrow and the radical elements that surfaced as a result blindsided these youth movements, which were overwhelmed by the idealistic fervor. Admittedly, such high levels of strategic thinking may be too demanding, yet if the stakes of intervention require a certain depth of strategic thinking, it should not be ignored. Therefore, in such situations, it is essential these youth movements are working in partnership with viable existing structures, international alliances, and the broader civil society thereby ensuring long-term impact and broader ownership for durable change. This however, does not nullify the role youth played during the Arab Springs; it is most certainly commendable and stands strong as an example of how youth leadership created the impetus for much needed change. At the same time, it solidifies the notion that youth are not able transform conflict independent of broader society. They may in fact be equipped to play a pivotal role in pioneering change but they do not have an exclusive responsibility or ability to transform conflict.
3.4 Opportunities

3.4.1 Need for sustainable and long term solutions.

Among the strongest cases for the role of youth in transforming conflict is the potential longevity of the investment in youth. World-renowned neurosurgeon at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Dr. Ben Carson, when asked why he focused only on child cases, made a simple but profound statement, “I focus all my attention to children and youth, because I want to see the long term repercussions of my work” (Carson). He goes on to explain how removing tumors and undoing the brain damage of a young child gives him the pleasure of watching the child grow up. He is reminded that the many hours he spent on each patient give him the great fulfillment of seeing him or her live a long and full life. The same sentiments of Dr. Carson ring true in regard to the benefit of working with youth and preparing them to be agents of societal transformation. Most of the greatest trials of society divided by conflict cannot be transformed during one political regime, a decade or in a few decades. These giant hurdles of society needs the consistent engagement; in other words it takes a full generation of change. The Civil Rights movement in America, the Independence movement in the Indian Subcontinent, the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, the abolishment of slavery in England and in the United States, all required a generation of engagement. A generation that thought differently, spoke out to challenge the norms, acted in accordance to their awareness and conscience, and created new norms to transform society. This is an attraction of a youth engagement in the major challenges of
society. In the midst of conflict, youth can engage with the commitment, zeal, and time needed to see true transformation. They have the capacity for long-term engagement and can lead sustainable change. In the long term, peace agreements, endurance, and the effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives depend on the day the next-generation accepts it or rejects it, how they are socializing during the peace process, how their perceptions of what the peace process is achieved, and how tangible the experiences of a better life are. (McEvoy-Levy 7) Therefore, the fact that youth are involved and impacted by the process in the long run and have the capacity to accept, reject, halt, or further the peacebuilding process creates an opportunity to further enhance the legitimacy in transforming conflict.

Furthermore, youth are attributed with the capacity to hold on to the values that preserve and enhance peace within a nation. In reality, not all youth will be activists and peace builders within their community, but they will still go on to live lives that depict the values needed for a peaceful society, thus further enhancing the argument that peacebuilding work with youth has long-term positive repercussions. In the above mentioned survey of 50 peace builders working with youth in 20 conflict zones across the world, when asked the question, “Given your experience with youth under age 25 in conflict situations, how do these youth compare to their elders? Do you think that the causes that youth get involved in and the values associated therein have an impact on their lives in the long run?” 88.46 % answered yes. Once again, the fact that these opinions come from the heart of conflict zones and transitional states such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Rwanda, Congo, Egypt and Afghanistan, is significant. These peacebuilders’ experiences with youth overwhelmingly suggest that young people are looking for a cause, a purpose,
and a platform to live out their idealism – an attribute that has great implications for the importance of youth in conflict resolution.

![Pie chart showing responses to a question about the impact of values invested during youth.]

Figure 3.2: Values invested during youth and its impact

3.4.2 The Opportunity Cost

The World Bank Development Report in 2007 stated, “With 1.3bn young people now living in the developing world--the largest youth group in history--there has never been a better time to invest in youth” (2). The report goes on to claim the level of education and health of the new generations is far greater than that of their predecessors. However, the reports make a vital statement that reveals a profound truth, “Failure to seize this opportunity to train them more effectively for the workplace, and to be active citizens,
could lead to widespread disillusionment and social tensions” (3). The inability to provide young people with the right foundations and opportunities will not just be a missed opportunity; the repercussions of such a situation will lead to a greater cost which in turn will further damage the broader society. The process of training for the workplace and guidance into becoming active citizens are indeed crucial for the development and the stability of a nation. The inability to understand this fundamental truth leads to the creation of a society that is marked by instability. Training for the workplace is entirely dependent on a strong and relevant educational and vocational training system. The correlations between unskilled labor, poverty, and violence have been proven over and over again. Thus, it is absolutely essential to have educational structures in place. Countries with low levels of literacy and skilled labor forces tend to have a larger scale of crime and violence. The examples of DRC, Syria, and South Africa stand as unfortunate yet prime examples of this reality. The inverse is also true; countries or even regions within countries that have a stronger educational system have lower rates of crime and violence. The World Bank Report goes on to suggest, “Developing countries that invest in better education, healthcare, and job training for their record numbers of young people between the ages of 12 and 24 years of age, could produce surging economic growth and sharply reduced poverty” (5). As the report and many other like it clearly argue, economic and educational opportunities are essential hurdles to successfully overcome. If the potential is embraced, and if the economic benefits impact a younger generation, it creates the capacity to be a formidable resistance against the ongoing radicalization of youth in the developing world. The opportunity cost of not providing youth with sufficient educational and economic opportunities is detrimental not just to intended Millennium developmental goals, but it
will have a direct correlation with the growth of violence and extremist movements and other non-state actors. Youth involved in war are not only causing mass devastation, but their lives represent a lost opportunity for a positive contribution to society. Youth who could have been great fathers and mother, doctors, investors, world leaders and even Nobel Peace Prize winners if they were presented a different reality are dying in conflict zones across the world. Humanity is hope for a future wasting away in the midst of conflict.

3.5 Threats

Among the greatest threats on the leadership capacity of youth for transforming conflict is the process of youth leaders being recruited to propagate violence by terrorist organizations. A Homeland Security report released in 2009 states “Terrorists are adaptive adversaries who use a variety of tools and tactics to reach potential recruits and supporters. Unfortunately, there is increasing evidence that terrorist organizations are drawing school-aged youth into their ranks all around the world” (Bott 1). Many youth in conflict zones, especially youth with strong leadership potential, are being keenly sought after by radical elements across the world. As discussed in the chapters before, these groups manipulate the desire of youth to change the status quo of inequality to embrace a life of war and religious fanaticism. A closer look at conflict zones across the world reveal that the process of recruitment of youth for violence in widespread. M23 in Congo, 969 in Myanmar, Boko Haram in Nigeria, 18\(^{th}\) Street Gang and many other gangs in cities in the western world, MS 13 in Colombia, and ISIS in the Middle East are skillful proponents of youth recruitment for violence.
Though they represent various religions, races and continents, and possess very different ideologies, they have one common core value—a belief that recruitment is key. Thus they spend a large portion of their resources and energy to the process of recruiting youth to their cause. Either by coercion or persuasion, their strategy is simple: demonize an entire people group in the eyes of these youth, define a certain people and their values as a fatal cancer that has to be eliminated, and manipulate these youth to commit violence. Thus giving them the delusion that their misfortune will turn around and justice will be achieved. This is commonly referred to as radicalization, a process where youth are lured to hold extreme principles, demonize certain communities, and embrace violence. The 24/7 news cycles thrive on these stories and have created a further platform for youth in conflict zones to romanticize violence and the desire to receive global attention. The Homeland Security
report further sheds light on this rampant threat on the legitimacy of youth in transforming conflict:

Any young person with access to an Internet connection can view websites that promote terrorist groups or provide graphic depictions of acts of terrorism that are commonly portrayed as acts of heroism. The Internet is accessible, cheap, and anonymous. It offers terrorists a variety of mediums to disseminate messages and provides connections to recruiters and recruits that might not otherwise be possible. Some groups have established websites designed specifically for youth audiences, disseminating propaganda...messages out to a worldwide audience, including any young person that has access to an Internet connection. In recent years, there have been reports of a growing trend of young persons “self-radicalizing” through use of the Internet. In 1998 there were a total of 12 active terrorist-related websites existed. By January 2009, a total of 6,940 active terrorist-related websites existed. (Botts 3)

While ivory towers of academia and the halls of power in policy debate the legitimacy of youth leadership and the nature of youth involvement in transforming conflict, terrorist and various non-state actors with a range of agendas have made youth the cornerstone, the heart and core of their operation. This causes a dynamic threat to the role of youth in transforming conflict by crowding the narrative with youth being used to perpetuate violence. The fact that youth are seen as important to these groups in itself should help increase the legitimacy of youth as crucial for sustainable peace. If this fundamental truth is not embraced and effective strategies to counter-radicalize youth are not effectively implemented, humanity may truly self-destruct. Ironically, hope for this process of giving youth a resistance against extremist rhetoric and introducing them to the alternate of positively contributing and building society is most effectively done by youth-led peacebuilding movements placed in these conflict zones.
CHAPTER 4:
CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION AND THE INCREASED LEGITIMACY OF YOUTH

The attributes identified as unique to youth that enhance their capacity to play a pivotal role in transforming conflict need to be complemented and affirmed by a recognized theoretical framework. These qualities of youth cannot function in isolation or in the void of a certain strategy that help reap results towards a more cohesive objective. A theoretical framework for various strategies of engagement is essential to increase the legitimacy of the initiatives youth lead. Without such framework, the various strategies may be merely an emotional response to overwhelming needs in societies impacted by conflict. In fact, they may well be drops in the ocean, inconsequential, isolated, and temporary; these attributes must be stewarded within a broader framework. This chapter takes a closer look at the various approaches used to addressed conflict and which framework will better serve and provide the much needed legitimacy for youth to engage in transforming conflict, an approach that creates a legitimate space for youth to play a pioneering and pivotal role in transforming conflict.

Conflict, war, and violence are as old as time. Humanity has had to overcome differences across regions, ideologies, religions, ethnicities, tribes, resources, and borders. Attempts to resolve conflict, restore contact, and create harmonious relationships with former enemies are also part of history. Peace-building and creating a resistance against the
raging violence has preserved humanity from total annihilation. From ancient conquests to colonization, the World Wars, the Cold War, and wars of terror, the world has always being plagued by violence and conflict. However, these eras of conflict have also been met with peace treaties, truces, negotiations, and other various forms of peacebuilding, which have created much needed resistance against the obscenities of violence and war.

Among the most prominent models of peacebuilding in the recent past, liberal peace models have been the most pronounced. These strategies use the tools of democracy, human rights, civil society, the rule of law, and economic liberalization in the forms of free market reform and development to ensure peace and bring an end to conflict. (Richmond and Franks 3). However, due to many failures of the model in the recent past, criticism has mounted against this approach. Ornella leads the charge against liberal peace as follows:

Liberal peace has been deployed in something like fifty to sixty post-conflict and fragile states since the 1990s. Although it has made significant contributions to peacebuilding, development, and human rights practices and has set important standards...a liberal peace approach failed to bring about the promised peace and stability and failed to respond constructively to many conflicts around the world, including ethno-religious conflicts in Muslim communities. In Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance, peacebuilding efforts failed to bring even basic security, while security in Pakistan is decreasing rapidly. The situation in Darfur has not improved. Even in Bosnia and Herzegovina, communities are more divided than ever. (Ornella 430)

The world has watched in horror as these nations that experienced liberal peace approaches continue to disintegrate into further turmoil. The limitations of liberal peace have been exposed across the world. Richmond and Franks write:
Allegedly, the most authoritarian approach of liberal peace is attributed to conservative models of liberal peace, characterized by top-down approach to peacebuilding and shaped by techniques of coercion, domination and hegemony. This tends to be operationalized by military intervention, political conditionality and the imposition of the state led peace, which diplomats are fond of describing as the “art of the possible.” (Richmond and Franks 7)

These models have been disastrous, because of their inability to understand the ground realities and cultural sensitivities. Therefore, instead of promoting peace in many situations, they have fueled tension and caused more widespread conflict. According to Donais:

The fundamental flaw that is depicted in the liberal vision of peacebuilding insists that global norms surrounding principles of good government do exist and should carry weight. Conversely, local values, traditions, and institutions tend to be dismissed in post-conflict settings as a cause of the conflict rather than a potential resource for peacebuilding, a problem to be eliminated rather than a foundation to build upon. (Donais 5).

