Building Peace from Within

Perspectives of Syrian Youth

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“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

- Mahatma Gandhi
ABSTRACT

This study is based on the perspectives of Syrian youth, on how they can contribute to and participate in future peace initiatives for Syria. The purpose of the study is to investigate opportunities and barriers to youth’s participation for peace, as well as the instrumental role of education in learning about nonviolent pathways for change. Thus, the research is conducted through the collection of narratives with a digital survey-interview method, followed by a thematic analysis with primarily inductive approach, putting the views and ideas of the youth at the centre of the study. The results from the narratives show that the youth have agency and hope to act for positive change in their societies, although they simultaneously feel restrained by suffering, due to imposed restrictions, increasing deprivation, and the on-going violent conflict. Following the analysis, the final themes are discussed against existing research on the topics of peace, participation, and education. The importance of education as a tool for peace and nonviolence was confirmed by the research participants’ strong emphasis on the benefits of education. Additionally, the youth propose that education for peace should include practical elements, and that practical skills are also part of building peace. The barriers in the narratives are discussed as something that can restrict people’s opportunities to return at all, however, the worries are accompanied by strong beliefs in cooperation, dialogue, and intergroup networks of care and respect. The final conclusions include emphasis on the need to support existing local and grassroots initiatives for peace, ideally through multi-sectoral approaches, incorporating support both from the humanitarian and the peacebuilding sectors. Furthermore, the youth participants show a great will to partake in creating positive change and building sustainable peace, nonetheless, they also need support to manage current barriers, including to put an end to the violent conflict.

Key words: peace, peacebuilding, youth participation, education, humanitarian action
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1 INTRODUCTION

Before the 2011-protests and the following civil war started in Syria, Syrian society had high levels of education and showed several other positive development indicators, including strong economic growth. At the same time, there was barely any organised civil society, few independent organisations, and mounting economic inequalities (Haddad & Wind 2014: 409f; Slim & Trombetta 2014: 13). The civil initiatives that formed after the beginning of the uprisings were largely made up of educated youth, often due to their ability to reach out internationally, possessing language skills beyond the regional ones (Haddad & Wind 2014: 409f).

Following the conflict’s escalation into civil war, the issue of how to de-escalate and resolve the conflict came up on the international agenda, with the first UN-led and Arab League-supported peace talks starting in 2012. However, so far, all the initiated peace talks have failed to make any progress of peace inside the country. The conflict has also seen increasing international involvement, both through support for conflicting actors and through instigating different attempts to negotiate for peace. Meanwhile, high levels of violence against civilians have been conducted both by the government-affiliated forces, led by Bashar al-Assad, and by opposition groups (Collin 2018; Haddad & Wind 2014: 406f, 433). In 2013, the Syria crisis was declared a level three humanitarian emergency, followed by the United Nations’ largest ever humanitarian appeal (Slim & Trombetta 2014: viii). While international support for a Syrian peace remains fractured among different interests, the humanitarian disaster continues into its ninth year (Collin 2018).

1.1 THE SYRIAN CONTEXT: YOUTH, PEACE AND EDUCATION

As the civil war enters its ninth year and the government has retaken several areas from the opposition with continued armed violence, several aid agencies have been banished and the delivery of humanitarian aid has become increasingly restricted, which has led to further displacement of people (Human Rights Watch 2019). Since the start of the conflict in 2011, 6.6 million people are estimated as internally displaced and over 5.6 million have left Syria for other countries. Additionally, tens of thousands of persons have been disappeared by the government.

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1 Level 3 emergencies are where an Inter-Agency Standing Committee Level 3 Response has been activated. Activation only occurs in the most complex and dire humanitarian emergencies, where there is urgency for effective systems and the right capacities to come in and meet the needs. Current level 3 responses still include Syria in 2019 (UN-OCHA 2019a).
Syrian government and their fates still remain unknown. At the same time as displacement continues inside Syria, the neighbouring countries of Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan have stopped Syrians from seeking asylum at their borders (Human Rights Watch 2019). Recent numbers from 2018 show that 1.75 million Syrian children are not attending school, where the lack of educational opportunities in Syria are considered effects from the war, due to attacks on facilities and personnel, as well as the displacement of around half of the pre-conflict population (ECHO 2018: 1; UN-OCHA 2019b: 13). Even though education is high in demand for conflict-affected communities and an acknowledged instrument in building sustainable peace, it is often put aside as something that should be dealt with later when planning and prioritising humanitarian assistance in emergencies (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo & Smith 2017: 15). Simultaneously, youth unemployment numbers in Syria in 2015 were already at 78 percent and many young men have been seen to join armed groups engaged in the current conflict (World Bank 2017; ECHO 2018: 1). One of the main identified reasons behind youth joining extremist groups is that they often feel excluded from civil society, making other opportunities seem more viable (Mikael & Norman 2018: 57).

During the course of the Syrian conflict, awareness has increasingly risen on the issue of youth as participants in building sustainable peace. One of the main documents supporting this is the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS), defining ‘youth’ as persons between the ages 18-29 years, as will be applied in this thesis. The follow-up independent Progress Study on the same topic, authored by Graeme Simpson (2018) and co-developed with 21 young independent experts, has contributed with an array of views from youth on the issues of youth, peace, and security. The report gives over-arching insights to the positive role that youth can play in promoting and sustaining peace globally, as well as some of the obstacles they are facing. The increased efforts by the international community puts emphasis on youth as agents for change and peace, and as people with a right to participate in the decision-making that surrounds the de-escalation of conflict and construction of peace (UNOY n.d.). The question is how this can be done in the context of Syria’s protracted conflict and what role youth could play. When all the high-level negotiations seem to fail at the same time as the space for Syrian civilians has become increasingly restricted, can young Syrians find ways to bring peace?
1.2 HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND PEACEBUILDING

With the Syria crisis still being one of the direst humanitarian emergencies in present times, whether change is coming or not, the issue of support for the civilians remain urgent. As the protracted conflict goes on, humanitarian actors cannot and should not address the current humanitarian needs on their own but need to build a wider system of support together with others, such as the peacebuilding sector (Maurer 2019). As stated by the International Committee of the Red Cross president, Peter Maurer (2019): in a protracted crisis the needs of the people go beyond emergency assistance. Needs include those stemming from high levels of violence, displacement, or loss of education, among other issues. The lack of educational and learning opportunities are illuminated as one of the main challenges and risks for increased exploitation of youth, with particular emphasis on young girls, who could end up in early marriages or early pregnancies. Hence why youth, together with children, are put at the centre of the humanitarian response (UN-OCHA 2019b). To meet the educational and overall demands, actors must collaborate to address the specific needs of communities and design the support through participation (UN-OCHA 2019b; Maurer 2019; James 2017: 22f). Consequently, an increase in collaborative approaches between sectors such as the humanitarian and the peacebuilding sectors, as well as the affected communities and their civil society, can increase chances of providing a more holistic support in times of crisis (Maurer 2019).

