Crossing boundaries in protecting civilians

Mapping actors, insights and conceptual spaces

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About the author

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Contents

Acronyms

AAP	accountability to affected populations
CAR	Central African Republic
CIVIC	Center for Civilians in Conflict
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
DPKO	UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
HHI	Harvard Humanitarian Initiative
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IHRL	International Human Rights Law
IRL	International Refugee Law
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NPA	National Peace Accord
LPC	local peace committee
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
POC	protection of civilians
RUF	Revolutionary United Front

UCP	unarmed civilian peacekeeping
UNAMID	United Nations – African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
ZOP	zone of peace

Introduction

Protecting civilians in the midst of violent conflict and war is a core element of humanitarian action. The challenges of protection are myriad, and the numbers sobering: in 2016 alone at least 103,000 civilians died in armed conflict, representing the fifth highest civilian death toll since 1989 (Allansson et al., 2017). According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2017), over 31 million people were displaced by violence and disasters in 2016, while in 2017 UNHCR reported its highest number of displaced persons, including 25.4 million refugees, since its founding in 1950 (UNHCR, 2018). Beyond displacement and threats to life, threats to civilians include deprivation of liberty, sexual and gender-based violence, and preventing access to life-saving assistance.

Although states are the primary duty-bearers for protecting the populations under their control, state and non-state actors are frequent perpetrators of harm against civilians. In cases where states, whether through neglect or willful action, fail in this responsibility, other actors, including local, national, and international humanitarian, human rights, peacekeeping or peacebuilding actors, often step in. Their involvement, however, does not absolve states of their primary responsibility for protection (ICISS, 2001).

For humanitarians, protection is about ensuring safety from harm, coercion, violence or deprivation, whether by minimising or reducing the exposure to threat or by creating a safe environment (O'Callaghan and Pantuliano, 2007).[1] The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) defines humanitarian protection as 'all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. International Human Rights Law (IHRL), International Humanitarian Law, International Refugee Law (IRL))' (IASC, 1999: 4; see also Caverzasio, 2001: 19). In humanitarian practice, however, confusion reigns. Numerous reports about protection cite the lack of clarity regarding what constitutes protection, and who will carry it out and how (O'Callaghan and Pantuliano, 2007; Jackson, 2014; Niland et al., 2015). Moreover, understandings of protection differ among various actors engaged in protecting civilians in conflict, including peacekeepers (Williams, 2010; Hultman, 2013), peacebuilders (Carrière et al., 2010; Furnari et al., 2015) and human rights actors (Mahoney and Eguren, 1997; Carpenter, 2005).

Since the first open debate in the UN Security Council on protection of civilians in 1999, this topic has received significant attention in both academic and practitioner literatures, from a variety of conceptual perspectives and with regard to the activities of multiple actors (Bradley, 2016; Willmot et al., 2016). Research questions have evolved over time, cascading from the threats posed by states to those of non-state actors, and from a central focus on the approaches of formal humanitarian and human rights actors to those that communities adopt to protect themselves (South et al., 2012; Couldrey and Herson, 2016; Gorur and Carstensen, 2016). Protection principles outlined in the Sphere (2011) standards highlight the need to prevent exposure, understand the context and not undermine communities' own strategies to protect themselves from threat. Despite this acknowledgement and recent emphasis on accountability to affected populations (AAP; see Featherstone 2013; Brown and Donini, 2014; ICRC and HHI, 2018), support for 'local' protection strategies[2] remains significantly lacking (Niland et al., 2015). In some instances, humanitarian actors themselves represent threats to those affected by armed conflict and violence.[3]

The dire statistics about the various harms civilians face in armed conflict serve as a reminder of the need to be creative in finding ways to improve protection

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1   This report focuses on protection in situations of violence and conflict. In some cases it employs examples of protection in contexts of natural hazard, which are specifically identified in the text.

2   In this report, local protection refers to the actions that community members take to protect themselves, used synonymously with civilian or community self-protection.

3   The 2018 media scandal that has enveloped Oxfam and other aid agencies is one recent example (www.irinnews.org/in-depth/exploitation-and-abuse), as are stories of sexual exploitation by local aid actors (see www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-43206297). Previously published reports documented this issue much earlier – see, e.g. Csáky, C. (2008).

outcomes.[4] This is particularly true given the regional nature of contemporary conflict, where threats to civilians often cross physical borders and where 'local' conflicts have regional dimensions. International borders in many conflict zones are porous, with legal and illicit trade, disease, rebel groups, and civilians all crossing on a daily basis. This, in turn, suggests a need to examine protection through the lens of cross-boundary transactions.

This paper aims to cross the invisible boundaries that characterise protection discourse and practice, particularly regarding 'local' protection. Namely, what literature exists about cross-border protection? What can we learn about protection from the points of intersection among humanitarian, human rights, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping concepts of protection? In other words, the paper seeks to identify insights that emerge from better understanding the threats and protection efforts that span international borders or other communal or national fault lines, and from breaking down the disciplinary silos that characterise discussions of the protection of civilians. How does a 'local' lens and the crossing of boundaries change the conception or meaning of the threats that people experience, and the implementation and outcomes of the strategies they use for protection?

The contributions of the report are two-fold: first in exploring the strengths and challenges of local protection; and second in identifying the intersections between different protection actors and protection approaches, particularly in terms of how they work in or with local populations. Accordingly, the report summarises the strengths and challenges of local protection, and the intersections among different protection approaches. It is a product of a desk-based review of 'grey' and academic literature about protection, including community-based, often informal, strategies, as well as the more formalised approaches of humanitarian and other actors operating in situations of conflict and violence. In doing so, the following questions guided the review:

- How do local actors understand and implement protection?
- How do boundaries and borders change protection, particularly local protection?
- How do cognate fields incorporate or build upon local protection?
- How might we more effectively operationalise local understandings of protection to achieve better outcomes?

This report first outlines approaches to and definitions of humanitarian protection from existing literature, highlighting both the confusion that surrounds the term and the mismatch between rhetoric and reality. The next section summarises insights about local approaches to protection, especially their strengths and challenges. A third section crosses disciplinary boundaries to better understand how human rights, peacekeeping and peacebuilding incorporate local protection and engage local protection actors in their work. The report concludes with observations about remaining gaps and highlights opportunities for complementarity, including the need for additional research.

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4   InterAction's results-based protection resources focus on protection outcomes by starting from the perspective of those who experience violence. See: https://protection.interaction.org.

1 Understanding approaches to humanitarian protection

As Syria, South Sudan, and Myanmar/Burma illustrate, threats to the protection of civilians are growing, in the midst of a complex environment in which humanitarians comprise only one part of the protection landscape. Many other actors have formal mandates or informal roles to protect civilians: most importantly, this includes civilians themselves, but also human rights actors who monitor and report on harms and violations of human rights; diplomats who negotiate legal frameworks and peace agreements and hold duty-bearers to account; peacekeeping forces that increasingly have a mandate to protect civilians; and peacebuilders who work in and with local communities affected by violent conflict.

Humanitarians have historically been reluctant to integrate the protection of human rights into programmes (Frohardt et al., 1999). Since the critiques of the 'well-fed dead' of the early 1990s (New York Times, 1992a), however, protection of civilians has become central to humanitarian action. Concurrently, bonds between human rights and humanitarian actors have strengthened over time, resulting in jointly-developed protection standards for both sectors (see ICRC, 2013; 2018). Yet, as a concept and set of practices, humanitarian protection is often underfunded, neglected, and either misunderstood or understood differently depending on one's vantage point. Several studies, for instance, have outlined core differences between military – including peacekeepers – and civilian actors, in which the former relied upon coercive and mandate or rules-based approaches, as contrasted with the latter's non-coercive programming, either as a set of stand-alone activities or as part of 'do no harm' approaches (Metcalfe et al., 2012: 21; Wynn-Pope, 2014).