This blatant denial of local realities and a blind belief that one sizes fits all, has caused the liberal peace approach to lose credibility in today’s world. Though the approach does address many important issues in conflict, it has failed to address the deeper issues and use a contextualized approach to attain durable solutions. Failure to affirm and support “local ownership” could be the greatest weakness within the liberal peace approach. In the context of this paper, the posture of liberal peace has pushed local youth out of the picture and barred them from being part of the solutions. However, one may not read of an advocate for a liberal peace approach who expresses clear resentment about including youth in the process, but the manifestations of liberal peace approaches seem to do just that. Peace processes in Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, Israel – Palestine, as well as negotiations in the
DRC, Uganda, and even Kenya hardly create room for youth participation. Thus, the dismissal of youth is either an oversight of liberal peace models or an error that depicts a flawed understanding of the value youth add to the process. These failures have led to a newfound respect and appreciation for local ownership and involvement in transforming conflict. Donais, in his book, *Peacebuilding and Local Ownership* writes:

> The term “local ownership” has become increasingly central to the vocabulary of post-conflict peacebuilding. Emphasized by both theorists and practitioners, in general terms local ownership refers to the degree of control the domestic act as wheels over domestic political processes; in post-conflict contexts, the notion conveys the commonsense wisdom that any peace process not embedded by those living with it is likely to fail. (Donais 1)

In relation to the central thesis of this paper, this local ownership is epitomized in the ownership youth are given in the peacebuilding process. McEvoy-Levy, in response to the sidelining of youth writes, “One of the most glaring inadequacies of peace process to date has been their failure to truly include and engage youth” (294).

Thus the evolution of peacebuilding has created a suitable environment which finally creates a space for youth to play an important role and feel included in the peacebuilding process where they are identified as an asset as opposed to a liability. This creates the possibility of youth to blossom to their potential. As explored in the previous chapter, this approach affirms the value of the unique attributes of youth that give them the capacity to play a pivotal role in transforming conflict. The newly evolved understanding of peacebuilding has opened the door for approaches such as Conflict Transformation. This chapter will take a closer look at the Conflict Transformation model and how it opens the door for a more central role for youth; a role not inherited or imparted as a ceremonial
expression, but as a critical role based on the merit and capacity of youth as a demographic. Understanding the deeper concepts of Conflict Transformation and reconciliation are of paramount importance in order to further recognize the pivotal role youth play in them. The following will define both these concepts and also examine how youth engagement and leadership enhance these attributes. Nations embroiled in conflict need a strong comprehensive intervention in order to find permanent solutions.

As stated above, many nations which have emerged from conflict and have experienced a liberal peacebuilding strategy tend to slip back into conflict. The fundamental reason for such failure could be attributed to a flawed and partial understanding of the conflict itself. Too often governments, civil society, and even the international community focus their entire attention on the outward manifestations of a deeper problem. These symptoms can range from war, violence, human rights violations, political instability, restricted freedom of information, and corruption. The conclusion that these horrendous issues are in fact the entirety of the problem becomes the beginning of the failure to reach long-term solutions. The goal of many peace interventions is to end war, stop violence, bring perpetrators of human rights violations to justice, create a democratic form of governance, defeat spoilers and non-state actors. They then assume that they have succeeded. Indeed these goals are noble and much needed, however, the flawed assumptions that these solutions are achievable within a limited time frame along with the presumption that the nation will instantaneously turn a corner from a culture of violence are irresponsible conclusions. The failure to identify and address the root causes of the conflict results in the creation of what many scholars now refer to as “negative peace”. Oliver Richmond, a peace scholar, calls such interventions “the contemporary liberal
peacebuilding project.” He goes on to state, this is becoming decidedly real in conflict-plagued nations around the world. More durable solutions are the desperate need of the era. The mechanism of the liberal peace model and the key actors within them, do not seem to have the ability to bring about long-term solutions. This further fortifies the need to explore new strategies and new actors; strategies that could be framed as positive peace. In regard to new actors, as the fundamental point in this thesis suggests, the role youth play in transforming conflict must be explored.

The Irenees Peace Workshop held in South Africa in May of 2007 declared the following definition of peace:

Peace does not mean the total absence of any conflict. It means the absence of violence in all forms and the unfolding of conflict in a constructive way. Peace therefore exists where people are interacting non-violently and are managing their conflict positively – with respectful attention to the legitimate needs and interests of all concerned.

A focus on the outward manifestations of conflict does not leave room to pay “respectful attention to the legitimate needs and interest of all concerned” (Irenees Peace). Such means of engagement are only interested in the functionality of a nation rather than the healing, restoration, and transformation of society. John Galtung, the father of peace studies, refers to the distinction between "Negative Peace" and "Positive Peace.” Negative Peace refers to the absence of violence; it is negative because something undesirable stopped happening. Positive Peace is filled with positive content, and it’s the integration of human society” (Galtung). The culture of violence that caused death, devastation, and the destruction of a
nation needs to be replaced with a culture of peace, healing, and a restoration of relationships throughout all spheres of society, not merely among the political leaders and the leadership. If violence doesn’t discriminate in its vicious devastation of society, where the elite and peasants all suffer, neither should the peace process and the pursuit of peace. Peace processes that seek to only deal with the outwards manifestations fail not only in their isolated emphasis on the symptoms of violence, but they also depend only on the top tier of society to engage in a solution. The masses and the focus of this thesis—youth—are left entirely out of the peace process. Therein lies the greatest threat of leaving the door open for renewed violence and extended conflict. Ignored grievances of the broader society eventually snowball back into violence. The journey towards positive peace incorporates the involvement of all tiers of society and gives a much-needed ownership in a broader process. Lederach’s Peacebuilding Pyramid (see figure below) clearly depicts these various strata in society and the role they play. However, when considering the role youth play in transforming conflict, their uniqueness is further emphasized by the fact that they are the only demographic that at various stages in their lives, could be placed in all three tiers of the pyramid. What begins as a grassroots movement has the capacity of having those same young people join civil society and become top-level leaders of their nations in a later stage of life. In this way, it is possible that the peacebuilding process to impact all strata of society and ensure the completion of a bottom up approach. This is a more realistic, organic, and less intrusive approach in comparison to a top down approach along with the assumptions that come with a liberal peace model.
4.1 Definition and Key Attributes of Conflict Transformation

In the midst of many failed and limited approaches to peace, Dr. John Paul Lederach, renowned scholar and peace practitioner, introduced the concept and approach of Conflict Transformation. He defines this as an approach that envisions and responds to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships. (Lederach 14) The process of Conflict Transformation has many unique attributes that address many of the shortcomings of addressing outward manifestations and liberal peace solutions. Among these attributes are: the unique perspective of crisis as an opportunity, the emphasis on the importance of
varied lenses towards the conflict, a commitment to address deeper issues, and long term engagement; these attributes differentiate it from other approaches towards solutions to conflict. The following is a closer look at these attributes of Conflict Transformation and its interrelationship with the unique attributes youth as a demographic have to offer.

4.1.1 Crisis is an opportunity

During one of his many historic speeches, President John F. Kennedy stated, “In the Chinese language, the word ‘crisis’ is composed of two characters, one representing danger and the other opportunity” (Britannica). To him, a crisis was not seen as solely dangerous and entirely negative, but the situation could create an opportunity for greater good.

Figure 4.2 Crisis = Danger and Opportunity

Lederach’s definition of Conflict Transformation is clearly guided by an understanding that depicts conflict as the emergence of an opportunity. The looming challenges facing youth that were explored in the previous chapters most certainly indicate a crisis. However, within a Conflict Transformational approach, that very crisis creates an
opportunity. This is emphasized throughout his definition of Conflict Transformation. “Envision conflict positively as a natural phenomenon that creates potential for constructive growth” (Lederach 15). Constructive growth can only be experienced if one admits that conflict indeed is a natural phenomenon and in fact a necessary condition to address issues within society. The dismissal and denial of deeper issues eliminates the potential for growth and positive change. In other words, an attitude of denial can lead to a missed opportunity. Lederach further elaborates, “As we all know too well, many times conflict results in longstanding cycles of hurt and destruction. But the key to transformation is a proactive bias towards seeing conflict as a potential catalyst for growth” (Lederach 15). Seeing conflict as an opportunity for growth does not mean being naïve to the danger and destruction within conflict. However, it is an attitude that creates room for proactive engagement as opposed to reactive responses. Human nature may indicate flight or fight reactions to conflict. However, both notions fail to address the deeper issues, experience constructive growth, and create a resistance for recurring conflict. Seeing the opportunity within the conflict in the midst of pain and devastation is certainly not for the faint hearted. It requires resilience, optimism, a strong grasp of the unfortunate current realities, and the ability to remain inspired by future possibilities. To illustrate this, the notion that a nation’s conflict can be seen as an opportunity is similar to a fire consuming a large but flawed house; the fire further exposes weaknesses in the safety, design, durability, and structural limitations of the house thus providing deeper insight to the builder on how to overcome previous flaws and rebuild a more structurally sound home. As conflict unravels within a nation, it reveals the glaring vulnerabilities and flaws of a nation. Thus, for the keen observer and proactive engager, it is also a strong learning opportunity to indicate how to
rebuild the nation. Though the process of Conflict Transformation may never build the perfect nation, it most certainly can identify, address, and transform recurring issues that continually inspire prolonged conflict and instability. A blind denial of the realities within the nation, which escalated into violent conflict, coupled with a limited commitment to managing the symptoms of the conflict, contributes to prolonged or relentless violence. Lederach affirms the strength of a Conflict Transformation approach is derived from its process of change: “Central to this approach are change processes, the transformational component and the foundation of how conflict can move from being destructive toward being constructive” (Lederach 19). The effectiveness of the approach lies in the ability to pursue a positive outcome as opposed to merely mitigating the damage. This creates a worldview that gives those who have suffered in war the ability to believe that they are more than victims, but rather have control over their own circumstances; this attitude infuses a sense of hope in the midst of the dire desperation of conflict. When inserting youth into this paradigm, they may have been being used to fuel violence and tensions, but conflict transformation helps them visualize these tendencies to be destructive as an opportunity for a constructive force.

Youth are pivotal in this exercise because they are in a formative stage in their lives and are thus able to embrace this new way of thinking. This creates a new sense of optimism that conflict can be overturned, and instead of being merely destructive, it can bring constructive change to society. This appeals to the nature of youth as highlighted in the previous chapter where youth are more prone to seek a cause and are more open and less jaded by hate. The universal emotion of youth to desire innovation, progress, and social change can be equated to a form of human evolution; a new generation seeking to
take humanity forward to reach newer higher levels and create their own legacy. What would the world be like today if each generation believed their only purpose was to preserve and maintain what they have inherited from the previous generation? Humanity and global society would not have progressed too far past the Stone Age.