This thesis considers how to build a more holistic approach to addressing the needs for those affected by the Syrian conflict, including sustainable change. Building on the assumption that youth are also important actors for creating change and building peace, the main aim of this study is to find out how Syrian youth can be actors for peace, instead of merely being framed as potential victims or rebels, to see if this large group of resourceful young adults can channel their energy towards something else than what they are often made out to be. Furthermore, it is here acknowledged that education is often argued to be crucial for the development of youth, particularly so during crises. Thus, the aspect of education will receive specific attention, to see if it can be an instrument for peace also in the Syrian context. Therefore, building on the pathways discussed by Maurer, this thesis intends to contribute towards the fields of both humanitarian action and peacebuilding, by looking at youth as potential agents for a turning point in the Syrian conflict.
1.3 DISPOSITION

The different chapters of this thesis are organised to first provide contextual and conceptual basis for the research, through reviewing relevant literature and reports on peacebuilding, youth participation, and education for peace in chapter 2. Chapter 3 provides a methodological overview, describing the method of using surveys for written interviews, in this case with displaced Syrian youth, and the analytical method of thematic analysis. In chapter 4, the analysis starts with inductively approached theme creation, followed by an interpretative analysis of the created themes and sub-themes, based on Braun’s and Clarke’s (2006: 24) framework for interpretation of themes. This is succeeded by a discussion in chapter 5, linking the themes to existing literature, to see if the perspectives of the survey participants align with or differ from what is presented in the literature, and to create foundations as well as suggestions for further research. Lastly, the sixth and concluding chapter will discuss the results of the study and answer the research questions.
This chapter aims to outline the links between peacebuilding, youth participation, and education for peace, by discussing the elements, concepts, and theories central to this study, set in the context of the Syrian conflict and its effects on its young people and their opportunities or lack thereof. It will firstly address the subject of peacebuilding through different theoretical perspectives, showing how the ideas of peace can vary; from addressing issues of direct violence to human flourishing, from being a creation by states for states or by people for the community, and finally landing on how peace can be contextually constructed. This connects to the participation of youth in building peace, since the contextual approach to peace is a step forward in understanding how youth can participate in building it. The existing literature also provides ideas of what are the necessary elements for participation for peace in general. Finally, the role of education is discussed, showing different approaches to education for peace and participation, and discussing how this relates to contexts of protracted conflict and displacement. Together these aspects will build the narrative for the thesis’s research questions.

2.1 BUILDING PEACE

When discussing peace and how it can be built, it should be considered that peace can have different meanings for different people in different contexts. In the YPS Progress Study (Simpson 2018a: 8), it is reported that participating youth define peace as no longer having violence and for its symptoms to be addressed (negative peace), as well as working to improve issues of social justice, equality, and honesty (positive peace), as originated by Galtung (1969: 183-186, 190). Sustainable peace cannot be built unless changes are made addressing all relevant elements of negative and positive peace with a long-term perspective. These views points towards what Lederach (1997: xvi) writes: “Building peace in today's conflicts calls for long-term commitment to establishing an infrastructure across the levels of a society, an infrastructure that empowers the resources for reconciliation from within that society and maximizes the contribution from outside.” To support positive peace in a conflict-affected society such as Syria, transformation is needed on a variety of levels, including political, economic, social, and cultural. Thus, injustices and inequalities must be addressed, together with other underlying issues (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo & Smith 2017: 17). Moreover, evidence shows that the current conflict landscape is largely made up of internal conflicts, increasing the need for civilian participation for peace. Basic structures
and institutions, as well as the civilians themselves, are often targets in the internal conflicts, as part of the conflicting parties’ war strategies. Although peace accord are still highly regarded as important elements of creating the conditions for peace to be built, theories point towards that it does not in itself provide long-term sustainability (McKeon 2003).

To create lasting peace, most peace theorists agree that individuals and communities from the various levels of society need to be involved to different extent. This is referred to as inclusive peace (Williams 2019: 9), when more parties are included in the peace processes than solely the bilateral parties fighting over the incompatibility between them. However, this approach has been seen to raise issues of representation, when a small sample is meant to somehow represent the views of the population. The groups most commonly mentioned for inclusion are women and civil society (Paffenholz & Ross 2015: 28ff). This demonstrates that not even inclusive peace theories entail generational consideration for inclusion, where specific mentioning of this would be advisable, to ensure that the necessity of cross-generational participation receives attention. Public support is one of the main factors mentioned by Paffenholz and Ross (2015: 35f) for successfully creating ground for lasting peace, as well as that exclusion or the sense thereof can lead to new conflicts. Such a view provides evidence supporting the idea of this study: that it should be considered crucial to include the large generation of youth, and the lack of essentialising the inclusion and participation of young people is thus considered a gap in the theoretical discussion. Williams’ (2019: 13f) report explains that it should be contextually decided who should be included from the civil society in negotiating and implementing peace. Hence, it mostly considers inclusiveness from the perspective of peace as a high- or medium-level process, assuming that civil society organisations (CSOs) included are often chosen by higher institutions and that the organisations chosen are not automatically grassroots. Thereby, not necessarily providing a framework that encourages cross-generational inclusion.

To look at peace that can be built from inside the affected communities, it is here argued that we should dare to look at what is being done to build peace on a local, community, or even individual level. Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013: 769) address the issue by looking at how locally based agencies work on processes for peace. Without romanticising the local, the authors emphasise the need to look at what is being done to mobilise peace in the everyday lives of affected communities, considering aspects of solidarity and agency among local populations (ibid.: 770). These theories point to there being a deeper inclusiveness than the institutions of civil society and shows that there is
opportunity to look closer to the grassroots. Acknowledging that peace can be built from
different levels and directions is here considered of interest when discussing participation
and instruments for peace. It is also of interest since this study considers the context of the
Syrian conflict, where all the top-down initiatives for peace are yet to have any success.

The theories point towards the idea that peace can be constructed from the bottom up,
which Lederach (2005) has provided evidence of. He reveals that there are several local
initiatives for peace and nonviolence, which have spread throughout societal levels; from
the individual to the local government. In one of his examples, Lederach tells about a group
of women in a small village in Kenya, who decide that they have had enough of the violence
coming from the on-going conflict. The women from the village of Wajir start with making
the marketplace safe by establishing monitors who watch and intervene if someone is abused
based on her origin. Realising that the broader violence still affects them, they speak to one
of the elders from the smallest clan, who becomes their spokesperson. The clans decide to
work on the issues together. The women move on to speak to government officials and
parliament representatives, who bless their initiatives. Next stop is to engage the youth,
speaking to them, listening to their concerns, and eventually linking the initiative with the
business community to engage the youth in new employment and in helping to rebuild the
community. The positive ripple effects continue, but the committee still works hard to build
new initiatives for a peaceful community, including peace education and teacher trainings
(Lederach 2005: 10-13). The story of the Wajir women shows that peace can start as a seed
(in the women’s case, one person took initiative to communicate her ideas to others, who
together found a common interest in safety), and grow into a flower (encouraging attitudes
that favour peace and affect behaviours outside of where the first seed was planted). It
should be noted that while the story told might make it sound easy for peace to grow, it
surely is not an easy task. There are also likely to be certain conditions present that can make
the situation ripe for initiatives. While acknowledging that Syria may be a different context
to the Kenyan village of Wajir, it is considered that its inhabitants still live on grounds where
seeds can be planted and flowers can grow.²

² For the interested reader, the book *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* by John Paul Lederach (2005) includes more stories of how peace has started to be sown from the inside out.
2.2 YOUTH PARTICIPATION FOR PEACE

Resolving violent conflict or building sustainable peace are contextually sensitive issues, which can meet various challenges, including different interests. In the light of UNSCR 2250, the spotlight is increasingly put on youth as agents for peace. Partly as an aim to channel their resourcefulness and energy towards nonviolent change and peaceful coexistence, rather than building up frustration towards their societies or joining violent groups. The resolution and the follow up report both highlight the importance of youth participation in processes for peace and decision-making. To support participation, it is necessary to understand what opportunities already exist, what possible opportunities there are, and what hinders youth from participating, as well as to see what ideas youth have on how to overcome those barriers. Syrian youth are mentioned as agents in fighting for change (Wimmen 2016: 20f), but when it comes to the potential for a Syrian peace process, youth have expressed that they do not feel represented by older representatives of some of the opposition groups (Haddad & Wind 2014: 417). Fabbe, Hazlett, and Sınmazdemir (2019: 104) explain that Syrian refugees are considered crucial for the termination of the civil war, yet there is no research found on how displaced youth could be agents for peace in Syria. Even though Wimmen (2016) addresses the issue of how building peace from within must be considered, there are few empirical references to how this is being done, how it can be supported, and how young people can have increased possibilities to participate.