1.1 Confusion about protection

Two general observations emerge from the existing literature on humanitarian protection. First, protection definitions rely upon well-articulated legal frameworks (Clapham, 2016; Williamson, 2016). Many humanitarians, however, remain confused with regard to what exactly protection is or how to do it, let alone how to improve protection outcomes. In a 2015 independent, system-wide review of protection, Norah Niland and colleagues observed, 'A striking finding … is the widespread perspective among humanitarians that they do not have a role to play in countering abusive or violent behaviour even when political and military strategies and tactics pose the biggest threat to life' (Niland et al., 2015: 27).

This reflects humanitarians' uneasy relationship with legal frameworks: they know the law is central, yet beyond legal advisors and a select number of organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), few are fully equipped to apply these frameworks in practice. For the remainder, the lack of a commonly-understood conception of protection is a hindrance for implementation and for assessing outcomes.

This gap emerges from what might be called a conceptual 'protection paradox'. On the one hand, the conception of protection is broad enough to fit an array of approaches and activities – everything from specific legal remedies and advocacy to the provision of assistance, support for community-based protection, and promotion of good governance and the rule of law. Organisations might 'mainstream' protection by analysing and minimising risk in their programming, or they might engage in specific protection actions (O'Callaghan and Pantuliano, 2007: 21; Global Protection Cluster, 2014). This capaciousness, however, makes it difficult to distinguish protection activities from other types of humanitarian work. As a result, it is possible to claim to 'do' protection without a strategic analysis of context or the threats facing particular populations (Niland et al., 2015; Pantuliano and Svoboda, 2016).

On the other hand, protection refers to a specific set of activities, often designed for particular groups, such as women, children, persons with disabilities, and sexual and gender or other minorities (O'Callaghan and Pantuliano, 2007). These various

identities create different vulnerabilities and call for tailored protection strategies that address specific threats related to disability, gender, religion and ethnic or sexual identities. Each of these identities intersects with power and context in various ways.[5] In some cases, the focus on specific activities results in a disconnect, such as activities to promote child-friendly spaces when military action or armed conflict represent the greatest threat to civilians (Barbelet, 2015; Niland et al., 2015). As progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment has illustrated, mainstreaming alone is not sufficient, and must be accompanied by targeted interventions – a lesson equally applicable to protection (UN, 2002: vi).

Operational guidance about protection has attempted to counter this confusion. Early guides referred to protection as a rights-based concept and linked protection to safety, dignity, and empowerment (Slim and Bonwick, 2005). This guide outlined the importance of context analysis and the structures and systems that underpin protection, referring to 'environment-building action that consolidates political, social, cultural and institutional norms conducive to protection' (Slim and Bonwick, 2005: 42). The updated ICRC protection standards (2013; 2018), Sphere Handbook protection guidance (2011; with updated version forthcoming later in 2018) and IASC policy (2016) all offer standards and principles but not operational guidance, and an updated ALNAP guide covers learning and evaluation in relation to protection (ALNAP, 2018). The ICRC standards represent a collaboration between humanitarian and human rights actors but, in keeping with the approach of not providing operational guidance, the standards do not make recommendations about the type or degree of complementarity between these types of actors.

1.2 Mismatch between rhetoric and reality

Second, there is a mismatch between the rhetoric and reality of protection, particularly for local actors. As Syria and Yemen illustrate, humanitarian rhetoric about the need to protect civilians often surpasses their ability to do so. This rhetoric then carries corresponding and unrealistic expectations, particularly on the part of vulnerable populations who anticipate someone will come to rescue them (South et al., 2012: 22–23; Niland et al., 2015: 19).

A similar gap exists between aspiration and reality in terms of building on and supporting local protection strategies (South et al., 2012; Pantuliano and Svoboda, 2016). Niland and colleagues (2015) found greater attention to protection within the humanitarian system, yet community coping and protection strategies were still largely ignored. Likewise, the legal frameworks that dominate definitions of humanitarian protection do not necessarily make space for indigenous coping mechanisms or community self-protection strategies (Russell in Couldrey and Herson, 2016), or reflect local communities' experiences or lived reality (South et al., 2012). The mismatch originates in part from the definitional emphasis on legal frameworks and the role of outsiders in promoting compliance. As Nils Carstensen (cited in Couldrey and Herson, 2016: 5) observes:

> *humanitarian protection aims to prevent or, failing that, limit or mitigate the impacts of abuses. This approach tends to see protection as something that outsiders try to provide for vulnerable members of a particular community in order to promote compliance with relevant bodies of international law.*

Moreover, aside from the ICRC standards, which were developed jointly with human rights actors, humanitarian approaches to protection rarely incorporate other disciplinary perspectives.

This gives rise to two questions:

1. How can we better harness local actors' understandings of and approaches to protection in order to reach better protection outcomes?
2. What insights emerge from other disciplines' conceptions of protection or their approaches to involving local actors?

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5   And humanitarian principles. See for example a recent exchange between Hugo Slim (http://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2018/01/16/impartiality-and-intersectionality/) and a group of academics on the applications of intersectionality in humanitarian action (http://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2018/03/01/identities-intersectionalities-vulnerabilities-humanitarian-operations-response-slim/), on the ICRC Law and policy blog.

2 A local lens

A rich literature describes and analyses local, also referred to as community-based or self-protection, strategies, as well as the ways that third-party protection actors (such as international peacekeepers, human rights advocates, peacebuilders or others) engage communities in the quest to increase the effectiveness of protection and to either support or to incorporate local action or actors. This literature highlights a series of insights into the ways that local communities understand protection and act to protect themselves.

2.1 Civilians are neither passive nor powerless

In the face of violence affecting their families and communities, civilians are not idle. Indeed, they have agency and take a range of measures to protect themselves and their loved ones. Civilian self-protection strategies seek to avoid, contain or manage threats and, in some cases, actively fight and resist (South et al., 2012; see also Gorur, 2013).

Casey Barrs (2016) has catalogued self-protection measures as related to physical safety, sustenance and life-sustaining services. The inventory includes both conventional and non-conventional approaches to engage armed actors and influence the course of events. Physical safety measures encompass the greatest range of tactics. The most obvious are attempts to avoid violence, usually by fleeing to neighbouring villages or by crossing international boundaries to become refugees. Other avoidance tactics are related to gathering and circulating information via word of mouth or radio, and even spreading disinformation. Civilians protect each other through affinity groups, such as kinship or other protective social networks – what Barrs refers to as 'stay together, pull together' networks – or through the patronage of powerful actors. Others may directly engage armed groups through negotiation, self-defence, or by paying taxes for protection. They may attempt to deter attacks by laying landmines around villages for protection from armed actors. Attempts to accommodate armed actors and their demands may involve persuasion or cutting deals to ensure safety. In other cases, keeping silent or acquiescing to armed actors' demands for labour or loyalty represent the most viable protection

strategy (South et al., 2012). A series of factors, including community capacities and their perceptions of perpetrator tactics and motivations, influences the strategies and tactics individuals and communities choose (Gorur, 2013).

The range of sustenance measures (Barrs, 2016) is more clearly linked to livelihoods. Violence and conflict, as well as disasters caused by natural hazards, threaten people's assets, such as property, land or livestock and, in turn, their livelihood options, access to markets, services like medical care or employment, and networks of support. Civilians may attempt to conserve their subsistence assets by eating fewer meals or relying upon foraged foods. In other cases, they may seek to expand or adapt their assets by taking on additional work, shifting from paid work to exchange through barter, through social networks and remittances, or accessing humanitarian assistance.

