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IT'S OK TO CODDIWOMPLE: ANTHROPOLOGY, PEACEBUILDING AND (EM)BRACING THE VAGUE

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ABSTRACT

This white paper takes the unknown and the vague and movement towards/in those realms – as frames for a discussion of present practice and emergent potentiality of anthropological engagement with peace (building) studies. Arguably, embracing the unknown or vague as generative constants as well as fundamental elements of non-linear peacebuilding further open collaborative, communicative spaces of possibility. Aspects of this discussion are drawn from broader conceptual/methodological considerations in both peacebuilding and social anthropology so as to contribute to an interdisciplinary alignment. Furthermore, the positions and persuasions in this work are (in)formed by extensive, on-going examinations of research and narratives active in Southeast Europe today. By looking to emergent concepts in peace studies via anthropology while moving with regional-specific ethnographies that speak back against North Atlantic hegemonies, there is offered a discussion that brings local realities into transnational (socio-academic) deliberations.

Keywords: anthropology, peacebuilding, the unknown, Southeast Europe

INTRODUCTION

Coddiwomple is defined in the Urban Dictionary as meaning “to travel in a purposeful manner towards a vague destination.” And I have yet to encounter another single word that so engagingly embodies that which is asked of social scientists today. Whether we speak of decolonizing academia, forming feminist futures, or imagining how societies progress towards peace, we routinely work within dimensions of the unknown and venture through the vague with our research. But do we routinely recognize or even valorise these realms of possibility? To articulate or give action to this thought, I look to the (admittedly whimsical) verb “coddiwomple” to set the tone for this essay; an essay that centres the unknown and the vague and our travels within. An essay that is part review/remembrance yet also part call/response which seeks to more intimately illustrate processes of peace and the practices of anthropology while working in the present realities of Southeast Europe. It is an essay that seeks to persuade and in so doing, suggests (new) ways of seeing research alive today in the post-Yugoslav space. Research that can contribute to navigating the broader unknowns inherent to peace(building) theory and methodology.

Here then is my argument: (em)brace the unknown and stay the course toward vague visions of vastly different futures. Do not just note the unknown or write a nod to a speculative site over the horizon. Look to the vague as liberation and centre the unknown as generative spaces wherein academic disciplines meet messy, real-world designs. Just as Donna Haraway (2016) dreams of anthropologists, artists, and authors as staying with the “trouble,” so should we stay with the trouble of non-linearity and gaping indeterminacy. And here I do not take the terms “indeterminate” and “non-linear” randomly. They are drawn from reviews of current negotiations in peace studies and placed here to foreshadow what is to come – a discussion of the (potential) alignments of anthropological research with processes of peace to navigate the indeterminacy. To coddiwomple. It is a discussion that reveals the unknown and the vague as spaces where we not only might align, but where we can become inextricably entangled. To again borrow from Haraway (2016), “we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations” (p. 4).

My ambition here is not to imbue the “coddiwomple” concept with scientific rigor or rewire its sense of action. I take it as a (discursive) guide so as to “travel in a purposeful manner” through an essay of conceptual scoping that, in turn, responds to calls emerging today for more rigorous anthropological engagement with peace(building) studies. “We have to make the future for ourselves,” writes Tim Ingold (2015), “but that can only be done through dialogue. Anthropology’s role is to expand the scope of this dialogue: to make a conversation

of human life itself” (p. 1). In pursuing this agenda, I attempt to entice your imagination toward more explicit interdisciplinary considerations. Ultimately, by invoking the whimsy and mystery of coddwompling, I will hopefully induce a lingering engagement with the following text, terms, and topography.

