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Civilians Creating Safe Space: The Role of Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping in Protection of Civilians

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ABSTRACT
The demand for protection for civilians threatened by direct violence is huge, and most responses draw on 'Protection of Civilians' (PoC) by military peacekeepers. In Myanmar and the Philippines, civilians use nonviolence to protect people in their communities from direct violence showing that PoC is carried out by local actors and in sites outside military peacekeeping missions. Evidence from those communities, and the use of Unarmed Civilian Protection, challenges the assumption that only the military can do PoC, and provides the basis for broadening the scope of PoC to better protect civilians from direct violence.

Introduction

Civilians are subject to numerous violent threats if they live or work in areas of armed conflict. There is the direct threat of attack by an armed group, and the increased risk of other threats such as kidnap, rape, being forced to join the armed group, passing through checkpoints and roadblocks, or being forcibly displaced. Violence takes many forms, and these threats are all categorised as direct violence, meaning there is a risk of, or actual, immediate physical harm. Other forms of violence, such as structural violence also cause civilians harm including, but not limited to, poverty, no access to healthcare, or having limited education. This paper is concerned with situations where civilians experience direct violence because it is this form of violence that UN/AU armed peacekeepers are called on to deal with when given a 'protection of civilians' component to their mandate, and it is this form of violence in which unarmed civilians carry out the protection of civilians activities without the military and without the use of weapons. This paper argues that protecting civilians in armed conflict is broader and more multifaceted than the deployment of armed peacekeepers and that the framework of Unarmed Civilian

Protection (UCP) shows how it includes unarmed civilians directly protecting other civilians.

Each violent conflict contains a complexity comprising different types of violence, a wide range of actors, and many types of threats to civilians. There is rarely a clear good and bad side, and the political or civil war triggers domestic and community violence so the threats, armed actors, civilians, and protection actors all operate within a complex environment. As well as threats to their lives, local people are often excluded from opportunities to participate in decision-making that affects them or get recognition for the intersectional impact of threats, or protection activities on their lives. This creates a complex context in which local actors can be seen as objects of the mechanisms rather than actors in them.

There is a clear need to improve responses and provide adequate protection to civilians experiencing direct violence because of the huge numbers of civilians at risk. In UN armed peacekeeping, this is where the 'protection of civilians' sits in the mandates and has been extensively researched (See other articles in this special issue, Hultman 2013, Willmot and Sheeran 2013, Willmot *et al.* 2016, IPI 2019, Wels 2019). In this paper, evidence is presented that effective 'protection of civilians' activities happen outside UN armed peacekeeping missions and are carried out by unarmed civilians and that meaningful inclusion of communities in protection mechanisms and strategies is one way that we can expand and improve 'protection of civilians'.

The question this paper asks is 'how do we best protect civilians from direct violence when contexts are diverse and by including local capacities so that mechanisms are effective?' The paper aims to illustrate that we can broaden PoC by recognising community capacity and the opportunities created by including unarmed civilian protection as an additional framework within the concept of PoC.

Literature and Framework

We first need to place Protection of Civilians in the context of the wider protection system. The term 'protection' encompasses all types of action that are designed to reduce the risk of harm to civilians and includes rights, dignity, trauma, human rights defenders, and creating a protective environment (GPPI 2013, Fast 2018) using a range of theories and approaches (deterrence, protection egg, presence, legal rights or monitoring). To study protection, most researchers sit within other well-established fields of human rights, humanitarian response, or peacekeeping because the field of protection is still emerging. This broad and, I would argue, contested meaning of protection hides some unchallenged assumptions about who is a protection actor, the importance of context, and community capacity, which are as

relevant to the specific focus on Protection of Civilians (PoC) as to other areas of study in the field of protection.

Protection of Civilians (PoC)

PoC is primarily framed as a function of UN or regional military actions (African Union, NATO, or European Union) and armed peacekeeping. The study of PoC has equally remained focused on the activities, roles, and decisions related to military peacekeeping or missions where PoC is a component of the mandate.

This paper aims to challenge the assumption that the military are the only actor in this space by conceptualising PoC as 'the identification and reduction of physical threats to people in situations of armed conflict'. This opens the possibility that it is defined by objective rather than by actor or inclusion in a mandate. Examples of PoC activities and behaviours (regardless of actor) include preventing armed groups from attacking civilians by standing in the way or through direct negotiation, changing the behaviour of armed groups through presence, and proactively engaging with leaders in armed groups to stop activities that risk harm to civilians. It can also include tackling rape and sexually based violence by soldiers, or preventing domestic violence by accompanying women who are at risk. PoC can also mean being present when people are at risk of kidnap and to prevent disappearances by armed groups.

If PoC is the response to civilians being harmed by direct violence then it cannot be true that the only protection available is in the few military missions and no protection available to everyone else. This paper suggests that if we re-think PoC as protecting civilians from direct violence in all armed conflict then we can study all forms of protection by all actors and begin to design effective programmes regardless of where they are needed and inclusive of the local community. This paper is not arguing that other forms of protection can 'support or be complementary' to military protection because this would reinforce an assumption that military is required or necessary in PoC. It argues we need to reconceptualise PoC so that the military are one of the possible actors, and that NGOs, local communities and individuals are equal actors in preventing and reducing violence depending on the context.

The study of PoC has been dominated by research on UN/AU armed peacekeeping missions and although studies (Hultman 2013) suggest that PoC by armed peacekeepers is effective, this literature only considers this question within the context of military peacekeeping vs no military peacekeeping. The literature does not consider if other forms of peacekeeping would be more effective in PoC, or if there are any negative impacts of using the military to protect civilians from violence. PoC can be achieved

through threat and coercion (Karlsrud 2015), but Furnari (2015) and Gray (2022) also show that relationships are vital, and that deep engagement and presence (Mahony and Eguren 1997) are also components of how to protect civilians.