Other studies similarly point out the links communities make between livelihoods and protection. In researching local populations' conceptions of security, Antonio Donini and colleagues (2005) documented the holistic way in which communities understand this concept, which extends beyond protection from physical threats to include livelihoods and other services. In Afghanistan, community respondents linked electricity and employment to their sense of security, while Sierra Leoneans emphasised the economy and livelihoods. In a study of five protection contexts in Myanmar/Burma, South Sudan, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, Ashley South and colleagues (2012) documented the close links between protection and livelihoods. In the cyclone-prone delta region of Myanmar, for example, civilian respondents cited the rehabilitation of their land as a central protection issue – a reminder that threats to civilians are not limited to conflict-affected contexts. In South Sudan, livestock herds are central to people's livelihoods yet also represent a threat, as they become both sources of wealth and targets of violence.

In another study, Susanne Jaspars and Sorcha O'Callaghan (2010) examined the links between protection and livelihoods in Darfur, Sri Lanka, Chechnya, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). For some, assets such as fertile land made people targets for attack or exploitation. Civilians

in Darfur chose to pay for protection in order to maintain access to their land, while in Hebron, Palestinians chose to remain at home during times when violence seemed more likely. Those with fewer coping choices were more vulnerable, potentially forcing them to choose between bad options or between short-term gain for longer-term loss.

Finally, life-sustaining services (Barrs, 2016) refer to tactics that address the indirect causes of death in armed conflict, which include illness, starvation, exposure and excess mortality that would not have occurred except for war or armed conflict. These deaths far outnumber direct, battle deaths and must be included in calculations of the cost of war (Wise, 2017). Life-sustaining services therefore encompass aid delivery and protection and the security and risk management approaches aid agencies adopt to maintain their programmes (HPN, 2010; Fast, 2014), as well as the actions of community members to continue health, education, and other services.

These studies highlight how local populations understand protection in a holistic manner and link their physical protection to that of their livelihoods (Carstensen, in Couldrey and Herson, 2016). Their community self-protection strategies are clearly necessary but not sufficient for survival. For instance, civilians under siege in eastern Ghouta in Syria live underground in an attempt to protect themselves and their loved ones from harm resulting from bombing and other violence (BBC News, 2018). This is necessary but insufficient, since these strategies 'rarely provide the degree of safety, security and dignity that people need' (South et al., 2012: 3). Instead, civilians' coping strategies underline the need for support from and complementarity with the actions of international actors.

2.2 Local protection strategies have both positive and negative protection outcomes

Not all community self-protection measures are successful or achieve positive outcomes. In fact, many studies of local protection describe the positive and negative ramifications of the choices people are forced to make in the face of displacement, harm and violence. Negative outcomes result from a variety of protection strategies. For example, in seeking to expand their assets, people may resort to prostitution, trafficking, smuggling, begging, or corruption. Others with significant assets face an opposite problem since they may become targets of violence. They may

destroy their assets (houses, food stores) to deter attacks or prevent their exploitation and use by armed actors – a tactic referred to as 'scorching' (Barrs, 2016). In cases where people flee violence, such as in South Kordofan, they can be left without access to food and shelter. Their flight may protect them from bombing, but it concurrently exposes them to different threats that could result in death from exposure or hunger (South et al., 2012). Other examples include early or child marriage to reduce family expenditures or sending family members to join armed groups in exchange for protection. Many of these 'negative' protection strategies often result from a choice in favour of short-term gains, despite their high human costs (Carstensen, in Couldrey and Herson, 2016).

Many local protection strategies do indeed reduce violence and protect people from harm at the individual, family and community levels. At the community level, civilians, supported by strong leaders, have established 'zones of peace' (ZOPs) that set limits on the conduct of armed actors. Some ZOPs declare themselves as 'weapons free' zones or as neutral areas that are unaffiliated with conflict parties, whether government or non-state actors. They reflect the agency of civilian populations; all have the goal of limiting the negative effects of violence and conflict on communities (Hancock and Mitchell, 2007; Mitchell and Hancock, 2012).

A study of sub-national mediation efforts in Darfur at the individual, family, clan, district or provincial level demonstrated their positive effects, finding that clashes between armed actors were less likely to recur after localised peacemaking efforts. Local peacemaking, in this case, referred to geographically localised peacemaking efforts outside official, national-level peace processes. Thus, it included in its analysis the efforts of (international) civilian affairs officers with UN African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and not necessarily only mediation efforts involving local populations. The study illustrates the variety of efforts at the sub-national level, the diversity of actors engaged in 'local' peacemaking, and their effectiveness in reducing violence and civilian casualties (Duursma, 2017).

Many local protection strategies, however, are neither exclusively positive or negative, but instead highlight the differential risk that people face in conflict. For instance, Richard Nunn illustrates the pragmatism of community members in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) who weigh up the risks of a particular action for one group over another. He writes:

In some communities, men going to market risk being tortured and killed as they pass through

checkpoints; families have reported making a conscious choice that women would take produce to market instead of men, even though women in turn risk sexual abuse and assault, judging this a more acceptable risk (Nunn, in Couldrey and Herson, 2016: 41–42)

Research in the eastern DRC on prostitution, typically seen in the context of threats to civilians, identified both the power relations inherent in transactional sex in humanitarian crises, but also its role as a livelihood strategy. The research highlighted the diversity of women's motives for engaging in transactional sex, including career or educational advancement. Acknowledging this diversity of motives, in turn, recognises people's agency and can help identify tailored protection strategies (Hilhorst, 2017).

In other instances, protection outcomes are mixed. Aid agency and government officials in Kakuma camp in Kenya have employed 'community policing', in which national police are deployed alongside refugee auxiliaries to provide security in the camp. The deployment of Community Peace and Protection Teams has had mixed results, since the teams themselves reflect the ethnic and tribal divisions of the particular part of the camp in which they work. Some camp residents see them as the 'eyes and ears' of camp officials or as 'spies and collaborators in a camp system of surveillance and control and as agents of corruption, not protection' (Brankamp, in Couldrey and Herson, 2016: 52). While they may be more accessible as points of connection to official protection actors – in this case the police – they may be distrusted by their fellow residents and therefore regarded as ineffective agents of protection. Similarly, community self-protection strategies may generate mixed results by exposing civilians to harm through allegiances with one set of belligerents, by providing a false sense of security in cases where communities overestimate the effectiveness of their self-protection strategies (Jose and Medie, 2016), or through displacement that limits communities' access to local networks and knowledge and, consequently, their ability to effectively mitigate threats (Baines and Paddon, 2012).

2.3 Local actors may be protective, predatory, or evolve from one to the other

Civilians in conflict play multiple roles – as victims/survivors, perpetrators, witnesses, enablers and protectors. These roles are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but instead often overlap. Refugees,

for example, often host other refugees, upending assumptions that host communities are composed of settled, citizen populations (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, in Couldrey and Herson, 2016). Likewise, local actors may be both active protective and predatory agents, sometimes evolving from protectors to perpetrators of harm and insecurity (Gorur, 2013: 4; Carstensen, in Couldrey and Herson, 2016; ICG, 2017a).

In most conflict contexts it is possible to identify examples of cross-communal protection and exploitation as well as examples of groups that form to protect civilians and subsequently begin to exploit or violently target those whom they are ostensibly protecting. In a series of case studies, the International Crisis Group (ICG) studied the role of armed 'vigilante groups'[6] in Africa, with the aim of better understanding their contributions to the security of local populations and the circumstances under which these groups undermine the state (ICG, 2017a; 2017b). Because of their community connections, language skills and contextual knowledge, vigilante groups often enjoy greater legitimacy, better understand conflict dynamics and are more adept at identifying and tracking insurgents. As such, vigilante groups 'can serve as valuable intermediaries between local communities and central authorities' (ICG, 2017a: i).