Youth who are born into conflict and poverty have a heightened desire for progress. They know what they were born into is not the world as it should be. Modern technology and global media has given them a window to other parts of the world not plagued by violence and filled with resources and opportunities. This creates a stronger desire for a change. However, extremists and violent factions convince youth that violence and success in violence is the only path to change, and they manipulate this same emotion. They lure youth to believe that they must sacrifice as a generation for the greater good. Many approaches to solving conflict do not have that aggressive and proactive intent. Instead they are reactive, defensive, and passive in the midst of conflict. However, the focus of Conflict Transformation is to see conflict/crisis as an opportunity creating a proactive call to action and infusing hope. This notion not only makes youth the perfect candidates to embark on the journey of Conflict Transformation, but it also attracts youth to get involved. McEvoy-Levy writes, “But youth are more powerful as active conflict transformers,” not as passive by standers. As indicated in the previous chapter, if youth are not mobilized for peace and they are asked to passively observe the process, they will be lured to an invitation to be active in destructive ways.

4.1.2 Lenses

Another attribute of Conflict Transformation lies in its perception of the conflict. Lederach states, “Conflict Transformation is more than a set of specific techniques. It is
about a way of looking and seeing” (Lederach 9). This process can be extremely difficult for an older generation which has been entrenched in hate for decades. However, the ability to think openly about these issues maybe more plausible for youth, who are guided towards “looking and seeing” conflict in a certain way. Many approaches to conflict intervention are plagued by the use of a one dimensional lens: a perspective that may be just that of an outsider, or the perspective of only those in the higher echelons of society, or a lens that only permits a short term perception of manifestations of the conflict. These are liabilities. Lederach addresses these limited lenses and suggests that Conflict Transformation lenses look beyond the “manifestation of violence” to see the context of the relationship that is involved, and then look back again at the “manifestation of the violence.” Lederach goes on to elaborate, “Not satisfied with a quick solution that may seem to solve the immediate problem, transformation seeks to create a framework to address the content, the context and the structure of the relationship” (Lederach 10). As an effective judge would preside over a case, it essential to not only focus on the claims of the plaintiff or the defense of the accused. The decision is made based on the evidence for or against the defendant’s actions. In addition, the final judgment is based on consideration of the context in which the incident took place. A sentence to bring justice is just part of the judge’s responsibility, but he or she is also responsible to make a decision that ensures there is justice and constructive change. This process looks at the issue from multi-dimensional perspectives. This is key in Conflict Transformation as well. If one fails to see a more complete perspective of the conflict, sustainable and effective solutions are bound to elude them. Lederach sums up the importance of having multiple lenses by stating, “The lenses of
Conflict Transformation show the immediate situation, underlying patterns and context, a conceptual framework” (Lederach 11).

Lederach suggests three main lenses that bring varying aspects of a conflict’s complexity into focus. First, it requires a lens to see the immediate situation; this step comes naturally to most who intervene in conflict. However, even in this diagnostic stage, there may be varied conclusions. The affinity of an individual to ground zero, the varied levels of exposure to such conflicts, the biases that distort clarity, and the flawed assumptions which are based on previous experiences, are a few of the many factors that can distort the first lens in viewing a conflict. This causes serious repercussions in the steps that follow, and therefore it is crucial to have the insight on various actors. Among them, youth play a pivotal role in giving a perspective closest to ground zero. Since youth are among the first to get lured into the conflict by radicals or to become victims of the circumstances, they have a capacity to give a more accurate picture of the immediate. If youth are consulted and affirmed from the very initial stages of intervention, the probability of gaining stronger insights remains high. The fact that youth may not be as biased by previous experiences and assumptions can help prevent the lens from being clouded by historic prejudices.

Lederach’s second lens is unique to the Conflict Transformational approach: Second, we need a lens to see past the immediate problems and view the deeper relationship patterns that form the context of the conflict. This goes beyond finding a quick solution to the problem at hand, and seeks to address what is happening in human relationships at a deeper level. (Lederach 25).
Looking past the immediate may be the most challenging of all the lenses. However, it may also be the most important step towards making an impact. Looking at a context in which the violence erupted is crucial but cannot be accurately perceived by those outside the conflict or even those within the higher strata of society. Once again the grassroots, those who are closest to “ground zero,” and individuals who have been impacted most by the conflict tend to have some of the deepest insight into the context and why the situation deteriorated to its current level. Among those in the grassroots, youth, as mentioned in the previous chapter, by virtue of the fact that they are less jaded by hate and the inherited prejudice, have a stronger capacity to deal with the deeper realities of the conflict. One might argue that youth at times in certain conflict zones embody the hate and bitterness of their societies; this is true in a context where youth are seen as the problem and not the solution and are left at the mercy of been indoctrinated and manipulated by extremist groups. However, if and when this threat of radicalization and indoctrination is countered, youth have the ability to break away from the inherited prejudice and view the conflict on a deeper level. Even from the perspective of the “enemy,” this creates room to enhance the second lens. Understanding the broken structures of communal relationship is the fuel of constructive change. Youth are the best equipped in society to detoxify the inherited hate across enemy lines and understand why the conflict emerged thus proving a stronger ability to look through the second lens. The following example sheds further light on how youth are better equipped to look beyond the surface of the relational challenges. The pre-conference training for Congo Unites focuses on youth leaders:

In the DRC, youth leaders from Congo gathered for a training on the role of youth in transforming conflict. One of the exercises included looking at the nation’s history from the independence to the current day. Each of the participants was given a blank sheet of paper to
mark their footprints. They were then asked to write an incident in history that they felt was crucial to their nation. They would place this on the relevant time frame. At the end of the exercise, the participants were asked to look at the similar patterns of the nation since independence. The cycle of violence seemed consistent. The enemies differed by era to era but the culture of violence that led a violent response seemed to cripple the nation. They also observed how certain communities who were once victims, then became perpetrators and back to victims. The conclusion was that violence was just the symptom of the deeper challenge. The culture of violence and insecurity had plagued all communities alike. This led each group to be violent against the other. Therefore looking deeper helped understand the actions of the other. It also helped reveal that the inability to understand the deeper relationship pattern among the various tribal groups and ignoring each other’s grievances was not going to bring about permanent solutions. (Congo Unites, pre-conference training)

Calling an older generation of participants representing the same tribes to participate in the same exercise would more often than not lead to very different outcome. The crippling inability to look beyond one’s own grievances and a denial of the deeper problems are common expressions among older generations in a conflict zone. This does not suggest that the older are inherently evil, but rather, compared to their own flesh and blood, they have had extended exposure to the poison of hate and the pains of violence. This suffocates their capacity to take a closer look at the relational hurts in society.

Lederach suggests that the third lens helps envision “a framework that holds these together and creates a platform to address the content, the context, and the structure of the relationship. From this platform, parties can begin to find creative responses and solutions” (Lederach 15). Such creative responses once again need the involvement of grassroots communities. As stated above, in relation to other attributes that make the Conflict Transformational approach unique, is the slashing of the monopoly of the top tiers of the society to implement the solutions. The creative approaches to counter structural violence
and injustice in communities can and should be led by grassroots intervention. Grassroots, and especially youth as argued above, have an advantage in that their lenses more easily identify the immediate, understand the context and the patterns of the conflict, and are able to view creative areas of engagement in contrast to the top down approach. The involvement of the masses and the grassroots, especially the youth, creates a stronger sense of ownership and thus gives life to the process of durable solutions. The implementation of national level responses conceived by the grassroots movements becomes more effective than government ordained initiatives that have no buy-in from the masses. The case studies in the next chapter will further explore creative and pioneering solutions youth in conflict zones are leading.

Using these lenses to look at conflict helps attain a better perspective and understanding about the root causes of the conflict and affirms the need to address the issues that are at the heart of the conflict. These same issues cause nations marred by conflict to fall trap into a reoccurring cycle of violence. Figure 4:3 attempts to visually express this reality.
4.1.3 Addressing deeper issues

The most compelling aspect of the Conflict Transformational approach lies within its continued emphasis on addressing the deeper issues of the conflict, an aspect that is not a focus nor seen as a necessity in liberal peace interventions. As indicated in figure 4.3, it is the realization that the conflict depicts an iceberg, with violence and other symptoms of the context just the “tip.” The main reason for the shipwreck is the deeper issues under the surface. In many situations, as the violence ends and war fades, it is easy to assume that
clear waters lie ahead. However, as depicted in the image, the danger has not being eliminated. The threats remain the same. The Conflict Transformational approach understands this condition and seeks to engage the deeper issues. Violence and war didn’t happen overnight; in almost every situation, the conflict builds up to a point where violence and destruction becomes evident. Hence looking at the time frame before those outbursts is key to ensure the recurring patterns do not persist. Lederach emphasizes this reality in the following manner, “A transformational approach seeks to understand the particular episode of conflict not in isolation, but as embedded in the greater pattern” (Lederach 16). War didn’t come to being out of thin air. Careful studies of patterns are essential to durable solutions. Lederach further elaborates, “Conflict Transformation, seeks to understand, not negate or avoid, the reality that social conflict often develops violent and destructive patterns” (Lederach 19). This leads to asking very important but difficult questions: “Why did young Tamil youth in Sri Lanka sign up to wear suicide jackets and blow themselves up?” “Why would young Muslim men and women in the west leave their comfort and opportunity in affluent societies to join ISIS in a bloody war in the Middle East?” “Why would M23 and other militia groups in DRC use rape as a weapon of war?” “Why would the Hutus kill nearly 800,000 Tutsi in 100 days and seek to annihilate them from their community?” The why is extremely relevant. The answer will include looking at the symptoms in order to find the root causes and even create antibodies to produce a resistance against the virus of hate and violence. If the denial of the deeper issues persists, it creates a lifelong struggle of containing the symptoms. Violence will persist if its origins are not met with intentional efforts.

Lederach further emphasizes:
To reduce violence requires that we address the presenting issues and content of an episode of conflict, and also its underlying patterns and causes. This requires us to address justice issues. While we do that, we must proceed in an equitable way towards substantive change (Lederach 21).

Substantive change in these violent zones cannot deny the need to address youth and their role in the conflict. As established within the first chapter, youth are at the forefront of the conflict, as victims in most situations and perpetrators in others. Therefore, addressing justice issues and proceeding in equitable ways cannot be achieved through the denial of the rightful emphasis on the youth demographic. Thus, the most effective way to ensure that youth are represented and their needs are addressed is to have them involved in the process. With over 89% of the world youth population living in these conflict zones, addressing their grievances and transforming their reality is a strong move toward addressing the deeper issues of the conflict. The highlighted case studies in the final chapter will take a closer look at specific ways in which youth are addressing the deeper issues of conflict and demonstrate an understanding of a conflict transformational framework.