AVENUES OF APPROACH

In a sense, coddwompling here signals the nature of the task encountered today at the heart of peace(building) discourse. We must imagine yet work towards “peace” when we actually know quite little about the emergence of peace-oriented societies or how societies in close proximity might co-exist in heterogeneous yet emancipatory processes of peace. These vagaries are compounded, if not generated, by the on-going defiance and demise of liberal peacebuilding strategies seen from the end of World War I onwards (see Džuverović, 2021; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 767-768; Schütte, 2015; Richmond, 2023, p. 27-28/55). Recognizing the demise of top-down, “Mini-Me state” approaches to peace (Mac Ginty, 2015, p. 845; see also Chandler, 2017; Millar, 2020) or “isomorphism” of perception and practice in peacebuilding (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 777) has, in turn, facilitated transformations of conceptual relations. For as Donati (2020) writes, “It feels as if, having navigated the troubled seas of human societies and conflict, we now realize the compass we were using is not necessarily leading to magnetic north and that there is instead a multiplicity of magnetic poles with no definite destination ahead, but rather a range of options” (p. xv).

Speaking of options, in this paper, the first sections are interlocking discussions of key elements selected from broad theoretical/methodological considerations of peace(building), anthropology, and the unknown. In so doing, I set a stage for the final section. A section that centres where possible anthropological and ethnographic contributions emerging from within Southeast Europe (SEE) or directly engaging with the post-Yugoslav space today. In a sense then, this effort is a nod to citational diversity (see Das, 2021) but it will also perhaps point to work that has not yet reached out across disciplinary divides. In another sense, this emphasis on narratives and subjectivities active in SEE builds from my own research endeavours. For in taking up a call issued by peace scholars for “eclectic, adaptive, cross-cultural and inventive approaches based on contextual experience” (Richmond, 2018, p. 238) to peace formation, I have pursued two avenues of research in SEE. First, to more fully understand (via ethnographic fieldwork and anthropological engagement) the life-worlds and socio-political positionalities of combat veterans living today in SEE. Second, building from this fieldwork, explore how/when/why (or why not) veterans participate in or problematize the processes of

peace(building) in post-conflict societies. And it has been over the course of this research and fieldwork – conducted over two continuous years (from 2020/22, with return visits in 2023/24) across Croatia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and Serbia – that aspects of this white paper have been assembled.

ANTHROPOLOGY, PEACE, AND THE UNKNOWN

*“They sought peace under kingdoms
and other ruling names. They sought
it in the high, cold, beautiful mountains...
but it eluded them and vanished from their hands.”*

- Anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston ([1938] 2008, p. 65)

In a 2020 lecture, anthropologist Heonik Kwon traced several of the lines that connect anthropology and the pursuits of peace. Speaking to the (desired) roles of anthropology before and after World War II, Kwon (2020) notes of the United Nations and UNESCO’s Department of Social Sciences: “In the 1950s, anthropology was at the centre of the department’s general activity and considered a key social scientific discipline in the making of a more peaceful and more egalitarian world society in the post-World War II era” (p. 284). Furthermore, it was an era that “vision [of] anthropology, as a *science of education*, would play a central role in the realization of the ideal of perpetual peace” (emphasis added, Kwon 2020, p. 286; see also Krebs, 2016). Complimenting Kwon, Nigel Eltringham opens with past discussions of peace within anthropology. In so doing, we are returned to considerations reaching back decades to Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, Gluckman, Moore, and Nader, among others. By aligning several generations of anthropological inquiry, Eltringham (2021) structures a central claim: “The means by which societies maintain ‘social cohesion’ by managing conflict has been a long-standing concern of anthropologists...[while] demonstrating the benefits of adopting an ethnographic approach to understanding ‘processes by which conflicts are handled’” (p. 25). Unfortunately for peace studies, the influences of anthropology have been overshadowed by the securitization of peace and peace as a co-opted component of North Atlantic hegemony (see Richmond, 2023; Sponsel, 1994; Visoka, 2017).

Yet Richmond (2018), in *Rescuing Peacebuilding? Anthropology and Peace Formation*, establishes and defends an insightful assertion: “Rescuing peacebuilding from neoliberal epistemological frameworks requires an anthropological and ethnographic

sensitivity” (p. 221). Writing from within and across mainstream International Relations (IR), Richmond (2018) finds today forces seeking to “instrumentalise anthropology according to its own needs and expectations” (p. 223); an instrumentalization first learned as colonizing endeavors turned to control of the colonized (see Eltringham, 2021; Mac Ginty, 2015). As such, anthropologists must now, via active engagement and resistance, reassert our voice in peace studies. For as Richmond (2018) further argues, new generations “of peace-making cannot be achieved without anthropology – its methods, ethics and perspectives – taking a place in IR and IR making space for anthropology” (p. 224). He concludes by emphasizing the reciprocity inherent to interdisciplinary research and echoes earlier arguments by anthropologists (see Sponsel, 1994) that, “IR lacks an understanding of subjectivity while anthropology lacks defences against power. Peace is a ground where they might negotiate these dangers together” (Richmond, 2018, p. 239).