In all cases, these vigilante groups started as community protection or self-defence groups: the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Nigeria, formed to protect communities from Boko Haram and the government's counter-terrorism campaigns; the Zande Arrow Boys of South Sudan and Uganda to protect from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA); and the Kamajors of Sierra Leone to protect from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The Kamajors originated within traditional societies and evolved from defending their communities to harassing and attacking civilians and killing suspected collaborators. The Zande Arrow Boys evolved into a rebel group and fought in the civil war in South Sudan. The CJTF worked alongside Nigerian police and military forces to identify and contain Boko Haram. They have become targets themselves and been accused of committing atrocities (ICG, 2017a; Amnesty International, 2018). While the Kamajors and Zande Arrow Boys were rooted primarily in one ethnic group

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6   The ICG report defines vigilante groups as follows: 'members of civilian self-defence groups, community defence forces and civil militias, which are formed to protect their communities from non-state or state actors or to combat insurgents' (ICG, 2017a: 1). While the definition does not explicitly refer to armed community, self-defence or militias, their four examples all use armed force. As the rest of this report suggests, however, self-protection can also be unarmed.

– within the Mende in Sierra Leone and the Azande in South Sudan respectively – the CJTF were composed of multiple ethnicities (ICG, 2017a).

A case study of armed groups in the Central African Republic (CAR) illustrates the effects of conflict dynamics on the evolution of local self-defence groups. In the case of the (Muslim) Seleka, they morphed from an armed group that preyed upon but then gradually gained support from the Muslim community as it came under threat. The (Christian) anti-Balaka moved in the opposite direction, from community protection to predatory force. Even so, some community members identified them simultaneously as a threat to civilians and as protective agents (Barbelet, 2015). Other academic research has identified similar dualisms, with civilian defence groups serving to both decrease violence on the part of state actors by using civilians to identify insurgents, and to catalyse violence when insurgents target civilians (Clayton and Thompson, 2016).

This dualism, of local actors as both threat and source of protection, also appears in relation to localised conflict and peace processes. Andreas Odendaal describes the complex interactions between local conflict and the national-level peace process around the time of South Africa's 1991 National Peace Accord (NPA). Local actors exploited the uncertainty of the transition process and engaged in opportunistic violence related to local processes, such as the decisions and behaviour of local government and businesses, personality conflict or competition for economic or political advantage, which allowed these actors to 'pursue the unfinished business of the war at personal and community level' (Odendaal, 2012: 96). At the same time, these local processes provided openings for peace. Regional and local peace committees (LPCs) were responsible for negotiating and then maintaining peace in their local communities, a significant achievement in the context of the communal violence that characterised that period. Many of these LPCs were themselves 'deeply divided', yet still managed to prevent violence, to mediate conflict that had escalatory potential and to contribute to community cohesion, in part through countering rumours and disseminating information about the NPA (Odendaal, 2012: 102–103).

Importantly, however, outsiders must not idealise the 'local', since it is often local ties that incite or perpetuate violence (Fujii, 2008). As Odendaal writes: 'The reliance on local agency is a double-edged sword. It encourages local ownership of the peace process, but also gives local actors the space to block the peace process, at times for rather opportunistic

reasons' (Odendaal, 2012: 104). Recognising the plethora of good – and bad – roles of local actors, whether in the community, civil society or government, simultaneously mitigates against idealism and emphasises their critical protection role.

2.4 A local lens requires an understanding of protection that emerges from within the context

Another key insight from local protection is the criticality of context, both in understanding what constitutes a threat to civilians, and who might address this threat and how. Effective protection at any level requires a nuanced and thorough understanding of context, the sources of risk and vulnerability, and opportunities for or challenges to protection. Analysing threats to the protection of civilians must occur with reference to individuals, families, and communities and at a national level, recognising that these change over time (South et al., 2012). For example, local populations have a superior sense of when something is unusual (ICG, 2017a), which can assist in prevention and response.

Understandings of local protection emerge from the context itself. They are usually rooted in traditional roles, values and culture, as well as circumstance (Carstensen, in Couldrey and Herson, 2016; South et al., 2012). Research about local protection among the Karen people in south-east Myanmar highlighted access to information and protection of people's physical bodies as well as culture and other identity markers as central to their conception of and approaches to protection. In Zimbabwe, threats to civilians are linked to politics and the effects of politics on livelihoods, such as access to land, which is used as a reward or punishment, or the destruction of 'illegal settlements' in urban areas (South et al., 2012).

Threats to civilians are sometimes linked to sociocultural beliefs, such as witchcraft and the occult. Traditional beliefs are integral to both defining threats and identifying coping mechanisms. As Richard Horsey observes:

> it is necessary to consider both imagined threats and real threats, as both can have protection implications – fear of witchcraft or of vaccinations, even if they lack rational justification, can have effects that are just as real as fear of violence or cholera. People also need to be protected from things that they do not necessarily recognise as threats, but should:

water-borne diseases, or the risks of falling victim to human trafficking (South et al., 2012: 19; see also Stellmach et al., 2018).

At the same time, it is imperative not to 'exoticise' threats to civilians and their coping mechanisms, since many of these cut across cultural and national boundaries. Harm from violations of human rights, torture, bombing, rape, domestic violence and genocide all constitute threats to civilians not unique to one country or era, even if their specific manifestations differ across space and time.

Those affected by war and violence often link their psychosocial health to protection. As one woman articulated about her life in Sudan: 'Even if – or maybe even more so when – you are forced to live in a cave, when you do not have enough food for your children or yourself, and you live in constant fear of the next bombardment – feeling clean, smelling nice and looking good actually becomes crucial to your self-respect and your ability to survive' (Konda et al., in Couldrey and Herson, 2016: 13). Such psychosocial coping mechanisms can include art or music. For instance, the novel *The Cellist of Sarajevo* was inspired by Vedran Smailović, who played his cello amidst the ruins of Sarajevo at the height of the siege in 1992 as a way of coping with and resisting the violence around him (New York Times, 1992b). Re-establishing a sense of normalcy is often key to people's ability to cope with uncertainty and threat (Barrs, 2016).

Examples of local protection highlight the importance of faith and prayer in community understandings of protection. This holds both in terms of how prayer and faith function to support healing (Gorur, 2013: 4) and in an explanatory sense as a way of ascribing meaning to situations of displacement. In researching the politics of displacement, Elizabeth Storer documents the 'causal link between sin and war' among evangelical South Sudanese exiles in north-west Uganda. She writes that 'spiritual understandings of causality and responsibility provide a space to imagine a future, back home in South Sudan', including the conditions that would make it possible to return 'home' (Storer, 2017). These examples contrast with the secular, humanist framings of protection that exist in the formal humanitarian sphere. Crucial here are the particular meanings and manifestations of faith in context, since faith communities can play healing as well as discriminatory roles. For example, in Fiji, sexual and gender minorities experienced discrimination by and even blame from faith communities for Tropical Cyclone Winston (Dwyer and Woolf, 2018). In many other conflict settings, religious beliefs are used to justify violence.

A nuanced, contextual understanding of protection is clearly essential to any effective protection strategy. Ironically, however, a focus on the 'local' may also obscure a broader view. In their protection study, Niland and colleagues observed: 'In the crises reviewed, contextualised protection situational analysis was very localised and atomised with only a few agencies having an overview of the evolving protection challenges specific to particular crises' (Niland et al., 2015: 49). In this example, a focus on specific geographic areas or vulnerabilities masked the bigger picture. Understanding the specificities of local context therefore must not inadvertently overlook broader trends and threats to civilians.