4.1.4 Long Term Engagement

Finally, the focus on long-term engagement within Conflict Transformation is another aspect that makes it a profound and viable approach. Lederach writes:

Ebb and flow; we often see conflict primarily in terms of its rise and fall, its escalation and de-escalation, its peaks and valleys, a particular iteration or repetition of a conflict episode. A transformational perspective, rather than looking at the single peak or valley, views the entire mountain range. (Lederach 16).
The perception of an entire mountain range is only possible with long term engagement; an in and out intervention will only see one peak and one valley of the conflict and only engage in reducing the devastation of that particular situation. However, in order to take into consideration the entire mountain range, one needs to engage for the long-term to ensure violence is reduced, justice is increased, and healthy relationships are restored. This attribute of a Conflict Transformational approach gives further legitimacy to the role of youth. If the goal is to engage in the numerous ebbs and flows of conflict and ensure the positive outcomes through long-term effective engagement, youth as a demographic are ideal candidates to play leading roles in the process. If those who will not face the consequences of their decisions make decisions, they should not be given a monopoly on the process. Engaging youth at a younger age causes creates a level of familiarity with the “terrain,” the ebbs and flow of the conflict, and thus gives them the expertise on the issues as they enter adulthood. The alternate would be to leave them out of the process throughout their youth, leave them vulnerable to the ideologies that suggest that a violent role is their only form of expression, and thereby mark their life’s mountain range as marred by violence that will further the nation’s culture of violence. The survey highlighted in the previous chapter affirms the reality that youth are influenced by the values infused through the causes they invest in during their youth, and thus depicts the capacity of youth for long term to engage. Though it may not be direct involvement as peace activist for their entire lifetime, they will embody those values in their sphere of influence and thus create a long-term resistance to a society that enhances division and fuels violence.

Lederach also addresses the life giving opportunities within the process of Conflict Transformation, “Conflict also creates life; through conflict we respond, innovate, and
change. Conflict can be understood as the motor of change that which keeps relationships and social structures honest, alive and dynamically responsive to human needs, aspirations and growth” (Lederach 18). Who would be better equipped and suited to this process of growth, dynamically responsive and innovative, than the demographic of youth? During the peak of their moldable years, engaging in Conflict Transformation informs the minds of youth of the realities of conflict and helps challenge beliefs, prejudices, and postures within the society that are not conducive to change. The elements of culture that need to be transformed in order ensure sustainable relationships can be formed through the leadership of youth, through the use of arts, social media, the demand for certain mainstream media, etc.

The overall emphasis on long term, proactive engagement in the deeper issues creates a strong precedent for youth involvement and leadership in the process of transforming conflict. Lederach helps drive this argument further, “Rather than seeing peace as a static ‘end-state,’ Conflict Transformation views peace as continuously evolving and developing quality of relationship” (Lederach 20). The evolving process can be detected, engaged and refined best by the core and shapers of culture, the nation’s youth. If peace was indeed an “end-state,” the role of youth could be questioned as irrelevant or inconsequential. However, when one reconciles with the idea that long-term engagement and being in sync with the ebbs and flows of conflict is part of a sustainable solution, it becomes easier to deduce the crucial role played by youth.
In summary, traditional neo-liberal notions of peace have been rooted in a model that focuses on a conflict resolution perspective. As stated above, such perspective creates a monopoly of engagement to a select few, fails to address deeper issues, has a limited time frame of engagement, is often plagued by the lopsided perspective of the conflict, and has largely proved to be ineffective in bringing durable solutions. The contrast of Conflict Transformation as depicted in Table 1 can be seen in the primary approaches it takes: its focus, purpose, the development of the process, the time frame, and the view of the conflict. In essence, it is a clear break from the previous notions of the process of interventions to solve the conflict. Therefore, it also breaks away from those who are the key stakeholders and actors in leading change. The process of conflict resolution does not create space for a longer term engagement or focus on the grievances of the grassroots or build and restore the relationships of the masses, thus it eliminates the role youth can play and creates a monopoly of influence with the onus on the state and higher strata of civil society. Within such a context, youth are relegated to play a ceremonial, inconsequential role and are not even seen as part of the solution. However, the process of Conflict

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<td><strong>Resolution</strong></td>
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<td>How do we end something not desired?</td>
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<td>It is content-centered.</td>
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<td>To achieve an agreement and solution to the presenting problem creating the crisis.</td>
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<td>It is embedded and built around the immediacy of the relationship where the presenting problems appear.</td>
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Transformation negates each of those disqualifiers of youth and enhances their role as argued above thus further strengthening the thesis that youth play a pivotal role in transforming conflict. However, even in the midst of a pursuit of a conflict resolution approach by the state and other leaders of society, youth can still engage toward leading change through the basis of Conflict Transformation and thus will still be pivotal in leading durable change. The failed instances of the liberal peace interventions and the creation of negative peace can be effectively challenged and engaged through the involvement of youth led change.

4.2 Reconciliation

John Paul Lederach makes mention of the importance of human relationships and states they are essential in the process of Conflict Transformation. He even goes as far to describe the restoration of relationships as the core focus of a transformational approach. Lederach writes:

Relationships are at the heart of Conflict Transformation. Rather than concentrating exclusively on the content and substance of the dispute, the transformational approach suggests that the key to understanding conflict and developing creative change processes lies in seeing the less visible aspects of relationship. While the issues over which people fight are important and require creative response, relationships represent a web of connections that form the broader context of the conflict. It is out of this relationship context that particular issues arise and either become volatile or get quickly resolved. (Lederach 30)

Restoring relationship is crucial for durable solutions. Assuming people who were at odds with each other can live separately and not engage is naive and unrealistic. At the same time the state cannot enforce human relationships because it does not have the ability to inspire a change in the mindset of the masses. It may look to use state media, state
education, and other tools at its disposal, however, it will not be able to deeply influence society to change and restore relationships. This responsibility rests on grassroots movements and especially on youth who may be more open to the notion of building relationships across enemy lines creating another avenue for youth leadership.

This aspect of Conflict Transformation and the process of restoring relationships is also known as reconciliation. The word “reconcile” is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as to “restore friendly relations between, make or show to be compatible, make someone accept a disagreeable thing.” Daniel Philpott in his book Politics of Past Evil writes about the meaning of reconciliation as follows:

Common to all many meanings is the concept, “restoration of right relationship.” In Hebrew, “reconciliation” is expressed by tikkum olam, meaning “to heal, to repair, to transform;” in Greek, “To reconcile completely, to bring back a former state of harmony.” In Arabic, the word is salima, meaning “peace, safety, security, and freedom,” and salaha, meaning “to be righteous, to do right, settlement, compromise, restoration and restitution.” All connote the restoration of relationships between persons. (Phillpott 15)

The concept of reconciliation and restoring right relationships is clearly one which cuts through diverse cultures, religions, and worldviews. This could be attributed to the fact that reconciliation is an essential process in human interaction. Conflict among individuals, people groups, and nations is inevitable, but a process of reconciliation creates an opportunity to restore the relationships and address unhealthy dynamics and injustices within the relationships. One can argue that reconciliation is a process that is a constant in any society. It serves as a health check on the emotional and structural health of a nation. The need for reconciliation is further heightened within the context of a violent conflict, but its nature demands that it is a long-term process and it requires constant focus. It is not
a tool that can be brought out to use during the immediate season after conflict and left alone in the long run. It is a continual process of engagement and ensuring that society is moving in the right direction.

Figure 4.4: *tikkum olam* – Hebrew definition of reconciliation.

The process of reconciliation can be further understood by its Hebrew word, *tikkum olam*. This word indicates a triune process of healing, repairing, and transforming society’s broken relationships. The process of reconciliation is thereby understood as a long-term endeavor, once again one that requires more time and attention than traditional forms of
intervening in conflict. Reconciliation is also a process that cannot skip any of the elements of healing, repairing, or transforming. Society can only move forward if this process moves steadily along. In order to progress, it is essential that each step is addressed on the journey towards restoring relationships. The failure to heal the hurts is often attributed to not acknowledging the wrong that was done to each other. Once again, such elements cannot be enforced by the state. The governments may make statements acknowledging injustices to certain communities that they have wronged in the past. Consider the following examples: Japan to South Korea, the Australian government’s to aborigines, and the U.S. government to Native Americans. However, the masses may not be in agreement and neither side may be willing to accept or acknowledge the hurts caused by them to the community in question. Engaging the masses to shift public opinion becomes yet another important role which grassroots movements, and especially youth in society, can and need to lead. The Civil Rights movement in the United States still seeks to educate the white majority about the inequality of wealth and the existing structural violence within American society showing connections between post-Civil Rights movement injustices and how they still impact African American communities. However, the masses may not buy into that notion of inequality or the connection to past injustices. Though the state may provide assistance and welfare to address a recognized need, the masses may not agree; the healing process still needs to improve.

Even if great strides are made to acknowledge and heal the wounds, the next stage of repairing must be set in motion. In this process, society examines the structural violence and existing injustices that cause the renewed hurt. This needs to be addressed at the state level, however, it can only be implemented and inspired through grassroots movements.
State laws can cause the incentive for society to prevent discriminating communities, however, if entire communities boycott these laws, it hinders progress. Once again, a changing of hearts and minds is required. The integration of schools as part of the Civil Rights movements in the 1960’s was a classic example of this process. This is a transformation of not just the elite, liberal minded, and the educated in society, but a broader majority of society. Referencing race in America, this can be identified by the notion of the election an African American President voted in by a white majority. A long-term process of restoration of relationship has caused a journey led by grassroots movement which evolved over the years to the monumental inauguration. However, it does not mean that the relationship is entirely restored. Racial riots, reports of police brutality on minorities, and the disproportion of minorities in prison all indicate that the journey towards reconciliation is not complete. Though many victories have been made for reconciliation, the journey continues. This process of transformation never enters a state of “arrival;” it is the journey and a continued litmus test of a society’s relationships. In an article about the truth and reconciliation movement in South Africa, James Gibson helps further define reconciliation and this process as:

People of different races getting along better with each other that is, a decrease of racial/ethnic animosities. This may mean that people come to interact with each other more (the breakdown of barriers across races), communicate more in turn leading into greater understanding and perhaps acceptance, resulting in the appreciation and exaltation of the value of racial diversity. It is this dimension of reconciliation – the extension dignity and esteem to those of other races and cultures, through understanding trust and respect. (Gibson 202)

Gibson’s definition has a fluid progression and analyzes a process which creates a cycle for reconciliation. This process never arrives or comes to completion, but it is a system that
needs to consistently practiced in society to purge existing prejudices and to prevent the development of new prejudices and divisions.