To draw on research and experiences from regional and topical perspectives, recent reports focused on the issue of engagement of conflict-affected youth are examined. Evidence of the importance of youth’s participation for peace is presented in the broader reports from Conciliation Resources (2018) and Graeme Simpson’s (2018) YPS Progress Study, which both include perspectives from diverse groups of youth, including youth holding refugee status. Moreover, Bourhrous and Smith (2016: 2f) argue in their paper on post-conflict youth engagement in Tunisia that youth are increasingly discouraged to engage in initiatives for peace and that there is a need to address this and make space for youth to be involved in processes of peace and decision-making. Thereby also emphasising the importance of further research on the issue of the participation of youth in creating peace.

Two opportunities for youth identified by the authors are communications platforms as support for youth to make their stories heard, and their ability to connect to and participate in local governance (ibid.). The opportunities outlined in the Progress Study (Simpson 2018a: 8, 18) include internal capacity of youth to contribute, as well as existence of youth-
led CSOs, including formal and non-formal education for peace. The report argues that a great shift in attitude and practice must be made in how governments and the multilateral system include and provide space for youth, including opportunities for partnerships. Furthermore, education is seen as the core issue for youth when it comes to peace and security (Simpson 2018: 14f). The Conciliation Resources report, a contributor to the Progress Study, further explains that youth have: clear ideas of what they believe peace is and a desire to achieve life without violence; a will to increase their own opportunities for learning and developing skills; ability to practically reflect on how to increase access to education, including to introduce peace education; and a desire to engage in increased dialogue among youth globally (Conciliation Resources 2018). To conclude on prospective opportunities, the reports highlight that there exists drive among conflict-affected youth to participate in transitioning their societies out of conflict and towards building peace, and to use opportunities of education, dialogue, and outreach as their instruments to achieve it.

However, youth also experience several challenges that limit their opportunities. The barriers outlined in the reports largely intersects and include: marginalisation by the media of youth as perpetrators or victims, rather than treating them as community actors who can support peacebuilding, which can lead to feelings of alienation and cynicism towards the future (Bourhrous & Smith 2016: 3; Simpson 2018a: 13). Moreover, other recorded experiences include: mistrust in governing institutions and the international community, a sense of being excluded from political processes and not being listened to due to their age, sectarian and identity-based divisions, violence and threats, and special emphasis on the exclusion of girls and women from civic arenas (Simpson 2018a: 13; Conciliation Resources 2018). Consequently, composing evidence of several obstacles for the youth’s active participation for peace.

A learning brief from YouthPower Learning (2017) outlines best practices and opportunities for youth to engage in positive alternatives to violence. It highlights the importance of youth to be included in the process of analysing the issue of where youth participate and demonstrates several cases where positive participation of youth has led to increased resilience. Recommendations for how to improve opportunities for youth are for youth to be able to create their own narratives; to increase dialogue and trust-building initiatives; engage youth through educational institutions, civil society, and the private sector; and calling for more coherence among efforts towards countering violent extremism and building peace (Bourhrous & Smith 2016: 2). The Progress Study highlights that the
sense of injustice among youth, based on their loss of trust in governing institutions, must be addressed and youth must be considered as contributors to peace (Simpson 2018a: 3).

Moreover, youth are already working to build peace; including the creation of several youth-led peacebuilding CSOs, encouraging dialogue, providing humanitarian assistance, and in 2019 the first international symposium was held on the participation of youth in peace processes (Simpson 2018a: 10; United Nations 2019). Peace processes are part of building peace in conflict-affected societies and are at a minimum incorporating the political progression towards negative peace, but with the possibility to include a more extensive approach to peace and human prosperity. To fully consider building sustainable peace, there are more aspects of participation to consider. The more societal, or bottom-up initiatives to peace can be crucial, either for planting the seed of peace or for the flower to grow and blossom. As in the case of the Wajir women, it is possible that Syrian youth could be initiators of peace practices from within their societies. Nonetheless, building sustainable peace requires a contextual approach, meaning that opportunities, barriers, and how to address them should not be concluded on until context-based perspectives are included.

2.3 EDUCATION FOR PEACE

The role of education for shaping youth and building a conscious generation is often highlighted as a vital instrument in building peace. In the case of Syria, displaced adolescents up to 17 years are largely denied education (Bangs 2016). Thus, Syrian youth from the age of 18 years are prone to not have attended school consistently or at all, depending on when the conflict reached them. The lack of access to education for young individuals who become displaced early in their lives gives them academic disadvantage and makes them more exposed to various forms of exploitation and violence than others. Bangs (2016) explains how being out of school can make children and adolescents miss out on peace-learnings, meaning that they can have a hard time to comprehend how the situation could differ or which paths can lead there. She emphasises how education varies and that it has been seen to impose bias on populations through affecting impressionable young persons. Thus, there is high risk in not critically assessing the quality of education and the input that young people receive. Simultaneously, there is a risk that those not having access to education at all simply do not possess the tools, or awareness of such, for participating in creating positive change in their societies. This is, of course, if most of what they have seen in life has been conflict and violence.
In the YPS Progress Study (Simpson 2018a; 14f), education is discussed as something that could have a positive effect on social cohesion, sense of belonging, and reconciliation, although it could also increase exclusion and separation, including gender inequalities. Education in itself will not ensure peaceful and diplomatic behaviour. As the youth in the study express: it must be value-based, teach critical thinking, nonviolence in conflict, and positive views on diversity. Youth emphasise that there are already CSOs creating strategies for education and peace, hinting that more strategic partnerships should be built to support those. Thus, some access exists, even if it is not always formal. However, reviewing recent humanitarian overviews from Syria, out of secondary school-aged children who have previously been displaced and returned, only just over 30 percent are enrolled in school (UN-OCHA 2019b: 25). At this point, it is worth to think back to barriers expressed by conflict-affected youth globally, discussed in chapter 2.2. For education to be an effective instrument for inclusion of youth as peacebuilders in Syria, it is considered beneficial if it addresses some of the barriers to participation, as well as enhances opportunities. Nevertheless, to assess its ability in positively affecting youth’s participation for peace, the varying quality of education must be considered, as well as the context it is taught in.

Pardo and Jacobi (2018: 5) write in their study of how school textbooks have been reformulated during the Syrian conflict, that “If there is any policy recommendation from this research, it is that the international community should not compromise on meaningful peace education in Syria. The ruthless and rampant violence is the result of a faulty worldview which cannot be resolved without tackling the issue of education.” Education in emergencies is increasingly integrated into humanitarian action, often referring to foreign intervention that either supports existing education structures or, if those are deemed insufficient, provide supplemental education activities (Burde et al 2017: 620). Education during emergency can provide a sense of normality, life skills, protection of people at risk of exploitation, restore hope, and support psychological healing (Sinclair 2001: 53). Research on education in emergencies largely focuses on primary and secondary education (Burde et al 2017: 624), thus primarily on children. However, on-going conflict and displacement are factors likely to also affect access to education for youth (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo & Smith 2017: 15). Hence, when a crisis becomes protracted, many youths are likely to not have had access to education for long durations of time or at all and are thus expected to need the skills and support that quality education can provide.
To continue the aspect of the quality of education for peace, education’s efficiency as a component in achieving individual and societal change must be addressed. To achieve efficiency, it is argued that general education policies and programmes must be flexible to incorporate peace-related issues, such as addressing inequalities between different groups and other factors related to social cohesion and reconciliation (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo & Smith 2017: 23). Therefore, peace education does not need to stand on its own but could be incorporated into existing education structures. Nevertheless, it is considered that this might not seem favourable to the conflicting parties, meaning that it could meet resistance from the ruling party if they are part of the conflict (Harris 2004: 8). As a tool for encouraging peace, social cohesion, and support positive intergroup relationships, education for peace seems like something largely positive. However, it is still unclear if education for peace can do much in the Syrian case and for the participation of its youth in building peace there.