2.5 Local perspectives encompass a broad range of potential protection actors

Research about local protection identifies myriad possible protection actors, including extended families, social networks, diaspora groups, business or the private sector, armed actors, religious or faith leaders and networks and tribal or kinship alliances. Family, kinship and social networks play critical supportive roles for people in times of conflict in terms of financial resources (Obaa and Mazur, 2017) and psychosocial support (South et al., 2012). Remittances and assets from diaspora groups and family members, for example, help to determine whether those affected by violence flee or remain and the circumstances they face after making that choice (Pantuliano and Svoboda, 2016; Wilson and Krystalli, 2017). Tribal leaders in Yemen earn legitimacy through their ability to negotiate and defend the interests of their tribes. They enhance their status through their ability to provide security – protection – for their people (Al-Sabahi and De Santis, in Couldrey and Herson, 2016). Armed non-state actors such as the Taliban provide control and co-opt crucial social protection and other services such as education or healthcare (Jackson, 2018). In Colombia, local businesses supported peace and development, particularly but not only in relation to livelihoods and economic outcomes (Miklian, 2016).

Faith leaders likewise play important protection roles. In CAR, faith actors including priests, imams and missionaries mediated between armed groups, worked to reduce tensions between groups, sheltered people fleeing violence in their compounds and places of worship and provided assistance, essentially becoming first responders in the midst of the violence (Barbelet, 2015). In Myanmar, faith-based leaders created 'zones of tranquillity' and provided protection for

their followers, and armed non-state actors protected people's lives and livelihoods as well as Karen culture and identity (South et al., 2012: 6). Others have highlighted the central role of faith communities in refugee status determination, advocacy work and psychosocial, moral and spiritual support (Ager et al., 2015; Benda, 2016; Wilkinson and Ager, 2017). Studies of local protection repeatedly emphasise these psychological and spiritual sources of protection as akin to physical protection in terms of importance (South et al., 2012).

As with the other examples of local protection, faith-based actors display behaviours that result in both threats to civilians and positive protection outcomes. In some cases in CAR, churches provided sanctuary to Muslims and mosques to Christians, while in others large groups of civilians at places of worship became targets of violence or faith actors lacked the resources to provide adequate assistance (Barbelet, 2015). During the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, Christian churches were sites of horrific massacres but also of protection, with some leaders risking and losing their lives in service of others (Des Forges, 1999; Benda, 2016). Muslims in Rwanda hid people in mosques, resulting in a 'disproportionate number of survivors, both Muslim and non-Muslim, [who] had been protected by Muslims' and survived the genocide (Doughty and Ntambara, 2005: 8).

Other research focuses on the dualistic role of tribal and kinship networks in fragile states. In the wake of government collapse in Libya, for example, local elites (business people, leaders and sponsors of armed groups) built alliances that affected local and national power dynamics. These broader alliances, however, 'put local unity at risk, threatening the credibility of local elites as representatives of their constituencies – their key symbolic resource – and, ultimately, their control over local territory' (Lacher, 2015: 82). The research illustrates the dangers of localism, in that it may lead to increasing fragmentation. In the case of Libya, these local alliances negatively affected the ability of the central government to re-establish control and contributed to continued conflict.

2.6 Community engagement is crucial, and points to the importance of leadership, community cohesion and trust

Much of the literature about community self-protection emphasises the centrality of community

participation in identifying protection strategies and in making them effective. Guidelines about community-based protection strategies emphasise engagement with and participation of communities (UNHCR, 2008; ActionAid, 2009; Berry and Reddy, 2010). Doing so enables more sustainable and appropriate protection strategies that reflect people's lived realities, avoids inadvertent harm and contributes to people's sense of agency (UNHCR, 2013). Yet understandings of community-based protection reflect different assumptions about the initiation and ownership of protection. One survey identified three understandings: one in which protection is led by external agencies and 'informed by' communities; another that defined community-based protection as a methodology to engage communities in protecting themselves; and a third that saw it as initiated and led by communities themselves (UNHCR, 2014).

At a minimum, community engagement enables communities to hold their leaders accountable, which can ultimately improve protection outcomes. For example, an analysis of community protection in DRC highlighted local communities' lack of knowledge about their legal rights, which hindered their ability to hold duty-bearers to account for violations and harms. In response, Oxfam supported local communities in establishing community protection structures to identify threats and strategies for protection, all while these structures engaged local authorities in positive and non-confrontational ways (Green, 2015; Barakat, 2017). Likewise, in reflecting on his participation as a refugee representative in the South Sudanese process, Simon Marot Touloung (2018) observes that:

> Ordinary citizens have the most to gain from peace and the most to lose from continued conflict. Yet we have barely had a glimpse of what goes on behind the closed doors in the foreign hotels where these meetings are held.

In these ways participation and engagement allow one set of local actors to hold other local actors accountable for their actions, contributing to positive protection outcomes in the process.

The literature on community engagement also points to the role of formal and informal leaders and community cohesion in enabling self-protection. Research on local protection emphasises the importance ofstrong leaders in determining a community's ability to negotiate effectively with state and non-state actors. A study in Myanmar concluded that communities affected by Cyclone Nargis 'were better at managing, negotiating and confronting threats where they had strong leaders, good relations

with the authorities or others in positions of power and the financial resources they needed to respond' (South et al., 2012: 9).

Community leaders likewise can foment or discourage violence. In Rwanda, Muslim leaders vocally expressed opposition to the increasing polarisation that preceded the genocide and educated their followers, members and students about Quranic values related to equality, protection and the value of human life. Their leadership, in the context of a genocide facilitated by an obedience to authority, allowed Muslims to resist participation in the killing. One study summarised respondent explanations for this resistance as follows: 'when the killings started, very few Muslims joined in, and they attributed this to the leadership having prepared people against the "temptation" towards violence, and having inoculated them against participating' (Doughty and Ntambara, 2005: 15). In other instances, community leaders play opposite roles, such as Rwandan religious leaders who encouraged violence (Benda, 2016). Community leaders are often men and may exercise their power and access to resources in ways that exclude other groups, including women, children, the elderly or disabled individuals.

While focused primarily on the interactions between the state and vigilante groups, ICG research illustrates the importance of community trust and leadership in curbing abuse. In contrast to the Kamajors of Sierra Leone, the CJTF of Nigeria, and Zande Arrow Boys of South Sudan, the protection outcomes of the Teso Arrow Boys of Uganda were better. Like the CJTF, their composition was multiethnic. While a variety

of considerations help to explain the differences in protection outcomes, factors central to their effectiveness relate to the degree of connection to and trust of community members, and oversight from local leaders (community or their commanders) or the state, all of which moderated their actions and contributed to better protection outcomes. Some predation did occur, but it was less than the other groups ICG studied. In particular, the study points to the deterrent effects of internal disciplinary procedures and 'shaming by their home communities' (ICG, 2017a: 23) as significant in limiting abuses.

Multiple analyses identify community cohesion as central to local protection (South et al., 2012). In South Africa, LPCs solidified social cohesion, modelled negotiation and dialogue as an alternative approach to violent conflict and represented a first small step towards reconciliation (Odendaal, 2012). In his study of civilian resistance to war, Oliver Kaplan emphasises the role of cohesion as a determining factor in community decisions to resist war and violence. Using case studies from Colombia and elsewhere, he argues that, when communities encounter multiple abusive armed actors or when compliance or allegiance with armed actors are ineffective, 'cohesion and collective strategies can help communities achieve autonomy, or maintain democratic decision-making power over outcomes *for* the community *within* the community, without influence from outside armed groups' (Kaplan, 2017: 9). Together these examples illustrate the ways social bonds help to insulate communities from both the physical and psychological harm that often affects civilians surrounded by violence

3 Crossing conceptual and disciplinary boundaries

Approaches to protection from the cognate disciplines of human rights, peacekeeping and peacebuilding arise out of different understandings of what protection is and how best to improve protection outcomes. Like humanitarian protection, each of these includes a range of academic and grey literatures and incorporates local as well as third party actors and activities. Most of these protection literatures, however, are siloed, with little cross-referencing or discussion, excepting the common protection standards for both humanitarian and human rights actors and some overlap regarding civilian–military interactions in emergency contexts, whether caused by natural hazards or due to armed conflict.