Figure 4.5: Cycle of Reconciliation
4.3 Restoring human relationships is a core to the Conflict Transformational approach. As the thesis of this paper depicts, youth play a pivotal role in transforming conflict. The point is profoundly depicted in the role youth play in the restoration of relationships in society, or in other words, reconciliation. Among the various attributes that youth as a demographic possess, the ability to adapt to new realities is one of the main strengths. In the context of a post war era, it is the youth who can blaze a trail in building new
relationships across enemy lines. This will create an impetus for new possibilities: restoration as a result of young people pioneering initiatives for change and breaking away from inherited prejudices. The following example of a restored relationship in Sri Lanka stands as an example of how the unique attributes of youth, being open to new realities, and thirsting for a purpose, change, and long-term engagement create a thriving environment for restoration of relationships. At the Sri Lanka Unites future leaders conference 2012 and beyond, this story was told:

Sanjaya is a Sinhalese youth from the Kegalle district of Sri Lanka. His father was a naval officer of the Sri Lankan army. During an attack from a Tamil extremist group, the LTTE, Sanjaya's father suffered serious injuries to his hand. Sanjaya grew up with an intense hatred towards the Tamil community. At the Sri Lanka Unites conference, for the first time in his life, he met a Tamil youth, Thilak. Thilak had lost his uncle in the war and grew up with the deep animosity against the Sinhalese community. Thilak states, “In my village every home has lost at least a member in war. My mother had lost her brother so she was angry,” Both Thilak and Sanjaya did not want to have any relationship and most certainly didn’t intend to restore a relationship of hate among their community. However, in a typical depiction of Gibson’s model their interaction, understanding all the way to respect. They saw the relationship heal, their repaired aspects of the ethnic perspective that caused further hurt and they transformed the reality of them being born as enemies to friends and even brothers. Their friendship went beyond them and impacted their families as well. Once sworn enemies gave friendship a chance due to each of their son’s passion and commitment. The relation over the past three years has thrived in to a family affair. Thilak states, “Sanjay’s mother did not know Tamil, but still she wrote a letter to me in Tamil and calls me on my birthday...My father never believed in reconciliation but once he visited Sanjay’s home, his opinions have also changed.” Sanjaya adds “My family has visited them in Jaffna and now we are family friends. Our siblings also get along like house on fire.” These are simple but profound moments in rebuilding the broken relationships in society. (Sri Lanka Unites)

Breaking the cycle of hate is the beginning of a cycle of reconciliation. Recently when radical Sinhalese political elements tried to ban the singing of the national anthem in
Tamil, it was no longer the language of the enemy for Sanjaya. Instead, it was a mother tongue of his friend and his family. He stood up in his entirely Sinhalese high school sang the national anthem in Tamil in protest of extremist Sinhala politicians. When Tamils stereotype entire Sinhala communities and fuel hate speech, for Thilak it is no longer malice against an enemy, but hatred against his friend; hence, he speaks up against it. Their influence as leaders in their community is not only causing healing of communal relationships but causing a resistance to hate. They had to lead the way for their parents and their community to be enlightened by the potential of restored relationships in society. Their openness to the “other,” desire for a greater cause, and consistent long term engagement gave them the capacity to be pioneers and play a pivotal role in transforming their society.
CHAPTER 5:
POINTS OF ENGAGEMENT

5.1 What does this engagement look like?

A conceptual and theoretical understanding of the crucial role youth play in peacebuilding through a Conflict Transformation approach is incomplete without an exploration of the tangible ways in which youth are getting involved in working with root causes of conflict in order to transform conflict. The circumstance they are born into leads them to respond to the struggles in their communities. The failures of generations before them, the pressing needs of the situation, the sheer numbers of peers who have been impacted by the conflict, all move these youth leaders to action. This chapter seeks to identify some key areas of engagement, the theory of change in each of these areas of engagement, and examples of how these strategies are being used by youth movements in conflict zones across the world. These points of engagement help prove the fundamental position of this thesis, that youth in conflict zones play a pioneering and pivotal role in peacebuilding.

The most compelling narrative to establish the thesis lies in the manner in which these youth have engaged the root causes of the conflict and the potential their initiatives possess to create durable solutions. Ohana, in her book *Youth Work and Conflict Transformation*, states, “Youth work at the national and international levels has had a long-
standing commitment to Conflict Transformation. Examples of good practices of Conflict Transformation initiatives involving young people and children, and using a variety of methodological approaches, are available …all over the world” (Ohana 33). Some unique and effective strategies and movements which employ this approach will be explored next.

Theoretical Framework
Conflict Transformation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth led movements</th>
<th>Platform of engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congo Unites</td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 6th Movement (Egypt)</td>
<td>Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Famble Tok (Sierra Leon)</td>
<td>Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghans for Progressive Thinking</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HROC (Rwanda)</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka Unites</td>
<td>National Identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.1: Points of engagement

Strategies and platforms of engagement include: INTEGRATION in conflict zones that possess a high rate of segregation; using new models of INFLUENCE to shift public opinion for peaceful solutions; EDUCATION, that expands the worldview of youth and the broader community to understand the perspective of opposing communities and cultivate
critical thinking; HEALTH, to advocate for the physical, mental, spiritual, and especially emotional health of conflict devastated communities; and JUSTICE approaches towards transitional and restorative justice emerging from grassroots communities. These strategies are responses to the root causes of the conflict and are made possible through a Conflict Transformation approach. Youth movements use attributes unique to them as youth, and through a Conflict Transformational approach, seek to chip away at the issues below the surface that have contributed to the continued cycle of violence. These long term strategies are welcoming not merely because they are steeped in local ownership, connected to broader understanding of engaging conflict, but because they have the potential to engage the masses and contribute to change at a national level. These strategies create room for upward mobility, and through it, growth engages all the tiers in the pyramid of peacebuilding.

5.2 Integration

Many civil conflicts and wars occur entirely or partly due to segregated societies. In the context of segregated nations, there are often stereotypes and prejudices about other ethnic groups. The fact that there is no interaction between ethnic, religious, and racial groups at odds creates no room for individual and personal experiences to break down harmful stereotypes that fuel tensions and animosities. This is clearly seen in Iraq among the Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds; in Sri Lanka among the northern Tamils and Sinhalese (especially outside the capital); and in Northern Ireland between Protestant and Catholics.
The similarities in the civil conflict and the chaos in each of these nations may vary by cause and agenda, however, a startling commonality is the fact that groups at odds did not live within a functional integrated society. Therefore, each new generation is born with inherited prejudices and hate and without any real life experience with “opposing” communities. This mindset cripples the capacity of a new generation to critically think about the realities of the conflict or the perspective of the opposing group. Thus, they are easily swayed by their prejudice and are more inclined to react violently when the situation arises. Therein lies an important challenge that needs to be addressed.

5.2.1 The theoretical framework for integration

Many scholars and practitioners alike support social integration and creating opportunities for connection across opposing lines. According to Levi, social integration exists “where numbers of actors in a large group play their role consistently and in coordination; cultural integration exists where the behaviors of the actors are compatible with each other and among the subgroups composing the total society” (Levi 111). Levi also discusses the importance of integration needing a purpose and a goal. “The new (high level) integration can only be towards an overall end which the otherwise conflicting groups share” (Levi 111). A purpose driven integration seems to have more weight in long-term solutions, and for the creation of stability, that would lead to peace within the society. For example, when the laborers work together in order to reach a certain target production, and each benefits by receiving higher wages, they will work more efficiently together. In the course of pursuing goals, there is a sense of unity and oneness in this group that creates room for stronger bonds within the broader society. Furthermore, the process of integration is also important for the clearing of hatred that breeds within a segregated society.
Singleman and Welch write, “Adherents of the contact hypothesis view racial segregation as a source of ignorance, a breeding ground for derogatory stereotypes and racial hostility” (qtd. in Gibson 203). Gibson goes on to express the lesson and value that is added as a result of integration:

Interracial context is said to provide direct information regarding the value, lifestyle, behaviors, and experiences of other racial groups. When information about other group is gained through long-term interaction with co-workers, neighbors, and others, the acquired information is likely to be relatively accurate and largely favorable in contact. This positive firsthand experience may then be generalized into positive perceptions of the group as a whole. In absence of such firsthand information, individuals may be unable to counter unfavorable impressions and stereotypes of other racial and cultural groups. In addition, individuals may be influenced by slated media images of other racial and ethnic groups, leaders, and other indirect (and often inaccurate) sources of information about these groups. (Gibson 203)

If nations that have intense conflicts make a genuine attempt to create opportunities for groups who are at odds to interact, the success of the efforts towards lasting peace and reconciliation will become more realistic. If societies remain segregated, there can never be opportunities to break harmful stereotypes that continue to create hostilities. Even if temporary peace occurs, it may not have the potential to expand into a lasting resolution as a result of the society’s failure to enhance interracial relations. Karl Deutsch states, “By integration we mean the attainment, within a territory, of a ‘sense of community’ and an institution and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure for a ‘long time,’ dependable expectation of ‘peaceful change’ among its population” (qtd. in Levi 101). The key point is the long-term exercise of a “sense of community” that is born from the integration of a society. The fact that the sense of community is the ultimate indicator which creates peaceful change is a clear indication that isolated efforts of integration or
short spells of integration do not fulfill the requirement. In contrast, an integration that expands through the long term and has a broad range of influence has more potential for peaceful change as Deutsch pointed out.

Based on the above-mentioned theoretical framework, many youth movements have adopted this practice as a response to the needs of their context. In essence, the strategy of integration is:

Building mutual trust between groups that are suspicious of each other because of segregation or violence committed against one another. These can involve young people who are both directly affected by an ongoing “hot conflict,” or young people who have no personal experience of the conflict, but who have inherited prejudices and suspicion from older generations. (Ohana 36)

Such efforts, when carried out with the objective of seeking a sense of community as opposed to random isolated events, have had a positive impact on society. The entire theory is based on the notion that real life positive experience can challenge and break through inherited prejudices.

5.2.2 Congo Unites

Congo Unites was founded in 2014 and exists to promote reconciliation and non-violence among a new generation of Congolese leaders. Their vision is to unite the youth of all tribal and religious groups across Congo, in a movement which provides hope and promotes reconciliation, creating a peaceful and prosperous nation for future generations. The movement is led by a national committee of young peace activists, and they represent every province of the nation. (Congo Unites)
The Democratic Republic of Congo has been devastated by conflict for nearly two decades. According to certain estimates, the nation has lost nearly 6 million of their population to the brutal civil war. International media has attempted to occasionally bring much needed attention to the Congolese crisis with headlines that read “Greatest human tragedy since WWII” and “Death tolls passing the Holocaust.” In an extremely complex civil war, the nation has been divided along tribal lines, and young people have been brainwashed to believe that violence is the only way to find solutions to the conflict. The government and the international community have failed to bring durable solutions to the ongoing conflict. Within this context, the Congo Unites movement launched its first future leaders conference to bring youth leaders from all of the provinces of the Congo together. Over 800 applicants from every province applied indicating the desire of youth to be involved in a greater cause and their thirst to see their nation live up to its potential. Two hundred and fifty youth leaders representing all major tribes, regions, and provinces were selected to attend the conference. In a nation that is one of the poorest and most dangerous in the world, gathering these student leaders from across the nation with its limited infrastructure was a major challenge; this effort was most probably the first of its kind. Yet, the Congo Unites leadership responded to the challenge. Gathering a group of young leaders from opposing tribal groups and the vast regions of Congo together in Goma, Eastern Congo, in itself would have been a great achievement, but the accomplishment of the summit and the journey that followed was the true testament to the success of the
movement. The strategy of integration and creation of a “sense of community” among these leaders were the highlights of these efforts. A documentary produced on this conference named *Out of the Darkness – Congo Unites*, summarizes some of the insights of the participants and the experience of how enemy lines blur and new alliances form among a new generation of leaders seeking to rebuild their nation after a brutal civil war.

Grace Kabando, a youth from Goma, North Kivu, states:

> The first person I hated was my father’s tribe. He abandoned our family and his tribe didn’t help provide for my family. Next, I hated my government. They killed so many innocent people and failed to protect its citizen from extremists … today with the help of the UN we have a certain level of peace, but everyone is praying and hoping that peace will last. I’ve told my family that someday I will be the President of Congo. If not, I hope to meet him or her at the Congo Unites conference. (*Out of the Darkness, CU documentary*)

Another student participating at the conference stated, “We came through conflict zones controlled by militia and other violent groups. We were scared but we are glad to see what is happening in our country, with the birth of this new movement.” Camille Ntoto, the founder and trustee of the Congo Unites movement, says:

> We need to let the next generation understand that we made mistake and help them understand, they don’t have to make those same mistakes. So what we are doing with Congo Unites is to put them in a context where they have an opportunity to interact with people from other tribes and other regions from Congo. We want them to realize that they are people just like them, with ideas, dreams, and vision, and all they want is to accomplish some of them. We want them to see there is much more advantage in unity than fostering this hatred that has been going on for too long. (*Out of the Darkness, CU documentary*)
A young woman from a certain tribe states, “I want to be part of a movement that changes my country. I want to do whatever I can to help bring that change. That is why I am here.” Another young man from the opposing tribe states, “I want to see a new history for my country. That is why I am here.” For decades, these tribal groups have destroyed each other, but their common purpose and passion to have a better future for their country brought these leaders of a new Congo together.