Unarmed Civilian Protection

In this paper using 'unarmed civilian protection' (UCP) as the framework for exploring a wider concept of PoC enables us to broaden the range of actors and sites involved in studying and assessing the complex work of protecting civilians from violence. It explores some of the assumptions that could be limiting our understanding of how PoC works that could risk disrupting existing community capacities. UCP is a useful framework because it is a non-military protection mechanism that has already demonstrated that there are groups doing peacekeeping tasks outside sites of UN peacekeeping missions (Julian and Gasser 2019), and it has over 35 years of history of protecting civilians (Moser-Puangsuwan 1996, Mahony and Eguren 1997, Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber 2000, Julian and Schweitzer 2015).

UCP is when trained, disciplined individuals and organisations use non-violence to protect other civilians from direct violence by being physically present and fully engaged with the communities requiring protection. It is defined as *'UCP is the practice of deploying unarmed civilians before, during, and after violent conflict, to prevent or reduce violence, to provide direct physical protection to other civilians, and to strengthen or build resilient local peace infrastructures'*. (Oldenhuis *et al.* 2015, p. 11).

UCP is used throughout the world. Examples of organisations who do UCP are Nonviolent Peaceforce (www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org) and Peace Brigades International (www.peacebrigades.org). One of the principles of UCP is that the protection activities happen at the community level and UCP staff live and work in the affected communities, developing relationships and being able to do direct protection work as tensions rise (Furnari 2015). In UCP they use non-violent methods (Julian and Schweitzer 2015, Julian 2020) which means no one carries weapons or threatens violence, but they influence and change the behaviour of armed actors to reduce attacks on civilians and comply with agreements (Oldenhuis *et al.* 2015, Julian UN May 24th). The role of unarmed strategies was acknowledged and noted in the HIPPO report (UN 2015) and to enable those strategies to be used there must be more research into how unarmed and military strategies could interact because they operate in similar contexts.

UCP is a mechanism that is all about protecting civilians from violence. Although protective activities (e.g., sanctuary, negotiation with armed actors) are centuries old, modern UCP dates from the mid 1980s when

international peace activists travelled to Nicaragua and Guatemala to protect civilians from attacks (Moser-Puangsuwan 1996, Schweitzer *et al*. 2001, Schirch 2006) and found that their presence kept local people safe. PBI has been consistently protecting human rights defenders from death threats and none of them have been killed while protected by PBI. This is PoC when there is no UN/AU military peacekeeping mission. Even when UCP operates in the same country as UN military peacekeeping protecting the same population from the same threats, such as in South Sudan, UCP can work directly with communities, involve communities in their own protection (Women Protection Teams in South Sudan) and provide protection to local staff (Nonviolent Peaceforce 2015). If PoC is the physical protection of civilians from violence in armed conflict, then UCP does PoC.

UCP research has so far focused on activities or mechanisms (Eastholm 2015, Engelbrecht and Kaushik 2015), the connection to long-term peacebuilding (Furnari *et al*. 2015) or peacekeeping (Julian and Gasser 2019), on how it works (Mahony and Eguren 1997, Julian and Schweitzer 2015, Furnari 2016) in specific places (Myanmar, Colombia, the Philippines) and its historical development (Moser-Puangsuwan 1996, Schweitzer *et al*. 2001, Schirch 2006, Julian and Schweitzer 2015). There is a body of literature showing that unarmed civilians using non-violence are effective against violence in multiple circumstances. These studies come from civil resistance (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, Bartkowski 2013), UCP (Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber 2000, Schweitzer *et al*. 2001, Furnari 2016, Wallace 2016, Kapplan 2016, Julian 2020) and non-violence studies (Francis 2010). These show that military are not the only option for tackling violence, and studies (Francis 2013, Julian and Gasser 2019) highlight the negative issues related to using the military (including increased militarism and gender issues). UCP has been studied in contexts where the violence is from armed state and non-state actors (Myanmar), targeted human rights defenders, and local and tribal violence (the Philippines and South Sudan) and has shown to be effective. The research for this paper is from Myanmar and the Philippines, which are sites where people are using UCP to reduce risks and tackle threats of direct violence.

The characteristics of UCP as embedded in communities, revealing capacities and methods that contribute to local and community protection from direct violence and contextual selection of UCP methods (e.g., proactive presence looks different in each place) help explain its useful nature as a lens for thinking about how PoC works in a wide range of situations. The UCP methodology has been encapsulated by Duncan et al. in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1. (Duncan *et al.* 2015)

Local Agency

Over many years, reorienting the focus of peacebuilding from elites and institutions towards local people and communities has resulted in new understandings of the role of local people in creating sustainable long-term peace and peaceful conflict resolution. The components that are relevant to this paper include the inclusion of local experiential knowledge to ensure that a conflict and context analysis is complete, all entry points are identified (Autesserre 2014a, 2014b), that local communities have agency and capacity to influence the path towards peace (Reich 2006, Hayman 2013), and that peace cannot be built without local people who are involved in the conflict. Some of the challenges of recognising the role of local people are that 'local' is defined in relation to the 'international' or outsider perspective and their actions are viewed as additional, rather than primary. Local is often recognised as important, but this is not the same status as being fully included as agents of change. The recognition of 'local' as the primary actor and managing their full inclusion requires an understanding of power and control that

doesn't privilege outsider knowledge over locals (Hirblinger and Simons 2015, Julian *et al.* 2019).

Understanding the importance of recognising the local agency in the midst of armed conflict (the local turn in peacebuilding) is well developed (Paffenholz 2010, Mac Ginty 2011, Woodhouse and Lederach 2016) and through UCP it can equally be applied to peacekeeping. In this paper the case studies provide examples of local people having a primary role and demonstrating their capacity. The challenge of reorientating our view of power and agency is addressed by including a non-violence perspective, which conceptualises power so we can recognise the power in civil society and communities.