Speaking to this desired “negotiation,” the contributors in *Peacebuilding and Friction* build upon anthropologist Anna Tsing’s seminal approach to the concept of friction by first noting:

Friction speaks to a variety of subfields within the broader realm of peacebuilding. As conceptualised by Tsing, friction has its origins in ethnography and anthropology. This book shows that the concept also has value outside these fields...[to] include democratisation, transitional justice, civil society development, and state-building... (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 203)

As an example, the chapter by Millar (2016) works from Tsing’s notion of friction so as to leave it “less open to appropriation by the agents of global power in the drive to influence post-conflict societies” (p. 33). In so doing, Millar also reflects upon how conceptualizations of friction acknowledge the unknown in the ever-emergent aftermaths of peacebuilding. Influenced by his own ethnographic explorations, Millar (2016) asserts both friction and the unknown reflect “the deep complexity and fluidity of peacebuilding...and therefore requires peacebuilding practitioners and scholars to accept a great amount of indeterminacy and non-linearity” (p. 42; on “fluidity,” see Visoka, 2017). Furthermore, by “analysing complex systems,” argues Millar (2016), “we cannot, in short, know what *will* happen, but we can know what might happen and from that set of possible future states we can choose a compass point by which to steer” (original emphasis, p. 43). Speaking via indeterminacy, unpredictability,

non-linearity, and again, the compass analogy, we find renewed our return to the vague and unknown in peacebuilding today.

We must then also recognize the traces of past legacies and present lessons that are active in anthropology. Legacies that when acknowledged and assembled for reflection, can affirm anthropological imaginations that reciprocally rework our engagements with peace(building). And the space for such engagements is our shared (yet for the moment unsynchronized) presence on indeterminate paths leading to and through the unknown. A realm quite familiar to anthropologists. “The call of the unknown now comes from cracks in the modern social imaginary,” writes Kirsten Hastrup (2007), “asserting itself in a continuous quest for knowledge of the infinite ways of being human” (p. 801-802). A quest within which is a whispered call, at times uniquely heard and heeded by anthropologists, of self-reflexivity in even personal encounters with the unknown. Yet, while “we do not always know who we are when we are submerged in fieldwork” (Das, 2020, p. 307), it serves to keep us with(in) the notion that pursuing the “vague” is not a path paved by diminishing returns. On the contrary, the vague and the unknown can be the very spaces incubating the unincumbered or radically “unhinged” transformations needed for futures that look out towards peace. Thus, we can listen/learn in these spaces through what anthropologist Jane Guyer deems an “epistemology of surprise.” An epistemology that “has opened up a variety of exploratory routes, collegial interchanges, and provisional conclusions” (Guyer, 2013, p. 284-285). And in a masterstroke of poetic expression, Guyer (2013) recalls a poem – *The psalm of uncertainty* by celebrated anthropologist Victor Turner – that continues to resonate today as we pursue perspectives of peace:

Uncertainties, dark-atoms of a life,
Whip-cord of truth, tracks of the pioneer’s cart...
Uncertainties.
How they spatter my page with clues to directions,
Pointers that call for unerring patience... (p. 292)

PEACE, POSITIVE PEACE, & PEACEBUILDING

*“Lost in a labyrinth,
No boundary, no belongings,
No white felt cap,
Status habitus...”*

- from the poem *Status Habitus*
by Flora Brovina (2001)