Harris (2004) describes how there are different purposes and curriculum that can be applied when considering peace education. They include: international education (addresses the role of global structures to promote peace), human rights education (deconstructs enemy images and addresses rights and justice), development education (addresses the oppression of people and promotes active democratic engagement), environmental education (develops environmental understanding and ecological practices), and conflict resolution education (addresses the roots of conflict, communication, and cooperative social practices). Harris concludes with that approaches can be combined, depending on the context and the current needs. The most likely conclusion for Syria is that a mix of these would be most relevant, which could be further confirmed through participatory assessments of the needs in the Syrian context (James 2017: 127ff). Clarke-Habibi (2005) also emphasises the importance of addressing what kind of peace education is desired and taught. Both Harris (2004) and Clarke-Habibi (2005) raise the issue of that it is our understanding of peace that varies.

A case that encompasses peace education for Syrian children and youth, within Syria and in neighbouring countries Turkey and Lebanon, is the education programme conducted by the organisation International Alert. There is little information on how and if peace education is carried out to Syrian youth, particularly inside Syria, whilst International Alert has published several reports of their work on the issue. Hence why it is the initiative chosen for practical input. Their activities include training of educators to deliver sessions, services for outreach, mentoring, and referrals for children and youth. The goals are to facilitate social cohesion and restore social networks, through providing safe spaces and trauma
support, as well as to counter the culture of violence that the students are growing up in. The impact they have detected include that people start to see alternatives to a life of violence and to see themselves as survivors capable of creating positive change (Simpson 2018b: 38; International Alert 2016). Other positive effects shown are how dialogue, self-expression, and openness to other people and their differences were seen to ease tensions in the communities. The organisation refers to their approach as ‘psychosocial support-based peace education’, focusing strongly on identity and social networks (Simpson 2018b: 39).

The intention with this example is to provide a real scenario of what education for peace for Syrian youth could look like. Considering that the conflict still develops and that the Syrian context now also encompasses the return of displaced people to areas within the country, additional aspects and activities might be required to address the needs. Additionally, the issue of poor access to education for Syrian youth still remains, and even if there are positive examples of education programmes achieving desired impact, there still seems to be a great need for more quality education and for instruments that can advance the participation of youth in building peace in the still-war torn Syrian landscape.

The existing literature on peacebuilding demonstrates that there is little mention of youth as a group that is important to focus on for inclusion, and, related to that, the exclusion of youth is highlighted through recent resolutions and reports on the issue; therefore, this thesis seeks to investigate the topic further. Based on evidence showing that displaced people are important for the transformation of conflict and construction of peace, this is also a situation that requires more research, particularly for the Syrian context, which involves displacement of over half of its pre-conflict population. The most highlighted instrument found for supporting youth as agents for peace is education, or more specifically, education for peace. Thus, these theories and practices will be further expanded on. This study relies on the instrument of education as a primary tool for the participation of youth, although remains open for the results to encompass further suggestions. To address the identified gaps and to guide the analysis of peace, youth, and education, this thesis asks the following questions:

- How can youth participate in building peace in Syria?
- What role can education play in building peace in Syria and in the inclusion of youth?
- How can perspectives of displaced Syrian youth on their participation in building peace add to existing literature and approaches?
3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter will explain the methodological approach for this study and the reasoning around choosing Syria as a context, as well as for the research design, the criteria applied for the survey-interviews, and the approach to the following thematic analysis.

3.1 THE CASE OF THE SYRIAN YOUTH

As the Syrian conflict carries on, evidence has shown that it has a detrimental effect on the population and its prospects for the future. Therefore, addressing the Syrian context and the potential for nonviolent transformation is considered crucial. The case chosen for this study is the possibilities for participation of youth in building peace, within the context of the Syrian war. More specifically, the opportunities and barriers to participation for displaced youth are addressed, since they are considered to have slimmer chances than youth in general to be included in peacebuilding initiatives (Simpson 2018a). Many of those currently displaced are estimated to want to return to a post-war Syria in the future (Fabbe, Hazlett, & Sınmazdemir 2019: 104), thus, for an inclusive approach to building peace their views must be incorporated, and their participation must be addressed.

The case study design of this thesis allows for the narratives of youth to take a central place in the study and to constitute its main perspective. The inductive approach to analyse case study data permits for the desired bottom-up approach and for a foundation that can guide further research (Braun & Clarke 2006: 83; Berg 2001: 249). This is coherent with the goal: to gain greater clarity on the problem of the very limited participation of youth in peacebuilding and to illuminate issues and possibilities that affect their participation, to hopefully guide future practice. The study is limited in its generalisation, due to its aim to highlight freely expressed perspectives of few, rather than to try to generalise data from restricted answers of many. Thus, the generalisation of this case study can only claim to generalise as far as that the findings could apply to some people within the studied population (Berg 2001: 232). Within the case of youth participation in peacebuilding, the instrument of education for encouraging peace and participation will be addressed, to provide an added practical perspective to this practical problem. Education is one of the most prevalent tools mentioned in existing literature on youth and peace for enhancing their opportunities and will therefore be analysed for its usefulness in the Syrian conflict context, keeping the perspectives of youth at the centre.
3.2 SURVEY-INTERVIEW: PERSPECTIVES OF YOUTH

To bring the perspectives of displaced youth to the centre of this thesis, their views must be recorded and incorporated. The option used was a survey with open questions, further referred to in this paper as a *survey-interview*, where the responses could be analysed with a qualitative approach. Through the style of the questions, the views and experiences of the participants could be captured in written format. Reaching displaced populations can be a difficult task, however, thanks to digital options of reaching out it was still possible to spread the questions to the intended group. In classical surveys, the intent is often to gather information from individuals to describe attitudes of the larger population they belong to (Eck 2011: 165), however, this study rather aims to incorporate a bottom-up perspective through present-time narratives from those affected by the identified problems that initiated this study: lacking participation of displaced youth in peace initiatives. Moreover, the survey created for this thesis (Appendix 1) includes close-ended questions as control questions, to ensure that the sampling criteria was kept intact, rather than for the main analysis (ibid.).

The survey-interview includes eleven questions in total: two optional and nine mandatory. The first eight questions are basic questions; on spoken name and hometown (optional), gender, age, and control questions, e.g. nationality of origin and if the person has been displaced due to the current crisis in Syria. The last three questions are the open questions; aimed at gaining better understanding of the perspectives of Syrian youth on how they could participate in building peace. More explicitly, the questions are:

- How do you suggest that youth should be involved in building peace in Syria?
- How do you think education can affect the opportunities for youth to participate in building peace in Syria?
- What challenges do you see for youth to be able to participate in building peace in Syria?

The total number of respondents within the chosen sample who answered the open-ended questions were 26 individuals.

Furthermore, the survey was translated into Arabic, which is the most common language spoken in Syria, and thus further ensuring the survey’s accessibility. The translation was cross-checked by three native Syrians, to ensure that the interpretation of

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3 The participants and the spread of the survey will be addressed further in chapter 3.4.1 Sampling.
the questions was as intended. 21 out of 26 responses were written in Arabic and were thereby subject to translation. Initial translations were conducted by a native Syrian-Arabic speaker with English fluency and then cross-checked. Additionally, five of the data sets were controlled for errors by sending the translation to the participants for approval. This made up 20 percent of the responses, and with no errors detected it was determined that the translations were likely to be correct. The quotes in the study are thus mostly translated, which can risk losing part of the meaning, however, the precautions of cross-checking and access to bilingual translators should mitigate the main interpretive risks.

3.3 QUALITATIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The qualitative analysis is conducted through thematic analysis; firstly, through the creation of themes, and secondly, through an interpretative analysis of the themes.