This paper seeks to specifically use UCP as a framework and mechanism to study local protection activities that fit the description of peacekeeping (Julian and Gasser 2019) and therefore can challenge the frame of debate on PoC. This paper argues that the evidence of local capacities in protection, the use of unarmed strategies, and the specific benefits they bring to understanding the effectiveness of protection (see the discussion section of this paper) is why we should broaden out the concept of PoC from its current focus on outsider-led approaches. The conclusion details some ways in which this could happen.

Methodology

To study UCP researchers draw on local experiential knowledge using participatory qualitative methods in which local people share, as well as with the trained peer researchers, thus capturing stories and experiences that local people categorise as part of protection, without having to be familiar with the terminology. The results are analysed by the research team, including how their actions fit the UCP framework.

Using findings from participatory qualitative research projects in Myanmar and the Philippines this paper shows how civilians are protected from imminent and direct violence in these situations by other civilians who are non-violent and using unarmed civilian protection.

In the Raising Silent Voices project (Myanmar),[1] researchers listened to local volunteers and coordinators who had been trained in UCP to enhance their existing capacities and give them more options and strategies that would help them prepare for a range of scenarios. The research was carried out with local peer researchers (Julian *et al.* 2019) and took place before the military coup in 2021. The research gathered data from the stories of local protection volunteers and studied the varied forms of violence experienced by people living in Kachin through drawing and storytelling. The themes from the research on the importance of recognising the lives of local protectors (on motivation, opportunity, and risk) have been published, and the data used in

this paper focuses on the protective behaviours that resulted in protecting civilians without the use of weapons. Some of the stories and drawings used in the evidence for this paper were also published in a booklet of the drawings and quotes from participants.

In 'Roles and tasks of civilians'[2](Philippines) local researchers in Mindanao held workshops with communities, and interviewed individuals, to learn what activities they undertook when protecting one another. Mindanao is an example of a bottom-up community-led ceasefire monitoring mission (Bantay Ceasefire) that went on to have a formal role in the Civilian Protection Component of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The research themes included Civilian Ceasefire Monitoring,[3] which has been published in a Working Paper by Creating Safer Spaces project, and in this paper the data demonstrates the protective approaches that have been used in the communities.

In the workshops the participants took the time to become confident in using drawing to begin a discussion on peace and protection. They were asked to draw responses to the prompts such as 'what is protection?', 'what is your role as a civilian in maintaining peace and order?' The projects used in this paper all involved the NGO Nonviolent Peaceforce as the local partner as well as national NGOs.

Results

The evidence for how UCP protects civilians comes from research with local partners in Myanmar (Raising Silent Voices, RSV) and the Philippines (Impact of Civilians Monitoring the Philippines Framework and Comprehensive Agreements).

In this paper the data from the two studies demonstrate that they are using UCP methods and therefore that UCP is using community-led and local mechanisms to protect civilians from direct violence. These studies are both about protecting civilians and illustrate that PoC involves more people and places than military peacekeeping currently provides.

Myanmar Results

In Myanmar the UCP activity described here took place in Kachin state where international workers are not able to travel freely, but where local communities have long used protective behaviours to reduce harms created by living in a militarised state. There is no UN peacekeeping mission and civilians are threatened by state and non-state actors.

In the RSV project, seeking to understand how the lives of people influence their protective strategies and approaches, we learned that they very clearly understood their complex context. They know there weren't just 2–3 groups

fighting, but multiple small groups, armed by the Burmese military, crossing borders, with changing alliances, and all trying to secure geographical and economic power. The community members had adopted many strategies to keep safe, by hiding, changing routes to work to avoid them, or quietly paying 'taxes' to be left alone. One participant explained how they had to leave for an IDP camp or run to hide in the jungle. *'It was our village which became the first IDP Camp after that initial clash. The initial clash lasted just for a while, and things got back to normal. Instead, there were serious clashes in other places. To avoid those battles it was possible to hide in the jungle'.* The coordinators and volunteers worked out how to help the communities plan a response, provide early warning, and use new ways to engage with the armed actors. One of the protection volunteers told how he invited armed actors, who he knew, to share a meal, then used that as an opportunity to discuss their responsibilities under the bilateral agreement they had signed to get their agreement to reduce the violence towards civilians. It wasn't always officials who undertook the negotiations, a participant told of their experience of being asked to help negotiate with the military. *'Even though I am not a member of the IDP camp administration committee or otherwise in charge, I am often asked to counsel and troubleshoot, because I am someone who knows how to talk to military personnel or leaders'.*

The activities carried out to protect civilians included escorting civilians to safety when armed groups invaded their village or came to attack them, learning and checking safe routes, having supplies and resources ready in case they have to move quickly, and monitoring the activities of armed groups so they know when a situation deteriorates. To keep the people safe they were sometimes led across borders and had to work together to hide from armed actors. The group developed organised monitoring systems, which are more than just observing and reporting, and the monitoring was carried out against the backdrop of the bilateral peace agreements that were in place, but fleeing to safety is not easy or straightforward. Even though the volunteers and coordinators could find and monitor the routes, they needed a place to flee to, somewhere that was safe. For communities who had to flee their homes and be accommodated elsewhere, the participants explained that it was community leaders, organisations and other groups who helped provide a safe space for them to flee to. Participants explained what happened when they were threatened by clashes between the armed groups and needed to flee the area to stay safe. There was no obvious place for them to go to, but temporary camps or accommodation in a church was found. They described how their faith group worked to find them safe space, explaining *Finally, our village parson was contacted by the district-level secretary of the Kachin Baptist Association. They took action to build temporary camps. Civilians around the state capital who were affected by the armed clashes*

also found some possible temporary places, to stay away from those clashes. Kachin Baptist Convention churches allotted spaces for the refugees. They also tried to get in contact with NGOs.