Grace, reflecting on his experience, states, “The first thing that happened at the Congo Unites conference is that we were divided into groups, but this was different. We were in groups with our opposing tribes. This was an experience that was very new for many of us. These were the same tribes that some of us grew up learning to hate” (Out of the Darkness, Congo Unites). During the course of the conference, through various strategies, the organizers created an opportunity for these youth leaders from opposing tribes to share their grievances, their hurt, and their sorrows. For the first time, they were hearing each other’s position and pain. They first sought to understand before seeking to be understood. At certain points during the conference, the students asked forgiveness from opposing tribal groups for the hurt caused by certain members of their community. They were building new alliances and creating a new sense of community. They were indeed a new generation of youth seeking to transform their nation. They stood together, even across the enemy lines as they chanted, “Who are we? We are Congo. Where are we? We are Congo. Congo will unite.” They represent the aspirations of a nation. They were pioneering a new path towards transforming conflict. Grace narrates:

For a few days in beautiful July, young men and young women gathered together from all the corners of my beautiful country. We
were encouraged not to think of ourselves, not as tribes, but as Congolese. We were inspired to turn away from all forms of violence…..we were challenged to imagine a new Congo, a Congo that serves not a few but all its people. It up to us, a new generation, to place our mark on our nation. (Out of the Darkness, Congo Unites)

The common desire to rebuild a great nation has caused them to establish Congo Unites chapters across the country. Congo Unites is comprised of youth from various tribes who can come together, build a collective Congolese identity, create a resistance against the recruitment of youth towards violence, and keep the government accountable for good governance. The following map shows the growing alliances of Congo Unites. Across tribal lines they are creating a new national identity.

Figure 5.2 : Expanding Congo Unites movement, projection for 2016
In early March of 2015, the government was cracking down on dissenting voices all across Congo. A leader of the Congo Unites movement, Serge Servy, was taken captive by the regime. The Congo Unites members, without resorting to violence, mobilized a non-violent protest on the streets of Goma and on social media until the increasing pressure caused the regime to release Serge. This was a strong test of their commitment to the lessons of the Congo Unites conference, and they passed admirably. These youth leaders have positioned themselves to transform their nation, to change a legacy of hate into a legacy of peace and hope. They have pioneered a course for durable solutions and have laid the foundation for the creation of a great nation.

![Figure 5.3 #FreeSerge social media campaign](image)
The Congo Unites movement depicts the attributes of youth explored throughout this paper. They were open to reach out across enemy lines and accomplish what was nearly impossible for their parents’ generation. Their passion for a cause and a burden for changing their nation motivated them to mobilize. Their willingness to engage long term gives their approach legitimacy in its ability to reduce violence, increase justice, and transform a nation that is desperately in need of change. When the older generation and the State in general had a very passive approach to engage deeper issues that could transform conflict, Congo Unites leadership pioneered a movement that is and will continue to play a pivotal role in transforming conflict.

5.3 Influence

If youth are to have an impact on the broader society and transform conflict, they need to position themselves in order to have wide reaching influence. The ideals of peace, unity, reconciliation, non-violence, equality, and good governance should not only be understood and accepted by a few groups that represent a very small percentage of the broader community. There should be focused efforts to establish and spread the message to diverse religious, ethnic, age, gender, and subcategories of these groups. A contextualized version of the message should be created to fit each of these groups so that there is an ability to identify and make the concept their own. If the message is widespread, constantly advocated, and people are encouraged towards society’s positive transformation, the overall efforts will be more successful.
5.3.1 Theoretical framework of strategy of influence

The Peter Wagner Leadership Institute, a faith based leadership institute, teaches their students a curriculum about the “seven mountains” that influence society. These are crucial aspects of society that shape the worldview and mindset of the broader society. These are: Religion, Family, Education, Government, Media, Art and Entertainment and Business (Wagner). According to the Wagner, these institutions have the capacity to inform the worldview and the values of any society. Given the limited resources, credibility, and capacity of youth, they are best served to communicate their message for peacebuilding through these institutions in society. Some are more accessible than others, and youth movements around the world have mastered the use of Media as well as Arts and Entertainment as their main sources of influence. A few have adopted business and business entrepreneurial techniques to expand their influence, and others have worked with religious institutes or educational institutes. Fewer have sought to work directly with local or national governments to enhance a message of peace and nonviolence to transform their societies.

5.3.2 April 6th Movement – Egypt

The April 6th movement is a youth movement based in Egypt. It was instrumental in using social media to mobilize youth and adults across Cairo to stand up non-violently against the Mubarak regime. They were founded in spring of 2008 and were inspired by the non-
violent Otpor movement in Serbia. The main concerns of the April 6th movement included free speech and nepotism in government and the country’s economy. They were a new generation of Egyptians who dared to break the silence and demand their rights as citizens. (PBS)

The April 6th movement of Egypt, having been inspired and trained by the Otpor movement in Serbia, was looking for ways to challenge the regime and restore free speech, liberty, and democracy to Egypt. The brutal dictatorship had violently oppressed Egypt for nearly 27 years. During this era, the regime had made all public protest illegal. The state machinery was well placed to punish those who dared to take a stand or attempted to influence people who were against the regime. In such a context, the youth leaders of the April 6th movements dared to awaken the conscience of a nation to rise up against the tyranny of Mubarak’s dictatorship. The only forum of influence left at their disposal was social media, and through a Facebook page, they shared their ideology and message with the broader community (PBS).

Ramesh Sirinivasan, an associate professor in media / information studies at UCLA, writes of his perspective on the movement in Egyptian movement:

Egyptians recognize that “older media,” such as television and radio, though accessed by most, tend to be biased. Still State TV, run by the ruling military, remains most popular, and domestic corporate media channels are self-serving and volatile in their coverage. Yet activists have explained to me that they can influence some of these media from the “outside in” by documenting videos of protests, creating credible blogs, and tweeting stories to influence both international and domestic journalists...While the mainstream media
sparsely reported on this protest, I observed how activists were using video cameras, blogs, and Facebook/Twitter connections to force this coverage from the outside in. These forces can potentially bring new voices into the mainstream media culture. (Sirinivasan)

During the first protest, police fatally shot three people and took 400 to prison. However, this movement still sparked new hope and created a new sense of courage for the broader society. Nadia, a 25 year old democracy activist who was arrested during the original protest, states, “They arrested me and accused me of being part of the crowd of protesters. They asked me about how we are using Facebook. They are afraid of Facebook and our work on the internet to create awareness because they can’t control it” (PBS). The government tried to track down and arrest the co-founder of the movement, Ahmed Maher. They threatened to kill him, but when asked why he persevered, he said, “Mubarak’s regime has been keen to terrify people and killing their political awareness by making them fear politics. I believe it should be the opposite. Even if it means getting arrested” (PBS). The determination of Ahmed and others like him indicates how youth have engaged the deeper issues of the conflict through influencing society not to accept the status quo of dictatorship. They pioneered the awakening of a nation’s conscience and had the courage to stand up against the structural violence of the regime. The new awakening of the masses inspired them to film instances of government abuse of citizens, corruption, and injustices that society had become desensitized to. Thereby they influenced the broader society to move towards Tahrir Square where they finally toppled the regime. Many attribute the toppling of the regime to the acts of young leaders, who used the resources they had to influence the masses. Columnist Mona Eltahawy writes, “In the absence of any viable opposition to the Mubarak regime, April 6 became that place where young people
could go. More importantly, it was able to take them off the virtual space and into the real
world. Because that really was the challenge” (PBS). The praise for the April 6th movement
comes from all across civil society and from the older generation. They organized,
mobilized, and inspired the nation to believe it was possible. They managed to bring the
nation to stand still until justice and equality were possible.

The movement in Egypt and others like them across the Middle East proved that
youth can play a pioneering and pivotal role in transforming conflict in their communities.
The specific attributes about youth as a demographic highlighted in this thesis also were
manifest in this situation: their openness to new and creative approaches; the fact that they
were less entrenched in their hate for different communities; and their willingness to work
across religious or political lines to create alliances to topple the regime; the desire for a
greater nation and a cause that rallied people to come together. The continued engagement
of these activists show their awareness of the need for long-term engagement. After
bringing down the Mubarak regime in 2011, these movements continued to keep the new
government accountable, and when they failed, they mobilized to topple the new president
Morsi in 2013 (Curry). They remain active and lead the charge to transform society. They
seek to challenge society until suffering as a result structural violence in society is no
longer the norm.

5.4 Justice

Youth movements may not be able to influence the judiciary or political systems to
address the injustices faced by citizens, however, addressing injustices is a crucial part of
transforming conflict and pursuing reconciliation in a nation devastated by conflict. If these grievances are not acknowledged, they often contribute to renewed conflict and prolonged hostility across opposing communities. Though youth may not have the capacity to ensure that punitive justice methods are in motion, grassroots movements have the capacity to administer restorative justice and transitional justice mechanisms. Even when punitive justice approaches are used, they are limited in addressing the grievances. The perpetrator-centered approach at times has negative impact of leaving the victims’ needs unmet. Youth in conflict zones have used this strategy to engage with the root causes of grievances in their communities and once again played a pivotal role in transforming conflict.

5.4.1 Theoretical Framework for the Strategies of Restorative Justice

Restorative and transitional justice receives most of its credibility from the essence of the approach. The victims are the key focus of attention. The process gives victims voice, opportunity for closure, healing, and restored dignity. Most conventional legal processes fail to restore dignity to the victim. This facet of restorative justice is a huge attraction in a context where the victims could be forgotten in the midst of the politicians and the international community scrambling to use the injustices to pursue a political agenda. The victims of civil war have for decades been robbed of their voice, their dreams, their aspirations, and their rights. Even in the legal system, their grievances and needs can be easily ignored and be secondary to the pursuit of justice. What value is justice if it still leaves the victims voiceless, ashamed, isolated, and traumatized? The dead cannot be brought back to life, the maimed cannot have their natural limbs restored, but the lives of
those who survived can be restored in body, mind, and soul. Restorative justice provides an initial mechanism that makes this possible.

The most compelling aspect of restorative justice is the emphasis on restoring relationships. Rather than one community proving itself “right” over the other, both groups seek opportunities to restore the broken relationships. If the severed relationship is a reminder of the injustice, it will continue to haunt the victim and the perpetrator. This sort of tense relationship among various ethnic groups could lead to further conflict. If deeper issues are addressed, the likeliness of further conflict is mitigated. Dr. Daniel Philpot writes, “As a response to past wrongs, justice is the will to bring comprehensive repair to the relationship that injustices have ruptured so that the persons involved are once again living according to the demands of right relationship” (Philpott 53). Comprehensive repair, as Dr. Philpot points out, is the key factor in restorative justice. If restoration of broken relationships does not take place within the process of justice, renewed violence and animosities are bound to resurface. Studies show that over forty-three per cent of negotiated settlements end up back at war. The fundamental reason is that the fractured relationships were ignored, and therefore justice was not attained. This incomplete justice leaves both parties still bruised and isolated, only to rekindle unresolved hurts with unending cycles of violence.