Pre-set categories of opportunities, barriers, and the role of education supports the structure and validity of the analysis, guiding it towards finding answers to the research questions. The theme creation is conducted through rigorous analysis with an inductive approach, meaning that the narratives from the respondents guide the final themes, rather than being guided by existing research, with the main purpose of putting the subjects of the case at the centre of the study. Consequently, the youth’s perspectives will provide the basis for answering the research questions. In chapter 5, following the analysis, the findings from the primary data will be linked with existing literature, to discuss if the views of the respondents align or differ from previously reported findings on how youth from conflict-affected countries view the issues of participation for peace and the role of education.

3.3.1 Theme Creation and Transparency

The theme creation primarily builds on ideas expressed by Braun and Clarke (2006), explaining thematic analysis as a method. Their research gives various options on how to conduct thematic analysis and for transparency the choices will hereby be described.

The choices are based on the goal of keeping a largely bottom-up approach for the study, the pre-set limitations of this paper, and the problems and gaps that inspired the creation of this study. The aim is to find patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke 2006: 6), and analyse them further to address the problems and questions of this study. The final themes have been chosen because they capture something relevant to the research questions, sometimes including sub-themes within the themes, to provide further insight. The aim is to provide a rich description of the dataset, as the case is argued to be under-researched,
hence why all the themes are included in the analysis. The overall approach to the theme creation is inductive, having them initially framed only by the research questions and not by pre-existing theory (Braun & Clarke 2006: 11f). However, for the sake of transparency it should be added that there is a theoretical interest behind the research questions, thus making the analysis somewhat deductive. A rather semantic approach has been taken towards the identification of themes, where the data is described, interpreted, and then further discussed (ibid.: 13). Underlying ideas are not addressed to any greater extent; however, it could be approached in a more extensive study on the same case.

3.3.2 Coding and Category Formation
The purpose of inductive category and theme formation is to ensure a bottom-up approach and minimise researcher bias; allowing the material to lead the way (Mayring 2014: 79). The formation was done through a number of steps: (1) formulating the research questions, (2) defining level of abstraction based on identified problems and aims to create first categorical framing, (3) inductively create codes based on reading through the narratives, (4) continue to form new codes and categories while going through the narratives, (5) revise codes and categories, (6) describe content of codes and categories, (7) create themes. The deductively created initial framing was set through the formulation of the open questions, which supported defining the level of abstraction at an early stage (ibid.: 82). It also facilitates the following discussion on the inductively created themes and existing literature.

After going through the material and creating the first codes, the ones that only occurred once were first considered, to see if adaption or merging with other codes into categories would be relevant. When codes and categories have been thoroughly checked, they have been examined again together with the coded text passages. This provides for continuous verification of the codes as representative of the youth’s perspectives and creates a holistic view of the whole data set. Sub-categories have been created to the main categories when necessary, to ensure that the intended broadness of the views is properly captured. They also provided ground for the succeeding theme creation (ibid.: 82f).

3.3.3 Operationalisation of Codes
The codes were chosen based on clear passages in the text relating to one of the three initial categories. The entire dataset of the open-ended questions was included in the analysis. Thus, the definition of the codes is: Factors perceived by the respondent to affect young Syrians’ opportunities and barriers to participate in building peace in Syria, as well as how education can play a role in youth’s participation. The level of abstraction applied is:
Concrete suggestions on how youth can participate or on how they are already participating, examples of perceived or experienced barriers or challenges that could affect or are affecting the chances for youth to participate, and concrete suggestions on how education can affect opportunities for youth to participate – hinder or facilitate.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLING

This section discusses the issue of sampling and brings up considerations towards the survey-interview respondents, such as anonymity and confidentiality, and on the contribution that the data collection makes to the study, as well as more broadly towards the fields of humanitarian action and peacebuilding.

3.4.1 Sampling

The sample-selection for the survey-interview was conducted through a non-probability approach, where categorisation of participants included age range (18-29 years), country of origin before displacement (Syria), and time of displacement (during the on-going crisis in Syria). The choice to focus on such a large population was made due to the extent of the identified gap and the hope to retain a broad range of views that can inspire several strands of future research. However, it was not possible to create a sampling frame over all the elements within the population, but since this study rather aims to generate ideas than to generalise to an entire population, the non-probability approach is well-suited (Grey et al 2007: 104).

A combination between convenience sampling and snowball sampling was applied; where initial points of contact (the convenience sample) were mainly made up of personal contacts to individuals within the humanitarian field who speak Arabic and have been working with displaced Syrians over the past eight years or who are of Syrian origin themselves. These persons are referred to as snowballers, since they referred the survey-interview onwards to their respective networks within the sample population. Snowball sampling is a commonly used technique for non-probability sampling, particularly useful for hard to reach populations. Snowballing often has the limitation of not ensuring a broad and representative sample (Berg 2001: 33; Grey et al 2007: 117). With the aim of ensuring a broad sample of elements, having snowballers in several different geographical locations and with broad networks among the Syrian youth was crucial. This resulted in a sample made up of youth currently residing in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (26.9 percent), Turkey (23 percent), Germany (15.4 percent), Sweden (11.5 percent), Iraq (7.7 percent), and one
respondent each from Lebanon, Denmark, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Additionally, as responses came in, male respondents dominated within the chosen category. Thus, quota sampling based on gender was attempted as regulation, based on UNHCR’s (2019) statistics showing that women make up around 2/5 of the total adult refugee population. To ensure better gender balance, a request was sent out for more female participants through the snowballers (Grey et al 2007: 104). The final 26 participants were made up of 10 women and 16 men between the ages of 18-29 years, with an average value of 24.8 years, corresponding with the median age among the Syrian population, which was 24.3 years in 2018 (World Population Review 2019a). They were mostly originating from Damascus (23 percent), Aleppo (19.2 percent), Qamishli (15.4 percent), and Malikiyah (15.4 percent). Two of the respondents came from Idleb and Deir ez-Zour and five chose not to answer the question with a town-name, but simply put “Syria”. The sample thereby incorporates views of both genders, persons originating from Syria’s two most populated cities (Aleppo and Damascus), and from four of the areas from where most Syrians have been displaced (Aleppo, Idleb, Greater Damascus, and Deir ez-Zour). These numbers are estimates based on reports from the UN and their partners (UN-OCHA 2019b: 16).

3.4.2 Considerations and Demarcations
Access to and security of the research participants has been a key concern for collecting narratives as primary data (Höglund & Öberg 2011: 4), where the precaution was largely facilitated by using a digital survey-interview to collect the perspectives of conflict-affected youth. Thus, based on research ethics and the humanitarian principle of do no harm, all participants have been kept anonymous, with the option of providing a spoken name to be referred with if quoted, as well as their hometown or region in Syria. Hence, explaining why current locations are only referred to by country name. Limitations with the survey-method for collecting perspectives and opinions on an issue include that people could have possibly elaborated more on the answers in a face-to-face interview than in digital format. However, the digital approach can be beneficial due to that some might feel freer to express themselves when being anonymous.

Additionally, as mentioned in chapter 2, the idea of what peace in Syria might look like can vary between different people. Some of the feedback on the questionnaire has been that the term building peace in the survey was too vague. The reason for this is to allow for different views on the definition, and to open for definitions to be created by those most affected by what the future will be like, if (when) peace is built. Furthermore, comments
included concern regarding how perspectives might vary among people from diverse geographical areas within Syria, making it difficult to compile a broader picture of the Syrian case for peace and social change. Although this is considered important input and well-founded criticism based on the variation among the Syrian people, it is also a risk that is accepted for this study, since it aims to display several perspectives from Syrian youth, rather than to generalise. Nevertheless, it should be considered that the results could have varied if the responses were instead made up by youth originating from other areas.

Lastly, it should be noted that this research is created as part of the bridge between the practical and academic fields of humanitarian issues and actions, however, it is not intended as a practical guide or as a study that alone can fill the gap between academic literature, practical reports, and perspectives of affected people. The aim is rather to contribute to research on the specific issue of the exclusion of youth from peacebuilding, and to further illuminate their views on potential for change, with support of existing theory.