For the people who do, and want, protection from violence they strongly connected to concepts of creating and keeping the peace, and the participants we spoke to were confident sharing what peace means to them because they desire this peace when they do the protection work. In Kachin people were willing to share their ideas on what peace meant to them and their role in creating that peace. In analysing their responses you can see that peace is comprised of many components (relational, state and social well-being), and when thinking about a peaceful future the participants were clear that it had to be peace for everyone, not just their communities, but all of those who are fighting. For example one call was that peace was '*Equal rights and opportunities for all ethnicities*' indicating that they see that solidarity is part of peace, and that it will take many people to create it who share their time and energy. As it was artwork in the workshops, the participants sometimes used metaphors to explain how they saw peace, and this can powerfully show how they see their role alongside everyone else who is needed. A beautiful example is when a participant shared '*I've symbolized myself as a big tree rooted at the bank of a river. The river represents organisations which are providing aid to us, the IDP's [. . .] There is not only one tree, but also many other trees, bushes, small and big plants depending on the river. We are making our lives in complex ways*'. On the other hand, as well as everyone being recognised and included equally, they emphasised the importance of your family being safe, and being with your family, as indicators of peace. One participant described peace as '*being together with the family*' and another described their role as '*I am a big shady tree for family and relatives, children and generations, and those who are in trouble*'. Amongst both the societal justice and family needs is having trust as the basis of relationships. One participant explained that to have peace there must be '*trust between individuals and organisations*'. These are all relational aspects of peace and we can see why people who protect their communities will imagine peace like this, but the need to improve security and make it safe for people to live there is seen as the responsibility of government and other public services. Outside the relational space, participants said they wanted to be safe, saying peace is '*A safe and secure place to live*'. They were clear that the civilian government[4] and its agencies were responsible and wanted them to be able to make it safe for them to live. Someone explained that the government must be allowed to make and implement security policies for there to be peace, saying there must be '*No interference in civilian government by the military*', and someone else believed it to be important that the agents of the state must play their role, emphasising the need for '*Police, soldiers and other public service personnel respect the public*'.

The final component is the need to ensure social well-being, which for these participants meant having opportunities to work and earn a living, and provision of social welfare including education and healthcare, as components of the peace that they wanted. It's not just any education, for them to feel valued and recognised they want the education to show the different cultures among the ethnic minorities. One participant explained they wanted '*fair education that recognizes history, culture and rights of ethnic minorities*'. As well as job opportunities, they spoke of how they could grow their own food when there was peace and this ties very much to being able to stay in once place to have time to grow crops on soil that you improve, a participant explained they wanted '*rich soil to grow crops*'. Above all, under social well-being, people wanted peace so that they could live with security and know that they would not be hungry. Someone shared that peace was '*Being able to meet basic needs, like eating and clothing*'. The metaphor which was shared to explain how and why peace is going to take many people working together draws on a cultural festivity when people dance the Mano Dance, which is about everyone working together. In the workshop a participant explained that the local cultural Mano Dance is a symbol of peace, sharing that '*In the Kachin Mano Dance, everyone participates, without limitation of age, class, poor or rich. The pangolin does not like to be in a group, it loves to be individual. For the peaceful development of a country this is not enough. All the people have to get involved, engage, and contribute to that it can be a Mano Dance celebrating peace*'.

The importance of having a ceasefire mechanism and method through which violations are reported helped people feel safer. Civilians felt safer when the Civilian Ceasefire Mechanism (CCM) was active and reporting serious violations, and those people doing the monitoring were seen as frontline workers taking risks to protect their communities. The civilian ceasefire monitors see their role as creating peace between civilians. One of their tasks is to share news about the peace agreement within the communities and advocate for individuals who are arrested or injured. One component of this is how they control rumours of fighting that make people scared, checking rumours and sharing what they find out to prevent armed groups from retaliating. They know who is safe to travel with, for example, travelling with monks so they are safe meeting with armed groups, and they know which tools will help them, for example providing phones that are not controlled by the military to villagers who need them.

When there is an airstrike people flee from villages and into the towns, and they become too scared to go back. Part of the role of CCM is to raise this issue with higher levels in the ceasefire reporting. CCM is a component of UCP because being able to monitor how armed actors comply with the agreement uses the tasks of proactive engagement, patrolling, monitoring, and confidence building. It's not the only UCP activity to take place in Myanmar, but

using UCP to increase local participation in maintaining the bilateral agreements means the local knowledge is harnessed because it uses non-violence, it means that civilians have their methods that work and which build the relationships they need to keep them safe.

In Myanmar, as in so many places of armed conflict, people have grown up and are living with the violence for decades, without any international intervention or support. They have, in that time, developed ways of protecting themselves and their families. They have built up agency and capacity. The bottom-up approach of UCP in Myanmar started with their experiences, enhanced their capacity, and gave them training that they wanted (rather than training that was required by policy).

Myanmar is a very interesting case because there is no doubt that civilians face threats from multiple armed actors as well as insecure employment, displacement and in some cases being refused citizenship, but there is no international military actor able to intervene in Myanmar. Local people have created protection mechanisms, and they use non-violence because it is effective in mobilising communities and opening communication with the armed actors, which is necessary to make themselves safer. UCP, underpinned by the local and non-violence principles is a framework that can be adapted to this context. Myanmar is one of the places where the international military would not be welcome to protect civilians, and where the state is also one of the threats, but civilians still need protection from direct violence. In this case it shows that local mechanisms work and non-violence can be effective in places with high levels of military and militia activity, thus opening the space for debating how we protect civilians without military missions.