In his chapter in *The Politics of Past Evil*, Mark Amstutz introduces the distinction between restorative and retributive justice. Elizabeth Kiss categorizes restorative justice as follows:
There are four elements of restorative justice: the restoration of victims’ human dignity, accountability for offences, restoring respect for human life, and promotion of reconciliation. Since the first three behaviors are also emphasized in retribution, the distinctive model, reconciliation is a means to heal broken relationships and is an environment where former enemies express mutual trust, demonstrate cooperation and mutual trust. (Philpott 167)

Restorative justice reflects the need for the process of healing for a nation, a process that if ignored could be the impetus for renewed violence.

5.4.2 Fambul Tok: Community Healing in Sierra Leone

Fambul Tok began in Sierra Leone in March 2008. It originated in the realization that peace cannot be imposed from the outside, or from the top down. Nor does it need to be. The community led and owned reconciliation process we support, witness and celebrate in Sierra Leone is teaching us that communities have within them the resources they need for their own healing. (Fambul Tok)

Fambul Tok is not a youth movement, however it was pioneered by a young lawyer, in response to mass injustices that were going unaddressed in Sierra Leone. It was a response to the growing grievances of rural communities who were victimized in conflict. Their grievances and need for restoration was not being addressed by state or international community led approaches:
By 2007, millions of dollars were invested into a Special Court that was prosecuting nine men; and the Truth and Reconciliation Committee – while it served to help catalogue the broader story of the war – never reached beyond the district capitals to the ordinary villagers most impacted by the war. John had a vision for the kind of reconciliation really needed at the community level. (Fambul Tok)

Hence the Fambul Tok movement arose as a response from the community to address the root causes of the conflict. In an award winning documentary of the innovative approach of a movement, Caulker refers to the notion that western models of justice may not respond to the needs of the nation. Victims had to live side by side with perpetrators, and restoring these relationships was crucial for the process of healing. Caulker says, “No matter what happens to a child, no matter how bad a child is, he is part of our community, we cannot throw the child away” (Fambul Tok). The perpetrators needed to be reincorporated into the community, while the victims’ hurt had to be acknowledged; also, the community needed to ensure justice was achieved in a manner that healed the nation. Caulker states, “We know those who committed these atrocities are Sierra Leoneans, but do we send them into exile? No way! They are part of our resources. We have to transform them to be good citizens. To be productive” (Fambul Tok - a Film about the Power of Forgiveness). This movement is committed to restoring a nation and helping create a foundation for a stronger one. Thus, its purpose is to bring both perpetrators and victims back into the fold of the nation so that they can contribute to the building of a stronger country.

Mr. Caulker first became a human rights activist as a student leader during the initial years of the war in Sierra Leone. Risking his life to document wartime atrocities, he
infiltrated rebel camps disguised as a rebel to gather information and stories that he would then pass along to international organizations. Youth leaders like Caulker depict their pioneering capacity to transform conflict and address the root causes of the violence. The example of the Fambul Tok movement reaffirms the search for justice as another strategy youth grassroots leadership uses to transform conflict (Fambul Tok). Once again, in this situation, the unique attributes of youth came to the surface showing their ability to implement justice. Long-term engagement required for durable solutions is depicted through the life of Caulker and his team. They continue to engage the issues until durable results are apparent. Even as a youth, Caulker’s desire to risk his own life for justice illustrates the desire for a greater cause, and finally, the willingness to seek an approach that incorporates the perpetrators and victims alike in this model portrays their capacity to be less entrenched in their hatred and open to the changes that can bring lasting solutions.

5.5 Education

“Establishing a lasting peace is the work of education; all politics can do is keep us out of war” – Maria Montessori (McEvoy-Levy 235).

Education has the potential to mold the worldview of the next generation. Many conflict zones suffer from two challenges related to education. There are limited opportunities for education in a post war context, which leaves many youth with few
chances to advance in society. This lack of education also has an impact on the capacity for critical thinking, which proves to be essential for resistance against extremist rhetoric. The next more worrying challenge is the use of educational platforms to teach nationalist and extremist rhetoric that further aggravate the divide across enemy lines. Certain educational approaches seek to indoctrinate youth with prejudice, which increases the probability of the conflict spilling over into the next generation. Therefore, durable solutions to conflict are threatened.

5.5.1 Theoretical Framework for the Strategies in Education

With regards to content of the curriculum, more often than not in a nation where there is conflict, prejudices against the groups at odds manifest themselves in what the children are taught in school. Sami Adwan and Dan Bar-On are two individuals who worked on creating a new narrative in the Israel-Palestine conflict writes:

In periods of war and conflict, societies and nations tend to develop their own narratives to explain the conflict, which becomes the only true morally superior narrative, from their perspective. These narratives are morally exclusive and they devalue and sometimes dehumanize their enemy’s narrative (McEvoy-Levy 218).

The existence of such prejudice directly destroys any move towards durable peace. In Sri Lanka, the educational system has failed to give the Tamil community their due respect. The only reference to a Tamil in a Sinhala curriculum is in history where they are
constantly referred to as the enemies from the north. With such a worldview being created in the hearts and minds of the next generation, the possibility for future conflict escalates. Education is also about human development and attitudinal change. In this respect, improved education can contribute much towards building a multicultural society. Educational systems are also implicated in political contests, and the way in which the system of education is organized has important consequences for ethnic understanding (Rotberg 135). In addition, Hume suggests in the case on Northern Ireland that the success in the system of education has further benefits in administering justice and civil rights. “Education has brought more active thinking into the whole political arena as well” (Hume 37). The ability to promote active thinking and critical thinking in the minds of a new generation in a post war situation is absolutely crucial for a true transformation of society.

5.5.2 Afghans for Progressive Thinking

Afghans for progressive thinking was founded in 2010, by youth who wanted to help expand the worldview of a new generation of Afghan youth. Thereby, enhancing a culture of tolerance, openness and respect. They believe tolerance will end war. Respect will foster love. Openness will encourage creativity. Their efforts engage nearly 10,000 University students from all across Afghanistan. They are active in nearly twenty public and private universities in Kabul, Herat, Badakhshan, and Mazar-e Sharif. They use debate, leadership training and radio programs to further their efforts across the nation. They are associated with the civil society organizations in Afghanistan. (APT)

In a nation devastated by war and extremist factions, where tolerance, respect, and openness are diametrically opposed to the Taliban leadership, these youth leaders are
engaging the deeper issues of conflict. The Taliban may have been defeated militarily, but they are in resurgence. Even more disturbing are their ideologies and prejudices that still run deep within the nation’s fabric. Assuming that the US led Allied forces have destroyed this radical movement and that the violence is over could create a lethargy that avoids dealing with the deeper more dangerous issues in today’s Afghani society. However, founder Aref Dostyar and his team at APT do not believe that durable solutions for Afghan’s challenges will come from the outside. They believe the solutions to their nation’s challenges and its future lies within. Aref declares, “I have always believed that it has to be Afghans who build their country. No one else can do this! It is 100% our own responsibility” (APT). The ability to identify the need for local ownership and pioneer change needs to come from within the conflict zone. Hence they have infiltrated educational institutes across the nation to help expand the worldview of a new generation of leaders and protect them from radicalization and extremism.

Aref goes on to say:

There are two questions: what to build and how to build it. When I look at my country’s history, I see that we have torn Afghanistan into regions and Afghans into tribes, languages, and religions. This has caused war, and war has further divided us and taken away that which we ought to value: love and peace. I believe that if we are to build a beautiful Afghanistan, we need to build tolerant, respectful, open minds and hearts. Tolerance will end war. Respect will foster love. Openness will encourage creativity. All of these three elements together will guarantee peace. Peace will guarantee sustainable development. (Afghans for Progressive Thinking)
His movement challenges the narrative of narrow-minded prejudice and ensures the next generation of leaders will not fall into the trap of extremist rhetoric. They seek to ensure that the nation can move forward under the leadership of a new generation of leaders who are able to critically think, be respectful of the other, and create a resistance to the culture of violence and division.

Once again APT, like other highlighted movements, proves the pioneering role youth are playing in conflict zones. They identify the deeper issues such as a culture of intolerance resulting from decades of indoctrination. Engaging the next generation takes a long term approach; if these youth become national leaders someday, their leadership will be diametrically opposed to the ideals of Taliban and others like them. They break away from inherited prejudices across tribal lines and work to create a new culture of respect. Finally, they work with a national agenda to change the legacy of their nation. These illustrate the fundamental attributes highlighted throughout this thesis and show pioneering long term change from the bottom up.

5.6 Emotional Health

National healing cannot be fully experienced if the physical and emotional healing of its citizens is ignored. In the midst of conflict and violence, the lives of people are crushed. As time passes, physical wounds eventually heal, but the unseen emotional wounds continue to fester. This results in the fact that many who are impacted by conflict
never fully recover. Some spiral into a lifestyle of self-destructive behavior, and others live lives that are violent and become a threat to their community. If not addressed, the deep emotional wounds cause recurring strife in their communities. It is in this context that youth movements have sought to respond to the needs of trauma and rebuild community resilience. In most conflict zones, the cultural norms tend to have a stigma attached to exposing personal emotional pain. However, the manifestation of trauma can be seen through violent behavior, alcoholism, and high rates of domestic violence. Youth in these communities themselves are recovering from their hurts but have realized the importance of emotional healing to solidify peace and take a stronger step towards transforming conflict.

5.6.1 Theoretical Framework for Trauma Healing

Understanding what constitutes trauma is absolutely essential in the process. A definition is of utmost importance. “Trauma,” as defined by the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health, is:

…an experience that is emotionally painful, distressful, or shocking, and which often has lasting mental and physical effects. It involves the creation of emotional memories about the distressful events that are stored in structures deep within the brain. It is believed that the more direct the exposure to the traumatic event, the higher the risk for emotional harm. (NIHM)

Ellen McGrath from *Psychology Today* writes, “Not everyone who endures a traumatic experience is scarred by it; the human psyche has a tremendous capacity for recovery and even growth.” She goes on to state the challenge of recovery for those who are impacted by the event:
Recovering from a traumatic experience requires that the painful emotions be thoroughly processed. Trauma feelings cannot be repressed or forgotten. If they are not dealt with directly, the distressing feelings and troubling events replay over and over in the course of a lifetime, creating a condition known as post-traumatic stress disorder. (McGrath)

Recovery from trauma is impossible by oneself. The condition needs to be addressed and cannot be overcome in isolation. Not dealing with the trauma can hamper the growth and potential of the individual. Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, a world-renowned expert in child and adolescent trauma, has led the charge in classifying a type of trauma that describes the cluster of symptoms that manifest in children and adolescents who have been victims of complex trauma, Developmental Trauma Disorder (DTD). “The case for DTD as its own classification is that children suffering from complex and interpersonal trauma consistently present with a coherent group of symptoms that should be considered as part of the trauma, instead of simultaneous, yet independent, disorders” (Van Der Kolk). However, most of them are never diagnosed let alone treated. These youth are judged as intellectually challenged and emotionally unstable which leads to the further trauma of being marginalized by society. Youth leaders can provide psychological and emotional assistance to young people and the broader community who have experienced conflict. They can also provide essential information to young people on health, education, and employment through counseling, advisory services, and guidance. Young people can find positive role models in youth workers. Unaddressed emotional trauma from war creates a population that is marred by domestic violence, stunted emotional and intellectual capacity, and has
the propensity for more violence. Therefore, though considered a stigma, it is crucial that these issues are addressed.