3.5 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The reliability of a study is determined by the preciseness and meticulousness of the researcher in measuring and assessing the results (Esaiasson et al 2012: 63). Thus, having clear definitions of codes and levels of abstraction supports the reliability, where the inductive approach may otherwise increase the risk of subjective interpretation. Furthermore, using clear themes and quotes from the participants allow readers and other researchers to back-track the findings and come to similar points in a new analysis, if being led by the same research questions, purpose, and problem-formation. To ensure that the survey-interviews and following thematic analysis measure what is intended, the initial categorisation of the survey-data was created as a framework for the themes to be created within; still allowing for the themes to develop based on the narratives. This increases the validity of the study. It is also ensured through cross-checking the translations, since that could have otherwise posed a risk of the responses having been interpreted differently to what was intended by the respondent, thereby leading to random errors (Fowler 2009: 106).
4 ANALYSIS

The analysis is based on thematic analysis method, where an inductive approach is applied for themes to reflect the perspectives of the participants, followed by interpretive analysis.

4.1 THEME CREATION

During the review of the survey-data, codes have been assigned to different passages. Through rigorous examination of the participants’ narratives and continuous verification against the defined level of abstraction, the codes have been reviewed and refined. Moving forward, patterns among the codes and adjoining segments have been identified, leading to the collocation of coded segments. These collocations supported the emergence of themes, which are made up of identified patterns and created based on their relevance for this study: understanding the perspectives of Syrian youth in relation to the broader social context of peacebuilding and youth participation. Potential themes and occasionally sub-themes (when distinct within a theme, see Table 1) became visible and were separated out. Following the visualisation and the theme creation, the themes were reviewed through reviewing all the allocated segments again, to see if they should change place, be discarded, or stay. Some codes were discarded, some changed, and others were kept. New potential themes were created as review and refinement moved forward. Subsequently, the entire dataset was revisited, to see if anything was missed and needed to be added in to the themes. Lastly, the final themes were checked for internal coherence and distinction towards the others, including drafting the syntheses of the themes (see Table 2 and 3).4

Table 1: Example of sub-theme development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Summary of segments</th>
<th>Sub-theme: Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevent violent extremism</td>
<td>Education creates options for youth that can make them reject extremism. Fewer terrorists means higher chances for peace.</td>
<td>Education can help youth to put forward their ideas and negotiate solutions with increased chances of being listened to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation skills</td>
<td>It is more likely that youth will be listened to in peace negotiations if they are educated and can put forward their views in a positive convincing way.</td>
<td>These youth are less likely to join extremist groups and will therefore contribute towards peace through choosing nonviolence over violence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 The process of analysis follows the general framework provided by Braun and Clarke (2006), with choices made within the framework to fit this particular study, as also suggested by the authors.
At the end of review and refinement of the themes, the collective narratives formed two distinct parts, or meta-themes, of Suffering and Agency as further outlined under each theme-specific section.

4.1.1 Meta-theme: Agency

The youth survey-respondents have outlined several aspects of the agency of Syrian youth and how that can support peacebuilding. Within this meta-theme, three distinct themes of agency are created: Build inter-group unity and cooperation, Educate and learn from the surroundings, and Help to rebuild society. The first and second themes have sub-themes: 1. Dialogue and Deconstruct divisions, and 2. Build skills to advance Syria and Increase awareness and critical thinking. Connections between the themes are found in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Themes and sub-themes to Agency

The theme Build intergroup unity and cooperation builds on that people should not focus on differences between them, but rather listen to each other and focus on what can be achieved together. The responses emphasise that Syrian youth need to unite across current divides, whether sectarian, generational, ethnic, or other. They express a need for increased communication and cooperation towards common goals of coexistence and peace; either through “Unity, exchange of ideas, and cooperation” (Nanda) or “Working to spread the concepts of peace and coexistence and nonviolence through workshops and meetings that include various components and different ages, from both gender” (Siraj). Creating social networks and cooperating with civil society is further emphasised, as well as to show love and care for others. Siraj managed to combine the sub-themes of Dialogue and Deconstruct divisions through an example of how opportunities for intergroup peace can be created:

The youth organisation Sawa (Kurdish) and the organisation Aridu (Syriac Assyrians), together with the youth (Arabs), organised the Spring Festival for four years over four days in the city of Qamishli. The festival included events such as theatre, cinema, drawing shows, folkloric shows, and joint songs in the three languages; Kurdish, Arabic and Syriac. The aim of the festival was to gather an audience of all components in one place, to sit, watch, share, and discuss together what they saw and heard. The results and outputs were very impressive as they eliminated the concerns felt about each other.
The theme of Educate and learn from others focuses on both academic, practical, and social learnings, where respondents express how education can facilitate individual development and create awareness, as well as provide tools both for negotiating and resolving conflict and for practical purposes. Yasmin views education as an instrument for encouraging “Openness, awareness, and free thinking” and Aisha expresses that “Through education young people can put forward positive and persuasive ideas and earnestly negotiate a peaceful and convincing solution to end the crisis.” It is also considered as an avenue for gaining skills that can be used for rebuilding the country, in Kenan’s words “I believe that there is no way out of the crisis except for educated students who are able to work in their respective fields.”

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes syntheses for Agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build intergroup unity and cooperation</td>
<td>Respect each other, listen to each other’s views, and cooperate among us to be able to raise our ideas together among all groups of the society.</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>Share our ideas and visions in meetings and conferences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deconstruct divisions</td>
<td>Unite in our common goals to create change and leave differences behind us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educate and learn from others</td>
<td>Education and learning from others are providing us moral and practical skills, crucial for building a conscious generation that can work to build peace.</td>
<td>Build skills to advance Syria</td>
<td>Good education is the key to personal and societal development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increase awareness and critical thinking</td>
<td>Education opens our minds and alleviates ignorance; helping us to make conscious decisions and learn from the past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help to rebuild the society</td>
<td>Youth can play an active role in rebuilding a more cohesive society, using all skills available; acquired through education or practice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The youth agency described within these themes, synthesised in Table 2, shows that the respondents are largely made up of a group of youth who feel that there are opportunities for them to engage in creating change in the society in nonviolent ways.
4.1.2 Meta-theme: Suffering

The dataset shows several issues related to suffering, which creates challenges to the lives of the youth and their potential engagement. Within the meta-theme, three distinct themes are created: *The government’s rule*, *Deprivation and frustration*, and *Violence, war, and fear*. Within the second theme, a clear sub-theme was identified: *Financial issues*. The connections between meta-theme, themes, and sub-themes are shown in Figure 2, with syntheses presented for each in Table 3.

**Figure 2**: Themes and sub-themes to Suffering

![Diagram showing the connections between themes and sub-themes]

The theme of *The government’s rule* incorporates a range of barriers, all connected to the ruling Ba’ath Party. It includes strict procedures, no freedom of opinion, forced conscription of boys into military service, and that there are few existing employment opportunities, mostly shared among the elite. It is also suggested to affect the protracted displacement, as expressed by Yildiz “Perhaps the fear of returning because of military service.” Showing that both the displacement and the fear of having to join the armed conflict can keep youth away from being peacebuilders within Syria. Moreover, the theme of Deprivation and frustration encompasses issues that cause both fatigue and frustration, where Seba suggests that barriers include “[T]he lack of economic, social, cultural and health infrastructure. These are all obstacles that cause frustration, and which are kidnapping the determination of young people.” Further emphasised by a 29-year-old female respondent, who wished to remain anonymous, explaining that it is “The deteriorating standard of living that prevents individuals from thinking and make them only think about living.” There is added stress on the financial issue, discussed partly as a general lack of means for youth, and as an issue that will prevent them from returning. The last theme of Violence, war, and fear suggests barriers that relates to lack of safety and security and that protecting oneself still must come first for many. The warring parties are also highlighted as a challenge to youth’s possibilities for participation, as Gulishan explains it: “We need to get rid of weapons and corruption in the country first and any external interference.” Thus, underlining that there are certain preconditions that needs to be in place in order for youth to participate in building peace.
The issues of suffering paint a picture of a population struggling to cater for their own basic needs, in the midst of actors encouraging societal divisions and keeping the conflict alive. Thus, making it difficult to find energy and resources to work on issues beyond survival.