There is rarely an uncontested definition of any one word in academia. (I am thinking here of all the ink spilt discussing “terrorist” or “artificial intelligence.”) Such is the case with “peace,” which Faye Donnelly (2016) refers to as an essentially contested concept (ECC). As such, it roams in the space of possibilities (Das, 2020, p. 306) that is peace studies – an interdisciplinary field formed by “taking peace rather than war or the state as its principal referent, [setting] itself apart from orthodox approaches to international relations and political science” (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013, p. 766). Noting the emphasis on these frames, the minds behind *The Anthropology of Peace and Nonviolence* advanced the position that “an exclusive focus on violence and war is not only myopic but actually a distraction, inadvertent if not purposeful, from many of the underlying problems and issues of peace” (Sponsel, 1994, p. 7; see also Söderström & Olivius, 2022). Such realizations have informed more nuanced considerations of peace and in so doing, have imbued the term with increasing scales of rigor and reflection. As a result, peace as a concept has cleaved into dichotomies, as succinctly exemplified in *The Ethics of Peacebuilding*:

Negative peace is the condition that most people refer to when they are discussing issues to do with peace and conflict: it is the condition in which peace is based on the absence of violence. We need to work more towards the notion of *positive peace*, which means a peace that promotes reconciliation and coexistence on the basis of human rights and social, economic and political justice. (emphasis added, Murithi, 2009, p. 4-5).

I extend this theoretical definition of positive peace here by including two deliberations that are potentially required of positive, emancipatory peace. This extension is necessary, I argue,

so as to pre-emptively account for plurality – but one antidote to hegemony. The first deliberation can be found, for example, in research emerging from Kosovo. Mironova and Whitt (2017) explicitly recognize the relevance of on-going antagonisms between actors in peace processes thus centring the problem of polarized plurality within non-linear peacebuilding. As such, a key embodiment of positive peace is brought forward from Johan Galtung’s 1969 structuring of “an environment where former rivals and adversaries are capable of moving beyond past grievances and divisions to engage one another cooperatively” (in Mironova & Whitt, 2017, p. 2077-2078).

The second deliberation on positive peace arises from the necessity of engaging feminist epistemologies in scholarship of the possible. Following this obligation thusly informs critiques of singular understandings of peace, critiques that are generated by destabilizing “the status quo upheld by liberal and neoliberal feminisms” (Stavrevska et al., 2022, p. 34-46; see also Deridder et al., 2022; Naples, 2013). In signalling or pursuing what may be seen as feminist approaches to peace, it is crucial to note an observation that the feminist frame is “not without its frictions and discomforts” (Smith & Yoshida, 2022, p. 3-4). If we see such frictions as having generative potentials, an emancipatory framework of peace may emerge that fosters an entanglement of “plural concepts of peace, unbound by traditional geographies and temporalities” (Smith & Yoshida, 2022, p. 3-4). Combined with the broader conceptualizations of positive peace noted above, these two deliberations challenge “received wisdom” in past discourse that locked out or obscured “insider views” of peace (see Eltringham, 2021, p. 1-19).

So realized, (the plurality of) positive peace is the vague destination we are moving purposely towards, with the processes of peace becoming both purpose and progression as they emerge during the course of our collective coddliwomple. I so position it because *we do not yet know* what manifestations positive peace can/could/will take or what self-perpetuating mechanisms it will (need to) generate to become a future state of life (e.g. Söderström & Olivius, 2022). We can but attempt to determine directions of progression – to draw upon the compass analogy we see appear time and again in the literature – that are instigated or inspired by voices speaking within society. Perhaps then, what we must think through and work with(in) can be referred to as “proximal epistemologies of peace” (PPE). Such a conceptual frame may simultaneously facilitate the realities of 1) peace as process rather than stasis, 2) the need for an intersectional/interdisciplinary constitution of peace studies, and 3) the aligned yet inherently heterogenous processes of peace forged in and amongst multiple societies.

Deeply embedded in and emerging from these proximal epistemologies are lines of life leading into the unknown. Thus, to recall Guyer (2013), the “‘unknown’ here provokes an

epistemology because it declares *itself*' (original emphasis; p. 288). These (un)knowns work upon our learning of peace as well as the knowledge generated by anthropology. This, in turn, counters previously ordained "natural" states of humanity that regard conflict as a default disposition of societies in close proximity to one another or those with lengthy histories of combat rather than collaboration. Yet these states of conflict presume that past legacies are stronger than the present lives looking to the vague new worlds just beyond our horizons. A presumption challenged in Richmond's (2023) assertion that positive peace rests "upon arguments that violence is learned rather than innate in society" (p. 11).