Protection activities too remain siloed within and between organisations. A study of protection in CAR highlighted missing links between the tools and approaches of humanitarians, peacekeepers, human rights actors and diplomats in addressing the highly complex issues of protecting civilians (Barbelet, 2015). Moreover, approaches to protecting civilians are operationally and conceptually separated from the protection of aid workers themselves. For example, the updated protection standards (ICRC, 2018: 155–156) discuss managing staff safety, minimising risk and duty of care for protection-focused staff in relation to their physical security and mental health, but the guidelines do not refer to the wider body of literature about security risk management or duty of care. This is despite the fact that many of the same caveats and good practices apply, such as the need for in-depth context analysis and distinguishing the differential risks for staff, whether related to gender, nationality, or other identities. While collapsing these two types of protection may further muddy the definitional waters, conceptually distinguishing aid workers from civilians also creates hierarchies of protection that exceptionalise aid workers as a category of civilians (Fast, 2013; 2014).

Nonetheless, these various fields all share operational space with humanitarians in conflict environments, respond to threats to civilians and work alongside local actors. Crossing these disciplinary or sector-specific siloes provides a glimpse into the practices and lessons of other disciplines that can contribute to humanitarian understandings of what makes for effective protection and how related fields engage with and support local actors.

3.1 Human rights

Like humanitarians, human rights actors conceptualise protection in terms of legal frameworks of human rights and the law of armed conflict. Whereas IHL applies only during armed conflict, human rights law applies during times of peace and times of war and includes certain core or 'non-derogable' rights that cannot be suspended in an emergency, such as prohibitions against torture or slavery. Human rights law concerns civil and political rights as well as economic, cultural and social rights, such as those related to health, the environment or communication. Human rights encompass both positive and negative obligations, where the former require states to engage in actions to safeguard rights or confer goods and services while the latter requires states to refrain from certain actions, as in the case of the non-derogable rights that prohibit torture, killing or arbitrary detention (OHCHR, 2013).

Human rights actors are both local, working in their own domestic contexts, and international, part of regional or global movements to defend human rights. They employ a range of tactics to protect civilians, from legal defence and advocacy to documentation, witnessing, and naming and shaming perpetrators (Carpenter, 2005; Davis et al., 2012). In some cases their tactics include direct engagement with armed groups, educating them about their responsibilities under IHL or IHRL. In CAR this engagement resulted in the demobilisation of child soldiers (Barbelet, 2015). In Colombia, Guatemala, OPT and elsewhere, human rights actors such as Peace Brigades International have adopted international accompaniment as a protection strategy. Their protection role derives from the belief, often borne out in reality, that the physical presence of internationals protects local actors – individuals or

organisations – from attack or targeting by state or non-state actors, thereby 'encouraging them to proceed with their democratic activities' (Mahoney and Eguren, 1997: 2; Coy, 2001). Foreigners thus literally accompany human rights defenders as they go about their everyday lives.

The development of the common professional standards of both humanitarian and human rights actors illustrates significant overlap between these two professions (ICRC, 2013; 2018). Aside from education and witnessing, the overlaps encompass protection through presence, which may refer to an active presence in the form of one-to-one accompaniment, or a passive version, which assumes physical proximity deters attacks. Protection-focused advocacy occurs on a local level, to national/domestic authorities and non-state actors, and also an international one, where local human rights groups physically or metaphorically cross borders and connect to transnational advocacy groups to raise awareness about harms and violations of both IHL and IHRL. These connections may also serve to protect human rights defenders themselves, as the UN General Assembly Declaration on human rights defenders suggests (OHCHR, 1999).

Although linking changes in behaviour specifically to advocacy approaches is difficult, research suggests that 'shaming' human rights violators has a positive effect on state behaviour. This positive effect is a result of both domestic pressure from human rights actors and pressure from outsiders in the form of transnational advocacy campaigns (Murdie and Davis, 2012). These strategies all point to the complementarities between international and local actors in protecting civilians.

3.2   Peacekeeping

Protection of civilians by peacekeeping actors most often involves third-party actors, such as the forces under the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), regional organisations (e.g. the African Union or Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)) or multinational troops (e.g. NATO). Increasingly, peacekeeping mandates explicitly refer to protection of civilians, including almost every UN mandate since 1999 (Williams, 2010; Mamiya, 2016). Peacekeepers are deployed in contexts of ongoing humanitarian operations, resulting in greater interaction in a shared operational space as well as discussion of the differences in approach between civilians and military actors, including peacekeepers (Metcalfe et al., 2012; Wynn-Pope, 2014) and joint evaluations of effectiveness (Holt et al., 2009). The recent establishment of

'protection of civilians' (POC) sites within UN peacekeeping bases in South Sudan, and POC sites decades earlier in Bosnia and Rwanda, highlights challenges related to civil–military coordination, inadequate mandates and resources (NRC, 2017).

Peacekeeping missions are often assessed against either peacekeepers' ability to reduce violence or with explicit reference to protection of civilians. These assessments point to the shortcomings of protection within peacekeeping missions (Holt et al., 2009; CIVIC, 2016) or their successes, whether in terms of reducing violence during conflict (Hultman, 2013; Hultman et al., 2014; Di Salvatore and Ruggeri, 2017), in the post-agreement phase (Kathman and Wood, 2016), or in protecting civilians more generally. For instance, Lisa Hultman and colleagues examined UN peacekeeping missions in sub-Saharan Africa between 1991 and 2008 and found that civilian deaths decreased with higher commitments of military and police forces (Hultman et al., 2013).

While a peacekeeping presence may be responsible for an overall decline in civilian deaths, case study research points to the critical role of community engagement. The local lens within peacekeeping literature, therefore, refers to the ways in which local voices and perspectives are integral to effective protection and how peacekeeping forces can and should interact with civilian populations to increase their effectiveness (Pouligny, 2006; UN, 2015; CIVIC, 2016; 2017; Müller and Bashar, 2017). Crucial for that is legitimacy and credibility with local populations, built on the observation that 'wherever peacekeepers deploy, they raise expectations among the local population – and among those who view missions from afar – that the reason for their presence is to support people at risk' (Holt et al., 2009: 3).

Indeed, a growing literature addresses the topic of peacekeepers' engagement with the local community (Giffen, 2013; Gorur and Giffen, 2013; CIVIC, 2017; Gorur and Vellturo, 2017) and this research mirrors many of the themes in the humanitarian literature, such as the possibility of creating unrealistic expectations with rhetoric or deployment (Gorur, 2013). These studies articulate the benefits of engaging and the potential pitfalls of not doing so. The lack of a strategic approach to civilian engagement, for example, limited the potential impact of these activities in South Sudan (CIVIC, 2017; see also Gorur and Vellturo, 2017). Generally, these studies conclude that better community engagement enhances effectiveness, in part because peacekeeping missions are not large enough to provide protection to all civilians at all times. Supporting and not

undermining civilian self-protection approaches therefore becomes a way of providing protection even if peacekeepers cannot be physically present (Gorur, 2013).