Mindanao Results

In Mindanao, Philippines, there is no UN peacekeeping mission but there is an organised civilian protection component of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement which is NGO and civilian-led. The organised nature of the PoC work grew from the bottom-up designed mechanism of civilian ceasefire monitoring and Community Early Warning Early Response (EWER).[5] In EWER, the communities worked together to study and evaluate the risks and threats that they face and organise pre-planned responses to those threats that were community-led and sustainable. Each community designed their EWER differently, making it relevant for their micro context. They might have common features in terms of reporting and coordination, but it depended on the different threats they faced after they had analysed the situation and come up with with ways they could help people respond to a threat. An EWER participant from Datu Piang shared that *if a community is peaceful we can see schools and big trees. The tree represents our work. As peace monitors we look at the root cause of the conflict . . . we also guide civilians to*

a safer space to keep them from harm. To do this work the community protection teams learned about the peace agreement, what constitutes a violation and were trained to be able to investigate it, and they studied human rights and international law so they could advocate for their rights with armed actors. During the Buganga workshop they shared how the training and participating in EWER helped them, saying that *'Now I feel my safety is enhanced because I learned what to do'* and how proud they were to wear the shirts which identified them as EWER monitors. In the Datu Piang workshop the participants were all members of the local EWER. They explained that they were monitors because they wanted to show their own commitment to making their communities peaceful and one explained *'because I am a grassroots monitor and a peace advocate I support all peace initiatives. I want to show everybody that we want peace'*, They talked about how their insecurity came from fear of attack during a siege, how the destruction of culture led to a breakdown in community structures and systems, and the fear of becoming sick and not being able to get medical help. In response to all this, they took training that enabled many of them to set up and join the community based Early Warning and Early Response. Across the workshops and interviews the importance of community connection and family ties were clear as both motivation for why they wanted to participate in, and build, the protection component, and also how they couldn't do it alone. In one story a community protector told us about an imminent military attack on a marketplace filled with civilians. They knew the soldiers and the commanders involved so they were able to go and talk directly with the front line soldiers who were waiting to be given orders to fire. They reminded the soldiers that it might be their own families that they could be shooting because the market place was filled with civilians. They were asking the soldiers to think and wait and not shoot until the market place could be cleared. While the soldiers were being asked to think and wait, other people had stepped in to evacuate the marketplace so the civilians were taken to safety. As a part of their protective role, people are responsible for collecting and sharing data regarding the compliance of signed agreements. This includes monitoring military movements, tracking the number of rido incidents resolved without violence, and documenting the situation of displaced individuals. This data helps to address urgent needs and ensure that the agreements are being upheld. This helps local and displaced people have access to information and feel that they have not been forgotten.

EWER monitors tackle many threats. Rido[6] is a source of threat for local people because rido leaves people in Mindanao experiencing multiple levels and forms of violence. This means that any protective strategy must be able to manage the complexity of threats from the political violence addressed in the agreement, and the rido. Each individual experiences multiple threats and a protective strategy that only tackles one threat means that they stay

vulnerable. By training people to do their own local analysis the complexity can be built into the threat perception and responses right from the beginning. UCP can equally be applied to rido in the same way as the political violence because in analysing the risks, some of the threats they identify can are generated through the rido, and some from the political violence. One of the roles of peace monitors and protectors is to help build confidence that the signed political agreements will hold and that people will be safer. To begin, they tell people about the agreement and explaining that they need to be patient and wait for the improvement because getting a peace agreement to work takes a long time. In the workshops they shared the ways they explained the ways they explained the slow progress of a peace agreement to other people. For example they said *'it is likened to a truck, it has started, it did not take off yet'*, or *'BARMM is not a lamp that when you switch it on the 4 corners of a room will be lighted immediately'*. The monitors clearly understand the scale of the challenge, but part of their role is communicating this to other people so they do not give up. Understanding that peace and security takes time is powerful and how local people know the history and experiences of those involved so they can tell others to be patient and they are believed that it will happen in time but outsiders will not know the history of the community and not be able to build the confidence which is needed. By encouraging people to be patient and not join armed rebel groups in desperation, the monitors are helping to break the cycle of violence. The peace monitors mentioned some of the challenges they face personally. Some people are suspicious that they are being used as military assets because they talk to the military and could supply information to the military. Sometimes the civilians expect immediate assistance once they have provided information. If civilians report shelling or attack, they expect the peace monitors to be able to halt the attack immediately but the only ones who can halt the attack are the commanders and soldiers of the attacking group (remembering that this situation is the same for armed and unarmed peacekeepers). The monitors explain that they have to be aware and conscious of the safety of the volunteers at all times. The motivations for the EWER volunteers is very personal. They want their families to be safer in the future. The need for peace in the community is connected to the need for peace in families and for children. In the research workshops, the participants described the need for peace in ways that are meaningful for them including the role of family (e.g., *'this mother is holding her child's hand'*) and that they feel safe because the International Monitoring Team are present and would provide immediate mediation when there is a threat from armed groups. As well as the strong emphasis on family protection as the basis for community protection, participants cited traditional cultures as important.