### 4.2 ANALYSING THE THEMES

When analysing the themes, it becomes evident that they are coherent within, but there are also links between them. An example of how the themes link together is the theme Educate and learn from others, where there are several aspects addressing how youth can build skills that could increase their capacity to participate in rebuilding the society. Hence, connecting to Help to rebuild the society. However, the distinction between the two lies in the fact that the different extracts they build on focus on different things: within the first, the youth respondents highlight education as an instrument for acquiring skills, whilst in the second, the respondents instead discuss how they should use the skills they have to rebuild their society – skills not necessarily stemming from formal or non-formal education.

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5 One example of internal coherence is the sub-theme Increase awareness and critical thinking, where every included segment emphasises on either eliminating ignorance or learning to determine right or wrong.
4.2.1 Interpreting the Themes

The two different meta-themes are contradicting each other to a certain extent, since the suffering described limits the agency of the youth. The issue between these two meta-themes is also that agency has some references to the current reality (e.g. there are already many educated youths, many have bright ideas, and some spaces for dialogue between groups have already been created). However, much of what is suggested are rather hopes and visions for the future (e.g. they should establish social networks, try to unite people from different groups, and start to accept the ideas of others). On the other hand, under the contradicting meta-theme of suffering, the perspectives put forward through the responses are descriptions of how they see the reality of people, primarily those still in Syria. Although the respondents themselves are all currently displaced outside of Syria, they are likely to still have friends or family remaining inside the country. It is not clear, however, if the suffering they describe is based on their own experiences before departure or based on accounts that they have received after leaving.

Furthermore, the respondents express difficulties to find the time and energy to engage in anything beyond managing their basic needs, thus contradicting the agency of playing an active role in engaging more for reconstruction and reconciliation between conflicting groups. However, the agency that concerns showing respect and willingness to hold dialogue with others could still be possible, although it might need to be done on different levels for different persons: from the local market stand to the international conference table and anything in between. Moreover, education is emphasised as important for building peace, both in the responses to the question specifically addressing education and in the preceding, more general, question on how youth can be involved in building peace. Some of the responses simply stated “Education” (Diyar and Nabil) on its own as the way youth should be involved in building peace, others said that “Education at the present time is key to everything” (Amer), whilst several participants elaborated more on the topic, such as: “Education is the important and the first step to post the peace's ideas between the young people, without education the ignorance will control in our minds and our ideas.” (Souad). There were also issues raised regarding education, for example that “When the war started in Syria, the first thing that affected the people was the bombing of schools, universities and educational centres. This war spreads ignorance and the future of entire generations was killed by the absence of education.” (Seba). Thus, according to the responses, education is important for youth and peace, but still affected by the on-going violent conflict.
5 DISCUSSION

As the analysis shows, the youth see many opportunities for participation, although several are currently perceived as blocked by violence, restrictions, and the sense of despair and frustration. These issues are discussed in the reports described in chapter 2 (see Simpson 2018a; Conciliation Resources 2018), although there is an added stress on government restrictions in the responses to the survey-interview. In the existing reports, a lack of trust in the government was instead highlighted. The different issues could be based in similar perspectives. However, in the data for this study, barriers hindering people from return from displacement are additionally highlighted, relating to the restrictions and deteriorating conditions imposed as a consequence of the on-going conflict.

The issue of education is generally regarded highly as an instrument in building skills that the respondents believe can be used for building peace in Syria, including aspects of raising awareness, enhancing critical thinking, building skills in negotiation and conflict resolution, and other productive skills for rebuilding a society related to work in various sectors. However, lack of opportunities, destroyed infrastructure, and the on-going war stands in the way, based on the views of the respondents. Although the opportunities of education for peace largely speaks for that it could be considered a useful instrument, the barriers to education are seldomly discussed in relation to peace education theories. It could be because organisations that provide activities prefer to illuminate the benefits of their programmes, rather than the challenges that can make them less efficient. From the perspective of theory, much of the theory on peace education consider it as a post-war possibility, rather than viewing it as a potential instrument for building peace from within.

There is high prevalence of and great emphasis on education as a tool for learning skills in negotiation, conflict resolution, for increasing awareness and critical thinking, and as an important agent in shaping our values. This shows clear similarities with what Harris (2004) refers to as conflict resolution education; with the overall aim to teach the students about different forms of violence and nonviolent alternatives, and more specifically, to address the roots of conflict and teach students to be more open, inclusive, and cooperative. This could potentially be expanded on by including aspects from human rights education, to address how to deconstruct stereotypes and create awareness on how to access rights and justice (Harris 2004: 11, 15). It should also be realised that a more in-depth assessment of the Syrian context and the different needs and desires of future students and communities must be conducted to make further suggestions on detail. As Harris (2004: 16) also
concludes, different schools of peace education can complement each other to create a more holistic programme – they are not exclusive of one another. In the case of Syria, it might also need to include practical approaches to peace on different levels and to practise certain skills, for example negotiation through role plays and mock conferences.

It should also be considered that the variety in responses from the survey participants might stem from that they have different views of what peace is. As discussed in chapter 2.3: since there is yet to be a consensus on the positive aspects of peace, this could be considered to affect the ability to build it (Clarke-Habibi 2005). If defining peace is contextual, as with much else, then it must be addressed through a larger assessment of perspectives of those affected by it. This could, for example, be discussed and debated within the frame of education for peace.

Other opportunities for youth to be involved in peacebuilding are expressed as that they have ideas and will to engage in cooperation and dialogue across different social groups and that they are a generation with many practical skills that can be used for rebuilding a more cohesive Syria. This includes to implement new plans and use professional skills in architecture or agriculture, as well as to create spaces to meet and build new social relations among each other. They also express that their chances of building peace are limited by the violent conflict itself and the warring parties, the despair they feel over how deprived their lives have become, the frustrations that take over their minds, and the restrictive rule by the government. Thus, identified opportunities do often not receive sufficient support to realise them, or the issues of violence and struggle to access their basic rights are creating barriers that seem too high to overcome without first ending the violence. Nevertheless, there is existing evidence from other cases of when peace has started from within during a conflict.

The turning points for peace, as shown through Lederach’s (2005) story of the Wajir women, among others, can occur in different ways in different societies. With Syria, it is not easy to know where it could come from. After many encounters with Syrian youth over the past years, the idea came that they might be the ones who can turn it around. Listening to them over time has given the impression that they are often resilient and use their strength to support those around them. This is what inspired the idea of the connection between the Syrian youth and building peace from within. However, in complex times of complex conflicts, values and interests can change. That leads to the second part of trying to find an instrument that young Syrians themselves want to use for encouraging change to happen. The instrument of education seemed logical; it can be moulded to fit different contexts and
is regarded as important by many Syrians met through previously described encounters, as well as in existing literature. Nevertheless, education does not plant seeds or make them into flowers on its own, it needs contextual input and just, open-minded, critical people to maintain and develop its structures. It also needs to include how to use the things learned in practice. As one of the survey-participants expressed: “In Syria, we have a lot of peace theories, but we do not use them or apply anything in real life.” (Souad). It can be hard to apply what one has learned if the teachings do not include such practicalities or mentorships.