Several studies identify the importance of prioritising local conflict – land disputes, criminal activity, trafficking, illegal mining or identity-based grievances and tensions that arise at the sub-national level – in protection efforts (Odendaal, 2012; Duursma, 2017; Gorur and Vellturo, 2017). Other studies have focused on integrating civilian perspectives into peacekeeping operations, because community perceptions influence their behaviour and should therefore be incorporated into tactical planning (Giffen, 2013; CIVIC, 2016). Tanya Müller and Zuhair Bashar (2017) examined interactions between local populations and UNAMID (Darfur) and their respective perceptions of the conflict. They conclude that incorporating local perceptions of conflict has the potential to not only enhance civilian protection, but also to develop trust between peacekeepers and civilians.

3.3   Peacebuilding

The local emphasis in the peacebuilding literature emerges from a recognition that local actors are better placed to identify and implement potential solutions and remain long after internationals depart. Local populations therefore must both frame and sustain peace. As Mel Duncan and Kimberly Ai-Lin-Loh write, 'Peace cannot be sustained without local ownership, which starts by recognizing and affirming approaches for safety and protection that already exist' (Duncan and Ai-Lin-Loh, 2017; see also Wallis, 2010). It is precisely this longevity and the local legitimacy that derives from their embeddedness in a conflict context that confer upon local actors an ability to act as intermediaries despite their connections to conflict parties. These 'insider-partials' contrast with the 'outsider-neutrals' – third parties who do not have these same connections or level of trust from local communities (Wehr and Lederach, 1991). A growing literature explores the intersections between the local and international 'levels' and types of peacebuilding, whether vertical and horizontal integration (Lederach, 1997) or links between local and international/global actors and processes (Mac Ginty, 2010; Hancock and Mitchell, 2012); they suggest the need for complementarity between efforts.

Falling under the broad scope of peacebuilding are a series of strategies designed to reduce violence and therefore protect civilians from harm. Unlike many peacebuilding processes, however, these strategies

are not designed to resolve or transform conflict but rather to create spaces that can nurture peace. They include the practice and conceptualisation of civilian interpositioning, in which unarmed individuals position themselves between parties to a conflict with the aim of interrupting the cycle of violence (Schirch, 2006), international accompaniment to protect human rights or peace activists (Mahoney and Eguren, 1997; Eguren, 2015) and (unarmed) civilian peacekeeping (Schirch, 1995; Carrière et al., 2010; Jose and Medie, 2015; 2016). Unarmed civilian peacekeeping (UCP) encompasses accompaniment, monitoring, rumour control, physical presence and community dialogue (Julian and Schweitzer, 2015). These strategies are not typically incorporated in humanitarian literature on the protection of civilians, perhaps because they adopt different terminologies than the language of programming or the legal frameworks referenced in humanitarian protection.

Unarmed civilian peacekeepers often integrate into the communities in which they work, which provides crucial insight into local dynamics. As Rachel Julian and Christine Schweitzer write:

> unarmed peacekeepers live and work with the people they are protecting. They are accessible and they learn about community mechanisms that already exist and can provide a safe space in which new committees, training, or meetings can take place. UCP makes it clear to all actors that its purpose is to stop threats of violence, and not to resolve the conflict, and that through their visibility, being known to all actors, using good communication, building up of good relationships, linking with networks, and being locally based, UCP can reduce the threat of violence, protect civilians, and create a space in which peaceful mechanisms can be built (Julian and Schweitzer, 2015: 3).

As such, these processes occupy a conceptual space between traditional understandings of peacekeeping based on consent, where military forces intervene to keep opposing sides apart,[7] and the long-term processes of building a sustainable peace (Furnari et al., 2015).

As a set of strategies, civilian peacekeeping tends to emphasise the agency of local actors, even though those intervening may in fact be outsiders. One review of

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7   This is known as 'Chapter VI' peacekeeping, authorised under Chapter VI of the UN Charter, which includes options to resolve conflict using peaceful means, such as mediation or negotiation. This contrasts with chapter 7 peace enforcement missions, which would include authorisation to proactively use force to protect civilians (see Fortna, 2008).

UCP suggests over half of civilian peacekeepers come from the host country, and that a significant proportion are women (Duncan and Ai-Lin-Loh, 2017). Civilian peacekeepers, whether local or international, are usually invited to intervene by members of the affected communities. Most adopt a non-partisan stance but others – often Christian groups – specifically choose an ethic of solidarity with those who are oppressed or persecuted (Julian and Schweitzer, 2015). As an approach, civilian peacekeeping involves non-violent action as a tactic to promote change but also as a way of modelling an alternative to violence (Julian, 2010; see Schweitzer, 2010: 51 for a comparison of UCP and humanitarian protection). It relies upon establishing trust and confidence on the part of the conflict parties (Wallis, 2010).

Another peacebuilding strategy that builds upon local agency are community-defined nonviolent spaces, such as ZOPs (Hancock and Mitchell, 2007). These zones take different forms, from 'corridors of peace' or 'days of tranquility' that allow health workers to vaccinate children (UNICEF, 1996) to cantonment zones for demobilised soldiers and physical spaces designated as places of protection for their inhabitants. These zones are usually defined, monitored and protected by the very communities whose interests they serve. They demonstrate the agency of civilians in the midst of conflict: 'most ZoPs are defined by statements, assertions of agency, in which the inhabitants create rules and processes by which they both attempt to create space for peacebuilding and, at the same time, push back against the violence that hitherto has defined their daily lives' (Hancock, 2017: 261). They first emerged in El Salvador but have since spread elsewhere, including the Philippines and Colombia, and are marked by a strong sense of internal cohesion and action (Hancock, 2017).

3.4 Complementarities and tensions

Many of the protection strategies of local communities can be complementary to those of internationals and vice versa, just as the strategies that peacebuilders, peacekeepers, and human rights actors adopt can be complementary to those of humanitarians. International protection actors, for instance, can serve as brokers and connectors between specific marginalised displaced or refugee communities and similar support or service groups in host communities focused on these marginalised communities (Rosenberg, in Couldrey and Herson, 2016). Humanitarians, human rights actors, peacekeepers and peacebuilders share

approaches of presence and accompaniment – whether motivated by solidarity or (humanitarian) principles of impartiality and neutrality – as well as influence and education, in the tradition of behind-the-scenes diplomacy or public-facing advocacy. The latest edition of the professional standards for protection work, as constituted by a diverse set of humanitarian and human rights actors – UN, IO, NGO – and inclusive of groups aimed at supporting people with disabilities, represent a step in the right direction for identifying these complementarities (ICRC, 2018). Yet they are still not inclusive of peacekeeping or peacebuilding actors, whether local or international.

There are some good reasons for this absence of inclusivity. While complementarities do exist, tensions will remain. Humanitarians are acutely aware of the tension between public denunciations of those perpetrating abuse or harm and the necessity of preserving continued, safe access to populations in need. Communities affected by violence live the contradictions and trade-offs between short-term protection strategies and long-term protection outcomes. And some local actors do not want internationals involved, as it may increase their vulnerability or dilute their own influence and agendas.

Tensions similarly operate between the approaches of these actors, whether focused on human rights, peacekeeping, or peacebuilding. Terminologies differ, leading to miscommunication or misunderstanding. For instance, where humanitarians understand impartiality to refer to the provision of assistance in proportion to need and without discriminating on the basis of gender, nationality, ethnicity, or religion, peacebuilders understand impartiality more in terms of non-partisanship or not taking sides – which humanitarians define as neutrality. Where unarmed civilian peacekeepers and peacebuilders may rely upon invitation or explicit consent to intervene, humanitarians are more willing to assert a right to intervene in order to provide assistance or protection.