The work of civilians in Mindanao is a very useful case study because the original mechanism developed by Bantay Ceasefire was a non-violent

solution to the threat of armed groups who were subject to agreements which limited their activities. Within it, the trained civilians monitored threats and created response strategies for when tensions increased, which made it safer for them. All across Mindanao thousands of local people took training and participated in activities that fit the UCP approach (locally led, non-violent protection from direct violence). They became recognised within the formal structures of the peace agreement as well as continuing to de-escalate and design local responses. UCP has become normal in Mindanao. If UCP is used for protecting civilians and this is recognised in a formal document and becomes normal within an area that has experienced violence for decades, it demonstrates that there are other ways of thinking about PoC. In places where there is a strong military presence (both Mindanao and Myanmar) there is a constant tension between the safety the military provide through their presence and protective work to prevent attacks on the people due to the fear of attack on civilians by a military group. In one workshop in Mindanao 'being safe' was attributed to the checkpoints and army presence, whilst at the same time depending on community-based protection in village halls and by NGOs. This contradiction is inherent when the international community gives the state the main responsibility to protect the civilians, but also allows them to classify some people as a 'threat' who can be targeted with violence. The state does not always recognise all civilians as citizens, or they can view a group as a threat which means they justify attacking them. UCP sits outside state mechanisms of protection of civilians and engages with them when the state can help (for example reporting into ceasefire mechanisms). UCP also helps communities design protection strategies which recognise the state forces as one of the threats they will have to monitor and respond to, and bring in new responses to mitigate the harm.

Discussion

In both of the examples above, civilians provide evidence that they protect others from violence, without the use of weapons. Their experiences can be analysed as contributing to our understanding of how their work influences the way we conceptualise PoC.

The evidence from the case studies of civilians using UCP in the Philippines and Myanmar can be summarised into the following points, i) that the local people and communities have capacity to act, ii) that contextual design, even micro-context analysis, works in designing specific mechanisms to fit local situations, iii) that relationships are essential, and this emerges from the use of non-violence, iv) that the complexity of multiple levels of violence can be embraced, and v) that there are local meanings of security and peace, which will influence what the outcomes are of the protection.

Although this paper argues that the inclusion, recognition, and enhancement of local communities is PoC from direct violence, this also rectifies an imbalance in which their experiences and capacity are not valued or used to design effective protection measures. We should not confuse this with communities being 'left' to deliver a wholly local protection service when national and international support could be provided to make them safer and create a secure environment in which they can work. Protection demands vertical relationships and communication pathways as well as local horizontal ones. The components of the vertical network might include commanders of armed units, national faith leaders, heads of local government, international NGOs, and agencies. We must consider how the evidence in this paper demonstrates the capacity of local people to be active in protection but not use it as an excuse to abandon them without support.

We'll look at each of these points in turn, reviewing the evidence from case studies and published material and how they contribute to a new approach to PoC.

Growing Existing Local Capacity in Communities

The examples show there is existing local capacity for protection. In Myanmar and Mindanao, local people were able to use their micro-analysis to implement effective protection mechanisms because their knowledge was valued and included. Before agencies and researchers arrived, people already kept alert and had plans for protecting their families and communities. UCP supports and enhances this and provides additional skills, networks and information.

In Mindanao the community established an informal process and trained volunteers across the island because they knew that more violations of the ceasefire agreements led to more civilian harm and casualties. They could see an immediate benefit of community-led monitoring and reporting on ceasefire violations because they knew that the process of observing armed actors changes their behaviour. This draws directly on the deterrence methodology in Mahony and Eguren (1997) where they demonstrated how the accompaniment of human rights defenders (an activity which involves watching for those who want to carry out violent threats towards the human rights defenders) reduced the risk of threats being carried out. In Mindanao, in the community-led process, they built relationships with the armed leaders, informing them that their activities were being monitored, training local people to understand the parameters of the ceasefire agreement, and creating a process for reporting violations to the ceasefire mechanism and local press. Therefore, the leaders of the armed groups would be aware of the consequences of violating the ceasefire agreement, which increases the likelihood of their compliance.

In Myanmar, the fractured nature of the state and people living under military rule for decades meant that they were used to relying on one another for security and being able to monitor the movements and activities of armed actors. The bilateral arrangements of the peace agreement presented an opportunity for local monitoring to be collected and passed to the joint monitoring mechanism and therefore for the local protective approaches to be developed with the support of international and national NGOs. The local motivation for protecting people was to make it safer for their families, and their capacity went beyond simple monitoring and reporting because they also negotiated with armed actors, and helped groups escape from violence.

Growing capacity means recognising and finding the skills and processes which are useful, but to grow it there must be some training and building of stronger mechanisms. For example, in both Myanmar and the Philippines volunteers were trained to take on roles in their community, to learn their rights and the responsibilities outlined in the peace agreements, and also to design EWER systems that would work for them. The type of training that communities mention includes non-violence, that everyone has human rights, that maintaining a good relationship with everyone means you do not fight, where to make reports, and if you see someone violating the law you know how to report it. On EWER the training makes sure that everyone knows where to go when there is a siege and where are the safe places. They learned that everyone should report terrorists and violent activities to the authorities at once. This is an example of the importance of building vertical connections as well as the ones across communities. The local turn in peace-building recognises that peace cannot be built without local people and that they should be engaged in peacebuilding design. The Protection of Civilians can similarly show that local people possess knowledge and capacity to make things safer, and as Furnari *et al*. (2015) argued, civilian led protection leads more easily to locally led and civilian peacebuilding. The local engagement of civilians in protection from direct violence involves listening to the local community and accepting that the outsider-led and military dominated model of PoC only provides one aspect of the protection needed.

The Contextualised Nature of PoC Activities

Each of the cases described in this article is contextually designed. Each one is designed differently according to the types of violence, local capacities, and needs of local civilians. The different contexts show that UCP can protect civilians from many types of violence including generational/tribal conflicts, armed political violence, or state violence.

In the Philippines local people designed their own system for monitoring incidents and adapted it when the peace process asked them to support the agreements. The local design in Mindanao recognises that

the traditional way of resolving conflicts is without violence. The traditional way is to gather all the information and elders will decide how to settle the conflict taking into consideration the rights of each party. Most of the time the results of a traditional settlement are honoured and respected. This is how rido is resolved and UCP incorporates the monitoring of escalating tensions in a community, and equally able to apply de-escalation or other protection approaches to rido, as to political violence. UCP can respond to micro-contexts, for example, in Myanmar, where the large number of armed actors require people to develop different strategies in different places. The CCM framework enables people to engage with the armed actors. For example, if there are airstrikes the armed actors can be persuaded to defer attacks while rumours are investigated and civilians are evacuated.