The issue of building peace in Syria and the inclusion of youth therein are issues that most likely cannot be addressed solely through education, even if it maintains high quality and contextual sensitivity. As the youth participants suggest, there may also be a need for battling issues on other fronts, such as the issue of stereotyping or othering that has created societal divisions, as well as the prevalence of violence and issue of fatigue. Nonetheless, most of the participants still express both desire and hope for the agency of youth as peacebuilders, and examples exist of how peace is being built from within, both in the stories told by Lederach (2005) and in the example of the Qamishli festival, explained by Siraj for this study. Therefore, it is suggested here that we look more towards the causes of peace that exist and learn from them, in combination with a greater push for youth to be acknowledged as peacebuilders and positive changemakers, both in Syria and globally.

5.1 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND APPROACHES

More research is needed on the Syrian case to understand the issue of division between various groups and how youth can be supported to deconstruct sectarianism and stereotypes, as well as what initiatives already exist in this context. There is also evidence to support that initiatives coming from within societies can contribute to further ripple effects of peace. Thus, it is strongly suggested that these should be investigated and supported more, encouraging both the humanitarian, peacebuilding, and academic communities to address this potential for peace. Furthermore, there needs to be a greater push to encourage youth participation in building peace in general, both in peace processes and in the communities. This can be done by highlighting the topic through research and academia and through everyday meetings and discussions, to normalise the participation of youth. Moreover, education for peace may be a highly regarded approach, but it must come with contextual considerations and rigorous evaluation of curriculum and outcomes. From a theoretical perspective, the academic field could contribute with this through highlighting more stories of successful and non-successful cases and work more towards improving theoretical
frameworks. The issue of peace education during conflict could also be further expanded on, which could support practitioners both in the field of humanitarian action and peacebuilding, as well as in the collaboration between the two sectors.
6 CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, the issues of context and the Syrian youth population must be revisited. There is evidence of that access to education both for Syrian youth within Syria and for those displaced outside of Syria is highly limited. Nevertheless, both formal and informal initiatives exist, but need more support. Education for peace is highlighted as a crucial instrument for peacebuilding, both in existing literature and by the participants in this study, thus showing that it is likely to be an accepted tool for creating further opportunities for the inclusion of youth in the Syrian context. This is emphasised by the fact that the perspectives of the youth respondents largely align with existing peace programmes. However, the role of education has potential to be expanded as a platform for creating more possibilities, e.g. through incorporating education for peace in the learning of practical skills, as well as to support further avenues for intergroup contact and dialogue. These additions to existing approaches should receive further attention.

The respondents show great will and express that there is already much existing potential for youth to act on the issues, both through initiatives in the past and hopes for the future. However, in addressing how they could participate, the barriers they see must be managed, so that they can access the suggested opportunities that are still hindered by restrictions, deprivation, and violence. To increase opportunities, the limited support systems that exist must collaborate to achieve maximum impact. Hence calling for a joint approach among humanitarian and peacebuilding actors to support existing initiatives for peace and expand further avenues.

Nonetheless, it is suggested here that some Syrian youth would have the agency to start building peace from within, through their own suggested measures of increased communication and in cooperation with others. If more youth and other persons see and are willing to act on these opportunities, and take initiative for it, then building peace from within could expand. Hopefully also leading to increased inclusion of youth in more processes for peace. Meanwhile, the issue of increased support must be addressed, as must the transition to end the violent conflict.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1: SURVEY FORM

Youth and Peace in Syria - الشباب والسلام في سوريا

First of all, thank you for being here and participating!
أولاً، أريد أن أشكركم على المشاركة في هذا الاستبيان.

I am currently conducting research for my master's thesis within the Humanitarian Action in Conflict Programme at Uppsala University, Sweden.
أنا في خضم إتمام هذا البحث الذي سيستخدم في أطروحة الماجستير في مجال العمل الإنساني خلال النزاعات التي أدرسها في جامعة أويسالا، السويد.

The research focuses on challenges and opportunities for young Syrian people between the ages of 18-29 years for participation in building peace in Syria and how education could contribute to the chances of participation.
يركز البحث هذا على العقبات والفرص التي يواجهها الشباب السوري بين الاعمار ٨١ و ٩٢ عند المشاركة في عمليات إحلال السلام والنهوض بالمجتمع بعد الأزمة في سوريا وعن أهمية التعليم ودوره في خدمة هذه الجهود.

The purpose of this interview is to gain your perspective on a few aspects of youth participation and building peace. Your experiences and insights are greatly appreciated, and I would be very happy to read some examples from you when you answer the last three questions.
هدف هذا الاستبيان هو أن أتعرف على وجهة نظركم المتعلقة بمشاركة الشباب في إحلال السلام في سوريا وعن أهمية التعليم ودوره في خدمة هذه الجهود.

Please write your answers in either English, Arabic, Swedish or German - choose the one you prefer, but please keep to one language per question.
الرجاء الإجابة بأي لغة ترغبون بها - العربية، الإنجليزية، السويدية أو الألمانية. ولكن الرجاء الإجابة بلغة واحدة في السؤال الواحد.

Excerpts of your answers and possibly the entirely of your answers may be quoted in the upcoming thesis.
سأقوم بنسب جواباتكم أو جزء منها في الأطروحة التي أعمل على إتمامها.

Any answers you provide will be used for academic purposes only, and maximum two factors will be used if your answers are quoted, e.g. "Mahmoud from Dera’a explains that..." or "Um Ali, 27 years, says that...". By submitting your answers, you agree to have said answers published within an academic research paper, which may be viewed by students, university faculty, and/or the general public.
أي جواب سأقوم بتقديم مقتطفاته في الأطروحة البحثية، ولكن ستستخدم فقط لجواباتكم من اثنين على الأقصى. عن طريق تقدمنا في هذا الاستجابة، اتفقوا أن تنشر في هذه الأطروحة البحثية، والتي قد تطلع عليها أعضاء جامعة وأعضاء المجتمع العام.

Thank you so much again, I look forward to learning from you! /Emma
شكرا جزيلا، أنا اتطلع للتعلم من أجوبتكم.

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What is your spoken name? (optional question - no surname, please, only one name for quotes) ما هو اسمك؟ (هذا السؤال اختياري - لا تضع اسم عائلتك، فقط اسمك الأول لتسجيل أجابتك في الأطروحه)

Which town/area are you from? (optional question) من أي منطقة/مدينة أنت؟ (سؤال اختياري)

What is your nationality of origin? * ما هي جنسيتك؟

- Syrian
- Other

How old are you? * كم عمرك؟

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28
- 29
- Other

What is your gender? * ما هو جنسيتك؟

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- Other
Have you been displaced due to the crisis in Syria? هل اضطررت لترك بلدك بسبب الأزمة في سوريا؟ *

- [ ] Yes نعم
- [ ] No لا

Which country are you currently living in? في أي بلد تعيش في الوقت الحالي؟ *

Do you think youth should participate in building peace in Syria? هل تظن أن الشباب يجب عليهم المشاركة في بناء السلام وإخراج المجتمع السوري من الأزمة في سوريا؟ *

- [ ] Yes نعم
- [ ] No لا
- [ ] Maybe ربما

How do you suggest that youth should be involved in building peace in Syria? (please feel free to include examples) برأيك كيف يمكن للشباب أن يشاركون في عملية بناء السلام وإخراج المجتمع السوري من الأزمة في سوريا؟ (بإمكانك توضيح أمثلة عن ذلك) *

How do you think education can affect the opportunities for youth to participate in building peace in Syria? (please feel free to include examples) برأيك كيف يمكن أن يؤثر التعليم على فرص الشباب في بناء السلام وإخراج المجتمع السوري من الأزمة في سوريا؟ (بإمكانك التوضيح عبر أمثلة) *

What challenges do you see for youth to be able to participate in building peace in Syria? (please feel free to include examples) ما هي العوائق التي قد تمنع الشباب من المشاركة في مشاريع إحلال السلام ومساعدة المجتمع بالنهوض بعد الأزمة في سوريا؟ (بإمكانك التوضيح عبر أمثلة) *