The complexities and tensions between human rights work and peacebuilding are well documented; understanding them creates opportunities for complementarity (Parlevliet, 2017). More examples of the challenges and successes of crossing disciplinary boundaries related to protection could provide similar insight. For example, in what ways do the tangible, material resources that humanitarian agencies provide alter the opportunities for engaging with local communities and actors, especially when contrasted with civilian peacekeeping, which does not promise or provide such assistance? Further engagement could tease out these tensions and complementarities and identify possibilities for enhancing protection.

4 Concluding observations

Examining local approaches and crossing disciplinary boundaries to protection highlights the diversity of actors involved in protecting civilians in armed conflict or affected by natural hazards, and the range of protection actions they take. Doing so suggests a series of observations, each of which affirms a need for further research.

4.1 Shifting from protection activities to protection outcomes, emphasising complementarity and integration

To date, much of the literature on humanitarian protection and on local protection focuses on protection activities and less on the *outcomes* of these activities. Research on local protection, for instance, often catalogues the various ways that civilians act to protect themselves, even as the literature acknowledges both positive and negative outcomes as well as the fact that civilian protection is not always effective – nor is military action to protect civilians, for that matter (Wallis, 2010). As the recent stories of abuse and exploitation in the aid sector illustrate, sometimes aid workers and peacekeepers themselves represent threats to civilians. And too often community-based, local protection is marginalised in favour of established, formal protection programming, as the mismatch between the rhetoric and reality of local protection illustrates.

Progress is underway, however. The recent ICRC standards also represent a shift, as they move discussions forward to focus guidelines on achieving protection outcomes, defined as 'a reduction of the risk, including through improved fulfilment of rights and restitution, for victims. It includes reducing the threats people face, reducing people's vulnerabilities to these threats, and enhancing their capacities' (ICRC, 2018: 9). In addition, academic analyses, particularly related to efforts by UN or other international forces, evaluate peacekeeping in terms of its ability to protect civilians (Hultman, 2013; Hultman et al., 2013; 2014; see also Bradley, 2016).

InterAction's results-based protection resources focus on protection outcomes. They represent a problem-based approach that starts with local, community-defined analysis and merge the protection agenda with accountability to affected communities, systems analysis and iterative, adaptive and collaborative programming.[8] Research that identifies examples of effective local protection outcomes – not just activities or programmes – by a broad swathe of actors and how internationals have supported these programmes can help advance our understanding of complementary approaches and how and why they are effective.

4.2 The importance of transcending dualistic categories

Others have pointed to the dangers of the dualistic categories of local and international related to current debates about locally-led humanitarianism (Obrecht, 2014; Fast, 2017; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018) and examining 'local' protection is no exception. Local actors and actions are not uniform and not all result in positive outcomes. Instead, they are heterodox and transcend dualistic categories of 'local' or 'international'. Local actors represent a diverse set of communities and authorities, each of which has its own interests and motives. They fall along a series of continua related to their organisation and strategies:

- They are informal to formal in the ways they are organised.
- Their interventions may be spontaneous/ad hoc to planned in response to new or existing threats.
- They adopt violent to non-violent strategies in their approach to protection, and differ in their acceptance of or willingness to use weapons.
- They are involved in mass numbers to operating as a single, designated authority (as with the case of vigilante/state-sponsored groups).
- They are community-initiated, -led and -managed to third party-initiated, -led and -managed.
- They are networked to isolated in their engagement with other protection actors.
- They are insiders and outsiders.

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8 See the InterAction website for further details (https://protection.interaction.org).

- Their outcomes range from positive to negative, and differentially affect individuals and groups.

Just as with the dichotomies of 'local' and 'international', rarely are the lines between these distinct. Moreover, as the examples above illustrate, it is crucial to avoid characterising local protection as always or inherently good or better, since protective actions may put some individuals at risk. Equally, however, privileging international protective actions and activities over local ones perpetuates tropes of 'saviours' and 'victims' that are both misleading and potentially dangerous (South et al., 2012: 21). Both are potentially effective and harmful. In these ways, analyses of protection must move beyond homogenous categorisations and towards further deconstruction and analysis.

The review above nevertheless supports the need for meaningful – and not simply tokenistic – community engagement and leadership in defining the threats affected communities perceive and the tactics and strategies they adopt in response. It also identifies a need to move beyond community engagement to direct support for locally-initiated, -led and -owned protection initiatives, which are all too rare in the sector (UNHCR, 2014). This in turn suggests a need for holistic analysis of both threats to civilians and protection actors. As Barbelet concludes in her analysis of protection in CAR: 'For humanitarian organisations, protection activities still tend to follow a standard pattern, and lack a strategic focus and the kind of holistic analysis that could highlight the multiplicity of interventions by different protection actors, including affected people themselves' (Barbelet, 2015: 23). Transcending disciplinary categories also highlights a lack of knowledge about why or how local actors engage (or do not engage) with the formal humanitarian protection architecture.

4.3   A dearth of knowledge about the regional or cross-border dimensions of protection

Given the increasing prevalence of armed conflict and natural hazards that cross international borders, surprisingly little humanitarian literature has focused on the regional or cross-border dimensions of protection, aside from legal frameworks on human trafficking or the protection of refugees who by definition cross an international border. These frameworks speak to particular threats and categories of people, both of which are important but neither of which necessarily tackle the specific ways that

borders affect protection. Moreover, the literature generally addresses protection within a defined, state-centric and local – bordered – context, as opposed to a local context with fluid national borders and regional dimensions.

In reality, protection actors and threats both cross borders. Local human rights actors and civil society groups often connect with transnational groups to advocate for change. Barrs (2016) discusses affinity groups and patronage ties in relation to community self-protection, both of which can cross borders. Yet we typically think of these as confined within state boundaries. Other examples of local actors and humanitarian effectiveness highlight the role of digital networks in cross-border exploitation and protection. For example, digital technology both exacerbates protection challenges (e.g. old photographs that are digitally manipulated and used to create or intensify fear or 'virtual' kidnappings, which are then exploited in other locations) or to create new ones, such as online child abuse or the sexual exploitation of children for profit on digital networks (IFRC, 2015). In other cases, digital technology supports protection. Digital technology has allowed refugees to expand their businesses and support their livelihoods in Kenya, and internet connectivity allows internally displaced people to access health services, such as ambulances.[9]

These issues are especially pertinent given the complicated interactions between protection actors in crisis environments, such as among affected communities, international NGOs, UN agencies, local human rights organisations and regional peacekeeping forces, or the fact that the faultlines that define conflict parties travel with refugees to their new host countries. While Afghans may leave Afghanistan, Syrians leave Syria, and Sri Lankans leave Sri Lanka, the deep-rooted causes that lead to violent conflict do not disappear at an international border. Analytical lenses focused on the 'borderlands' (Plonski and Yousuf, 2017) have identified new insights related to the roots of violence and opportunities for including those at the geographical, political or social margins. Other peacebuilding initiatives have supported cross-border dialogue processes in Afghanistan/Pakistan (USIP, 2011), the Mano River region in West Africa and elsewhere (Ramsbotham and Zartman, 2011). These

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9   See www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2018/5/5aeb1c264/study-finds-refugee-businesses-play-vital-role-local-economy.html and www.unhcr.org/blogs/critical-connections-enable-life-saving-assistance-niger/. For these and other examples, see UNHCR's Digital Inclusion blog: www.unhcr.org/blogs/digital-inclusion.

realities suggest the need to reconsider boundaries as they relate to protection, with corresponding analytical insights and practical implications for how humanitarians organise themselves to address threats and harm to civilians.

The tapestry of protection approaches and actors is rich and colourful. Better understanding of the points of intersection and how to weave together the varied threads will assist in helping to better protect those affected by conflict and violence.

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Mohammed carries bricks for
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