Even though both cases had peace agreements developing or in place they had different benefits and opportunities for protection. In Myanmar there were bilateral agreements, so several different armed actors were involved, and it opened space for conversation and gave communities something concrete to use in creating protective strategies. In Mindanao there was a single more comprehensive approach. Mindanao civil society created the civilian ceasefire monitoring because they were desperate for the latest ceasefire agreement to work, but they were later able to join the formal mechanism.

Relationships and Collaboration/Unarmed and Nonviolent

UCP is explicit in the use of non-violence as the underpinning set of values through which the activities and mechanisms are designed. This is important because the activities may look similar to those of military peacekeepers (see Julian and Gasser 2019), but using non-violence means they are done differently and with a focus on building strong relationships, trust and re-humanising those caught in the violence, including the humanity of soldiers and those who are marginalised by the conflict. The use of non-violence, with an emphasis on inclusion and dialogue, is one explanation for why unarmed civilian protection includes more women, and that those women take on leadership and advocacy roles for their communities. Non-violence is an inclusive approach, it means that people who have strong relationships with each other, and with the land, see good relationships as the bedrock of peace and they have a means of working towards that with non-violence. For example, non-violence is evidenced as feeling safer through the mediation work carried out by protection workers or described by participant in Bukidon as '*civilian protection is enabling ourselves to work with each other, and in capacitating the younger generation to carry on their work as women leaders and protectors in the community*'.

In all examples, and embedded in the methods they use, is the importance of relationships and collaboration. In all these cases the protection mechanisms involved networks across civil society, with the armed actors and vertically with national and international institutions and stakeholders. They are all using existing community capacity, networks and relationships to reduce the impact of violence on civilians. The relationships are both horizontal and vertical. The community monitors in Myanmar and the Philippines are all embedded within the horizontal networks that link people in villages, towns, local and traditional leadership. They can receive and share information amongst people who are both threatened and in a position to help protect, and they benefit from the training on how to collect and keep information safely. Even if every monitor is not connected vertically to official mechanisms for the ceasefires, peace agreements, or police, they create a mechanism in which their collected information can be fed upwards, and through which the needs of local people (for additional protection or to change the behaviour of armed actors) are heard. Both of these relationship networks are necessary for them to be effective. Furnari's (2015) work demonstrated that relationships are key to all forms of peacekeeping, including military peacekeepers and so recognising how those relationships are formed and valued gives us insight into how the protective activities work. Strong relationships are an important component of the non-violent nature of the UCP because non-violence places dialogue and accepting of the 'other' as important and having worth. The research on 'local ownership' recognises that local communities play a strong role in reducing violence and building peace through their networks. In both Myanmar and Mindanao the civilians who lived in the areas affected by the armed conflict knew the people who were threatening them, and so the existing relationship can be harnessed. In recognising the importance of relationships we see they are not always protective because there are many examples where neighbours threaten and harm their neighbours (essentially community level violent conflict), but we must include them in the contextual analysis when looking for opportunities to protect people. The 'only outsider' model of military peacekeeping or military missions can create community engagement routes, but this is a different quality to enhancing strong community networks that already exist.

Managing the Complexity

In these examples the protection approaches show they can manage the complexity of the situations they face. They are designed to monitor different types of violence and threats from a range of actors in each region. Any attempt to classify or simplify the complexity of the conflicts and the number of armed groups in Myanmar is going to be flawed. The armed actors can't be grouped by ethnicity, region,

background, or aim, because they were fluidly changing and moving according to the availability of arms, resources and opportunity presented to them. Being able to navigate this complex environment requires monitors to be flexible and have a range of tools and communication methods available. This is very different from being able to identify 2–3 armed groups with hierarchical structures where the commanders are available to meet and you can easily assess the level of weapons and resources that they have.

Violence (and taking steps towards a peaceful resolution of conflict) is a messy and complex problem to solve. The limitation of a blueprint approach or single mandate for a large area restricts the analysis and solutions. In Mindanao the communities deal with multiple levels of violence (local rido, political and regional terrorism) and communities create relevant responses. They engaged traditional cultures, formal structures, and official reporting mechanisms to make it a bit safer for them. The complexity is clear when we learn of the contradictions people hold when they must live in these violent and militarised environments. In these situations people both depend on and fear attack by the military and armed groups. They feel safe because of the army presence but they also turn to community and CSO spaces when they feel threatened by them.

A Local Community View of Peace

If we recognise that protection is a step towards peace, then we need to know what peace will look like for the people who live there, which can then inform the design of the protection mechanisms to help achieve it. UCP enables the civilian understanding of the meaning of 'peace' to be specific and recognised. Answers to 'what does peace mean to you?' show that peace is more than just the absence of violence, people want to have good livelihoods, education and safe housing. One of the findings in both sets of research is that the motivation for doing local protection work is about people wanting their families and communities to be able to live with more security and to be peaceful. This motivation explains why civilians want to protect others from violence, a job that can be seen as difficult and usually unrecognised outside their community.

One reason for understanding what the local meaning of peace is so that we can understand how the community thinks about the risks they face, which of them they can live with, and which they are working to reduce. When outsiders do a risk analysis they do not have either the local knowledge of where and what is safe (whole regions or areas can be deemed 'too risky and insecure') nor an understanding of what would constitute safety for the local communities. A characteristic of UCP is that the local communities themselves define the goals and priorities and those

who support them provide skills, training and facilitation to enable them to create protective mechanisms that help them. This is the link to contextual design in UCP.