This assertion connects with research conducted in an original vein of anthropological study. Fry and his team followed a method that "sought peace systems in the anthropological and historical literature to compare with a sample of non-peace systems regarding various features hypothesised to promote dynamic peace among neighbouring social units" (Fry et al., 2021, p. 3; see also Fry, 2009). The resulting discussion of peace systems "challenges the assumption that societies everywhere are inclined to make war with their neighbours" (Fry et al., 2021, p. 4). Here then, opposite the unknowns of positive peace, are the knowns and norms of negative peace. Such "peace" tumbles out of a precarious status quo of 'not currently shooting at one another' and is a reality about which we know very much indeed – especially with regard to the co-optation by neoliberal regimes of "peacebuilding" for current world orders (e.g. Belloni, Ch. 9, 2020; Ramović, 2016; Touquet & Vermeersch, 2016; Visoka, 2017). It is a reality that relies on negative peace being seen as the default dream and one that keeps various military-industrial complexes centred and critical to "securing" the peace. Hence, these complexes have become so integrated into our economies that it is almost impossible to speak of a demilitarized peace that can replace the profits, persuasion, and employment created by the arms industry. It is a neoliberal reality that requires an ignorance of the possibilities and potentialities of positive peace that can act as diverse drivers of socio-economic prosperity. Yet, this prosperity is a necessary dimension of positive peace – a dimension that must be actively imagined and integrated into both the study and practice of peacebuilding today.

And it is to peacebuilding we turn to in the next section. A practice defined here as a "range of efforts...aimed at political, institutional, social and economic transformations in post-war societies for the purpose of a sustainable and positive peace" (Björkdahl et al., 2016, p. 3; see also Väyrynen, 2019). Furthermore, peacebuilding is to be seen as "a widely institutionalised field of knowledge...[that] borrows legitimacy and experience from scholarly traditions" (Denskus & Kosmatopoulos, 2015, p. 219). Alternately, seen via its liberal – and hegemonic – frame, peacebuilding rests "on the notions of reformability, universality and

superiority, where peace is seen as a deliberate mode of governance that can be replicated and implemented” (Džuverović, 2021, p. 21). Working against this hegemonic homogenization, insurrections have erupted to resist such capitalist or controlling peacebuilding efforts. These local (re)actions, often seen by practitioners and policymakers in the Global North as “resistance” to “sound” strategies which have worked elsewhere in the world, challenge thus commandeer the *processes* of peacebuilding. Challenges that seek to centre – spoiler alert – local lives and desires over global replications of governance.

In fighting for this recognition of “the local” over “mini-me” states in peacebuilding, “the grassroots have become partly synonymous with independence [and] has re-politicised and given substance to the local agencies that have emerged” (Kappler & Richmond, 2011, p. 264). We can see this, for example, in Stefan Schütte’s (2015) *Peacebuilding and pasture relations in Afghanistan*, where he finds “[l]ocal peacebuilding...is a consultative process involving a variety of actors whose commitment to the process cannot be presupposed” (p. 243). In a similar register, Gëzim Visoka (2017) pierces the arrogance of assumed “accuracy and precision in pre-emptively guiding governance of the unknown” (p. 11) in peace (interventions) brought to the lands of Kosovo. To then foster and follow local non-linearity that is consultative and does not seek to pre-emptively govern the unknown, we must channel John Paul Lederach’s call of “moral imagination” to “venture on unknown paths that build constructive change” (in Gentry, 2016, p. 168-169). And what a striking dimension to add to coddiwompling: the moral imagination to move purposefully toward a vague destination.

PEACEBUILDING AND THE “LOCAL TURN”

“Menduem se bota fillon me ne...”

(“We thought that the world begins with us...”)