5.6.2 Healing and rebuilding our communities, HROC-Rwanda

HROC is a type of trauma healing approach that was created in Rwanda in 2003. Rwanda has been plagued by a brutal history of colonization, civil war, ethnic hatred, and genocide. As the country strives to build sustainable peace, it is clear that in order to move forward, communities must grapple with the consequences of violence. (HROC)

In the aftermath of genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the nation was shaken to its core. With nearly 800,000 people killed in 100 days, the world watched and read in horror about the atrocities in Rwanda. The trauma and emotional devastation of the communities of this nation still exist today. In such a context, a home grown model of acknowledging and healing trauma was born. Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC)-Rwanda strives to provide psychological support and training to Rwandan people and communities who have experienced genocide, sexual/domestic violence, and trauma of any kind; simultaneously HROC-Rwanda promotes peace education to establish a future generation guided by nonviolent and harmonious values (HROC website). Though HROC is not movement committed to only serving youth, the founders embraced the attributes, highlighted throughout this paper to transform the realities of their conflict.
The co-founder of this movement founded in 2003, Theoneste Bizimana, has been working as coordinator since that time. Theoneste has been instrumental in spreading the HROC peacebuilding model throughout Rwanda and internationally including leading trainings in Burundi, Kenya, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the United States. He serves as the Program Coordinator for the HROC Center and as a facilitator for HROC workshops and the training of HROC facilitators (HROC website). His initiative has not merely identified the devastating impact of trauma in Rwanda but has pioneered an extremely effectively homegrown model, which provides a strong response to a deep seated need of the community. This workshop focuses on understanding trauma, loss, grief, and mourning, how to deal with the consequences (such as anger, depression, isolation), and rebuilding community trust. If these emotional scars are ignored, especially among the youth of the nation, there is the potential to revert to violence. Theoneste and his team could have passively watched the end of genocide and the peaceful years that followed. They could have also waited for international organizations to provide the lead and assistance to address the issues of trauma in their community. Rather than waiting for a western model or solutions provided by the United States, they embarked on a journey to respond to the needs of society. In doing so, they created a model that is now recognized across the region and even in the West for an effective approach of addressing trauma. The HROC organization depicts a commitment to long-term engagement, by offering healing from trauma workshops to communities across the country and the region. It also shows a pioneering spirit in tackling national level issues with home grown approaches that are being recognized and replicated in other parts of the region and the world.
5.7 Summary

Each of these movements illustrates the notion that youth play a pioneering and pivotal role in transforming conflict. Through their work, they are contributing directly towards long-term solution to the conflicts in their nations. Each of these initiatives in Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, and Egypt have managed to create national level impact using strategies that depict an understanding of deeper root causes that enhance their potential for long term solutions. They help bolster the argument that attributes of their youth, such as their openness for change, how they are less entrenched in hate, how they desire a broader purpose, and how they have the capacity for long term engagement has served them well for the initiatives they have embarked on. Though the strategies vary, they address issues below the surface that could contribute to renewed conflict in their societies. They are transforming conflict from the bottom up and playing a pioneering and pivotal role in transforming conflict.
Figure 5.2: Highlighted movements across the world
CHAPTER 6:
CONCLUSION

Within the broad and universal theme of the role of youth in peacebuilding, this thesis has narrowed its focus on the role of youth in conflict zones, aware that their unique attributes affirm their capacity to create change adopting a Conflict Transformation approach to make broader societal change and transform their conflict. The thesis has looked at various creative strategies youth movements in conflict zones have employed to apply their unique strengths and their understanding of a Conflict Transformational approach. These approaches affirm hope that a new generation of leaders in transitional states are not merely engaging in positive initiatives or blindly seeking change, but they are strategically guiding their communities to durable solutions, pioneering new methods of engagement, and inspiring their generations to create new legacies for their nations. These are not efforts limited to merely a single community, nor are they simple minded or good hearted activities; rather they are ambitious, intelligent, strategic, visionary movements that seek to transform their nations. This affirms the notion that youth can play a pioneering and pivotal role in transforming conflict when granted a knowledge of the unique attributes they have to offer and the use of creative strategies within the Conflict Transformational framework.
6.1 Research Findings

Throughout this research, it is clear that youth do have a role to play, and it is not inconsequential. As the thesis emphasizes, youth play a pioneering and pivotal role in transforming conflict. This notion was explored through the highlighted attributes of youth: they are open minded and less entrenched in hate; they are seeking for a cause with purpose; they have the capacity for long term engagement in a cause. These are all attributes that could be used as inspiration for positive change or manipulated by extremists towards extending violence. Therefore, in the midst of the growing youth demographic, especially in impoverished communities, it is essential to have vibrant youth movements that provide an alternate to extremist manipulation. Movements that help youth identify their unique attributes and affirm them to engage within a conflict transformational framework not only help youth discover their capacity to create pivotal and pioneering change, but create a strong resistance against extremism. Thus, the conclusion can be made that nations that don’t have a vibrant counter narrative to extremism from local non-violent youth movements can be more susceptible to violence. This proves the pioneering and pivotal role youth could and should play in society.

This paper also reveals the reality that grassroots youth movements that have embraced a conflict transformational framework have managed to engage crucial issues which have been ignored and are necessary for durable peace. The use of conflict transformational perspectives has given these youth movements insight into the deeper
issues of the conflict and the ability to find points of engagement. These efforts are a result of growing root causes identified by youth, who themselves have been impacted by these evils and have chosen to respond, especially in the context where state and higher echelons of society have failed to address these issues. McEvoy-Levy states, “Engaged youth have something to teach adults, particularly political elites about the root causes of the conflict” (294). This once again proves the importance of youth and their value in the process of transforming conflict.

In addition, one can also conclude that youth engaging conflict in this manner can create a perfect training ground for the future civil society and the political structures of society. This creates room for long-term change and for youth to further prove that they are pivotal to transforming conflict. The survey of peace builders overwhelmingly affirmed the ability that values learned in youth can have a strong influence in the lives of a new generation of leaders. Long-term engagement on these difficult issues was cited as essential for transforming conflict, and while the values of some youth are positively working, some youth leaders will provide a lifetime of work to see a generation of transformation on crucial issues that have been and can continue to be an impetus for conflict.

Finally, youth in conflict zones, understanding their capacity and value and embracing a conflict transformational approach, can have some of the keenest and strongest insights into how to transform conflict. Because of their pioneering efforts and innovative approaches to address age old challenges along with the fact that they themselves were impacted by the heart of the conflict, they have the capacity to provide the
world with peace building insights that have yet to be discovered in finding durable solutions to conflict. Youth in these conflict zones have the capacity to be world leaders and scholar practitioners due to their work and experience over the years affirming the paramount importance of their role in local and global conflict transformation.

6.2 Recommendations

In light of the research and ideas in this thesis, the following recommendations can be made to ensure that the immeasurable value of youth participation in transforming conflict is harnessed. First, it is essential that governments and NGO’s seek to affirm the capacity of youth and provide them with opportunities to lead certain aspects of transforming conflict. The dismissal of their capacity or ceremonial inclusion or even the highly regulated levels of participation can repel youth from being as effective as they could be. Affirming their capacity in words, deeds, and providing opportunities for engagement or supporting their current effort is crucial for youth to feel validated and supported. This could manifest in stronger youth participation in governance, peace process, reconciliation efforts, and even civil society.

Along with the forum and platforms for their work, youth initiatives need financial support and experience in sustainable ways of engagement. An older generation that acknowledges the unique and positive attributes of youth and complements their efforts to provide enhanced results are more likely to reap the benefits to society of a stronger
contribution by youth. In the midst of ever increasing radicalization, supporting grassroots movements that are providing youth alternatives to violence is of paramount importance. These movements cannot thrive without the support of moderate, non-violent individuals of the older generation. This is similar to the extremist groups which are supported by older mentors who use them for their ends. Support for positive youth movements may include financial investments in the movements, an increase in educational spending, help with mentoring programs, and peace education at a very young age.

In essence, the growing youth demographics in the developing world where youth are most at risk should be considered an opportunity for greater strides in economics, politics, societal issues, and peacebuilding. This opportunity will only be realized if youth are embraced and affirmed as the nucleus of each of these enterprises. If the large spike in the population of youth is handled and supported well, the nations these youth represent are in store for economic growth, political stability, social progress, and durable peace.

6.3 Conclusion.

Many who are overwhelmed with pessimism given the challenges of conflict zones and transitional states are justified in their concerns. Dictatorial regimes, growing terrorist organizations, renewed strategies for the radicalization of youth, failed liberal peace approaches, and stagnant international intervention raise concerns and challenges the hopes for seeing transformation. The 24/7 news cycle bombards us with information, which further aggravates our pessimism. However, far less has been written or reported about
youth peace builders and their courage in the midst of conflict (McEvoy-Levy 19). Ironically, in today’s world, it has become easier to gain the world’s attention through violence and terrorism than through the courageous life giving, nation building, and transformative initiatives of youth in the midst of conflict. However, in the midst of their overwhelming odds, youth in these very same conflict zones are seeing their true worth through Conflict Transformational approaches. These will enhance their capacity and pioneer new strategies to engage crucial deep seated issues thus inspiring hope for long term change and improving the odds for the prospects of these nations emerging positively out of conflict.

When one looks at history, from the colonial era to the time after the world wars, to apartheid and the numerous tragedies humanity has faced, a new generation of leaders arose in each of those situations to address the spiraling effects of those circumstances. Young leaders of those eras played a pivotal and pioneering role in transforming those societies from the evils of their time. We see examples of great leadership in William Wilberforce, who as a youth began a movement for abolishing the evils of slavery; in the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, who stood up at the age of 26 to create the Civil Rights movement in America to ensure a journey towards equality after generations of segregation; in Mahatma Gandhi, whose non-violent struggle against the oppression of the British empire brought independence to the Indian subcontinent; and in President Nelson Mandela’s struggle against apartheid and for freedom in South Africa. These leaders remind us of how in the early years of life, they understood the deeper issues of the challenges in their societies and their own capacity to contribute towards change. Despite
the overwhelming odds, they created innovative approaches to bring about these changes in their societies. History has taught us that despite desperate circumstances, young leaders have the capacity to lead change that could affect the lives of billions across the world. Therefore, this thesis further affirms the reality that youth can play a pioneering, pivotal role in transforming conflict. It is essential that the broader society, especially within these conflict zones, affirms and supports youth as crucial actors in transforming conflict. McEvoy-Levy writes, “Youth who are good at Conflict Transformation, peacebuilding, and peacemaking should be nursed, trained, encouraged, and rewarded…Youth may well be our best protection against further deterioration towards total war” (McEvoy-Levy 276). Indeed time will further prove the role pivotal and pioneering role youth play in transforming conflict. Rather than continuing the cycle of violence and missing an opportunity, our hope should be that we can invest in the potential of youth and let them lead society to overcome the challenges of conflict.
A.1 Platform of engagement for youth movements

Figure A.1: Ice Burg illustration Part 2
APPENDIX B:
ICEBERG ILLUSTRATION PART 3

B.1 The result of long term engagement of the deeper issues.

Figure B.1: Ice burg Illustration Part 3
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