In Myanmar peace and security wasn't just about armed actors abiding by the bilateral agreements they had signed, but how improved security would mean children being able to access education and not having to hide in holes in the ground after school to escape recruitment by armed groups. In Mindanao peace and security is underpinned by the security for a family, being able to return home after displacement, and using their own cultural and indigenous methods for resolving conflicts peacefully. Peace is about being able to live without fear, but people also want to participate in local processes, have their civilian leadership recognised and included, and be able to access health and education services.

For the civilians who are being protected it is not just the implementation of a ceasefire or peace agreement, nor the reduction in the use of weapons and guns, but it is about the safety and security of their families and communities. In both research projects the participants used imagery and drawing to explore the question of 'what does peace mean to you'. In both places the image of a tree was used because the branches provide protection and because local people see the need to understand the roots of the violent conflict so that the conflict can be resolved peacefully.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to show that unarmed civilians, outside sites of military peacekeeping, are protecting other civilians from direct violence, and that this is part of the debate on how we are best able to protect civilians from direct violence in diverse contexts and including local capacities. If we acknowledge this as PoC, then the evidence demonstrates that PoC happens even when there is no military peacekeeping mission and that using UCP is a method of directly involving and building the capacity of local people to protect themselves and their communities. It proposes a reconceptualisation of PoC as the identification and reduction of physical threats to people in situations of armed conflict, defined by behaviours and activities rather than actors, and including community capacities and unarmed civilians working outside military missions, as well as military peacekeeping and missions.

Studying a broader range of PoC actors and contexts will lead us to be able to develop new theories about how PoC works (regardless of which actors are involved) and the role of local communities in making protection from direct violence effective, which can then be fed back into policy and practice. Ultimately this approach can be used to explore how a full range of protection activities will help address the enormous need to protect civilians from violence.

This paper demonstrates how PoC is not only an outsider-led activity, and that what constitutes peace depends on local understandings and definitions, being relevant to the context and being able to deal with the complexity. Being local and using non-violence distinguish UCP from other protection approaches. As well as being local, all the UCP actors design using non-violence, as well as being unarmed. The five broad themes help us understand the contribution of UCP i) what local capacity is, ii) how UCP enables a contextual design able to respond to micro-contexts using the experiential knowledge in the communities, iii) the importance of relationships in understanding how and why UCP works, iv) that the complexity of multiple forms of violence, multi-level and many actors can be accommodated in analysis using UCP principles, and v) that by fully including communities, the protection is leading to a peace which is locally defined.

UCP can contribute to developing PoC theory by a) challenging the assumption that PoC works because it is the military carrying out the protection, thus opening space for new theoretical developments on how PoC works, b) showing that communities play a role as actors in protection, not only as objects of the protection mechanisms therefore opening up the list of 'protection actors' to a wider range of groups, c) that relationships are central to civilians being able to protect one another and recognising that this can take time to build.

It can seem challenging to think that unarmed civilians can protect other civilians from violence perpetrated by armed actors. The literature on making PoC effective is dominated by studies that do not question the assumption that violence works or that 'if there is violence we need soldiers'. Steps to broaden the concept of PoC to include community-led and unarmed approaches could include people defining the type of PoC they are researching (for example where it is limited to studying the institutional responses) or seeking to include local communities in the research design so that any protection capacity is acknowledged.

Although UCP hasn't often been a part of understanding, researching, and developing PoC, the case studies of Myanmar and the Philippines provide some empirical evidence that unarmed civilians are protecting others from violence, and the thematic discussion provides some structure for future research and discussion.

Notes

1. Research project called 'Raising Silent Voices' (2016–2018) Funded by UKRI AHRC. https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FN008464percent2F1
2. Research project called 'Impact of civilians monitoring the Philippines Framework and Comprehensive Agreements' (2018–2021) Funded by United States Institute for Peace.

3. Civilian Ceasefire Monitoring refers to the activities of investigating violations of the agreement, informing parties of their responsibilities, and ensuring local populations are aware of the agreement in order to build confidence and create a safer environment. In Mindanao civilians were doing these roles. Ceasefire monitoring has often been seen as a role for the military, but in this case, civilians fed directly into the official mechanisms and were responsible for investigating and reporting on violations, in the same way as a military mission would have done.

4. The research was carried out before the military coup in February 2021.

5. EWER is a mechanism which is designed for each context that gathers all knowledge on predicting when threats may occur (the early warning of a threat) and a set of procedures or activites that are taken to mitigate the harm (early response). For example sending runners out to see when an armed group is heading to a village, they run back and tell people to flee into hiding until the armed groups have left. In UCP local people design and run the warning system, and the responses use non-violent strategies, ultimately keeping them safer.

6. Rido is the local name for intergenerational and clan violence in Mindanao (Bacaron 2010), traditionally the conflicts are resolved by elders, but can spark the escalation of violence between groups, adding another layer of threat to local people who get caught up in the violence.

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributor

Rachel Julian is an expert with 20 years of experience in unarmed civilian peacekeeping and protection. She has spoken at the UN in New York, published papers on UCP and has externally funded research projects in Myanmar, Philippines and Kenya. Rachel teaches Civilian Protection in Politics and International Relations at Leeds Beckett University.

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Ethical Approval

The research in both Myanmar and Philippines was approved by Leeds Beckett Ethical Approval process in which the research design, consideration of ethical

issues, participant information and informed consent documentation was reviewed. All the data has been anonymised and no person can be identified from the quotations used. Informed consent was ensured through extensive conversation with participants before the workshops, through sharing the full description of the research and the role of the researchers, explaining how the data will be used. The research team included peer researchers who lived locally and were able stay in touch and ensure that participants could withdraw if they wanted to.

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