- from the song “Gjeneratat” by Kosovar band *Grupi NA*

I have had, over the years spent conducting ethnographic fieldwork in post-Yugoslav space, multiple opportunities to discuss local practices of peacebuilding in relation to my research alongside war veterans. These discussions take place both formally and informally, while moving between veterans, academics, NGOs, and various governmental personnel. In one recent instance, I was invited to speak at a military conference convened and attended by members of multiple armed forces from across Europe. An opportunity I used to highlight the emergent field of “veteran studies,” argue for ethnographic engagement with veterans, and

discuss the possibilities of what I have come to call “veteran diplomacy” – a concept that (re)moves veterans from history books or hospitals and positions them as active participants in building our futures. In reflecting back upon these discussions (and to keep a certain brevity to this white paper), I want to feature here an ensemble of but four voices that have informed aspects of my work. Each in their own way speak to endeavours with(in) the unknown or the vague via practice, power, preservation, and political time in peacebuilding. Furthermore, each voice contributes to emerging discourse structuring the so-called “local turn.”

First is Mac Ginty’s work of conceptual scoping in *Where is the local? Critical localism and peacebuilding*. Much as with the concept of peace, “the local” can be seen as currently stuck in the lasting loop of an essentially contested concept. Yet in his approach, “the local” embodies “the capacity of local communities to reconcile, stabilize, negotiate, resist, make peace and engage in conflict and inequality” (Mac Ginty, 2015, p. 848). Furthermore, the local “is a system of beliefs and practices that loose communities and networks may adopt” (Mac Ginty, 2015, p. 851). Practices that challenge the current “orthodox paradigm” of seeing the local as some kind of geographical place rather than geo-social imaginaries that are anchored and active across generations. Finally, Mac Ginty (2015) offers up a realization that is near-and-dear to my own anthropological research: “to assess the true extent of localism...is to ask: where does power lie?” (p. 846). Did someone call for an anthropologist?

Second is Obradovic-Wochnik’s contemplation of power and peace vis-à-vis the local that compliments yet contests Mac Ginty. Thinking through the politics of NGO-led initiatives that are often a marker of local engagement for political elites and IR/International Community (IC) projects, she seeks to reveal “the subtler forms of power enacted by local agents upon other locals” (Obradovic-Wochnik, 2020, p. 119; see also Devic, 2006). Though writing convincingly with the goal of destabilizing views of “the local” in peacebuilding – as based on analysis of a dominant coalition of NGOs operating in the post-Yugoslav space (see also Touquet & Vermeersch, 2016) – she does not reject out-of-hand the conceptual turn to the local. Instead, Obradovic-Wochnik (2020) clearly demonstrates a dimension of situated knowledge that has so far been obscured or ignored in research narratives: “liberal peacebuilding NGOs often go on to replicate the same kind of governmentality...inherent in the external donor-local recipient relationship, by setting explicit or implicit discursive and practical limits on how other locals can speak and participate” (p. 123). This leads to local actors with access to economic, social and political capital having the power and privilege to construct and maintain their normative visions of the local (Obradovic-Wochnik, 2020, p. 134). Thus, as a corrective tweak to the local lens brought now into peacebuilding, we must be aware

of the “ability of the ‘local’ to disempower and not respond to a range of local needs and voices” (Obradovic-Wochnik, 2020, p. 134).

Third, following with power dynamics, we move into realms of the hidden discussed by Visoka in his seminal 2017 work on Kosovo. In what may be a near-criminal abbreviation of a work that should be mandatory reading – along with *Civic and Uncivic Values in Kosovo* (Ramet et al., 2015) – before stepping foot in Kosovo, I want to take up but one of the undercurrents in Visoka’s work. That of “hidden transcripts” encountered during the local turn in peacebuilding. For Visoka, hidden transcripts are a reaction or deflection engaged by local actors to counter what are seen as hegemonic practices of interventionist peacebuilding that (could) obliterate or otherwise subvert the local (see also Greenhouse, 2005). “Consequently, local actors develop,” according to Visoka (2017), “alternative narratives which they feed foreign researchers while preserving their hidden transcripts as existential knowledge to protect from invasive tendencies” (p. 24). These tactics feed into (external/international) perceptions of local resistance to seemingly straightforward strategies of peace(building). Yet such tactics can be felt to preserve local agencies and pre-empt local actors being treated merely as informants within local problems rather than solutions (Visoka, 2017, p. 24; see also Chandler, 2013; Kappler & Richmond, 2011; Millar, 2020). And by sensing hidden transcripts, Visoka posits a case for anthropological engagement. An engagement developing a decolonized conceptualization of peace that would account for subaltern actors, critical forms of agency, and the stories of ordinary people (Visoka, 2017, p. 24-25). If such a critical mass can be achieved, Visoka (2017) sees a “decolonised epistemology of peace [that] reverses the order of knowledge, placing the local first” (p. 25).

Fourth, among a myriad of considerations needed to achieve this reversal of order, one that I want to center here is time. Recent work (see Simangan, 2021; Söderström & Olivius, 2022; Väyrynen, 2019) has taken up time and temporality vis-à-vis peace(building), with Christie & Algar-Faria (2020) seeing conceptualizations of time as “fundamental to an emancipatory peace” (p. 155). Writing as a corrective to past disregard of temporality, they introduce three timescapes that re-scale i.e., re-align perceptions: policy time, liberal political time, and intergenerational time. By thinking through these timescapes, the argument is formed that “by enforcing timeframes that are disconnected from the everyday experiences of communities” (Christie & Algar-Faria, 2020, p. 159), IR/IC and political elites undermine the very positionality sought for locally embodied perspectives of peace. For example, Christie & Algar-Faria (2020) see liberal political time as serving to “(re)enforce specific articulations of time, in particular linearity, that shape nations’ constructions” (p. 159). Yet in seeking linearity,

servants of liberal political time ignore or otherwise try to override the fact “that the everyday is a timescape of its own” (Christie & Algar-Faria, 2020, p. 160). Liberal political time thus attempts to outpace the aforementioned epistemologies of surprise and the unknown by declaring some future point of stability rather than prioritizing possibility and process. When considered via the frame of process, we realize that polyvocality in peace is derived not only from listening to “the local.” But by also being aware that “the passage of time open[s] up different demands made by various generations” (Christie & Algar-Faria, 2020, p. 170-171).

Though circumscribed, the hope is that these four voices brought into conversation with one another speak to a far from cohesive concept: “the local” as a practice and perspective rather than just a place(holder) for new paradigms of peace. With these four discussions, we can more fully understand the calls for anthropologists to re-engage with peace studies. For, they trigger how the vast arrays of anthropological research – some of which may be seemingly remote from the realms of peace(building) – can contribute to contestations of colonialism, capitalism, and other forms of control inserted into peacebuilding today. In service to practitioners of peace as well as to the rest of this essay, these four discussions directly undermine criticisms that the local turn is but a romanticization of locals – the act of ascribing “benign, but shallow, characteristics to local communities” (in Mac Ginty, 2015, p. 847; see also Džuverović, 2021). Or what has been noted but correctly dismissed as a turn that attempts to “shift the blame” for (liberal) peacebuilding failures onto the subaltern (in Christie & Algar-Faria, 2020, p. 162-163).

ANTHROPOLOGY & FINDING THE LOCAL (TURN IN PEACEBUILDING)

*“Take my eyes and look around
Tell me, what do you see?
Take my heart and live with it
Tell me what do you feel?...”*

- from the 2019 exhibition *Be My Face* by Eliza Hoxha
(Museum of Kosovo/ Kosovar Gender Studies Center)

In the preceding sections, I endeavoured to sketch past intersections of anthropology and peace(building) studies as well as take up Eltringham's (2021) position that "what is 'local' is a matter of perspective" (p. 153). In so doing, I set the stage for what comes next: thinking through a broad spectrum of anthropological research that can inform critical discussions in peacebuilding. Discussions that can be joined or juxtaposed by anthropology based on shared mandate to purposely move to and through dimensions of the unknown. To be clear (and preempt concerns of appropriation), I do not claim grandmothers exchanging fungus cultures in Bosnia (see Jasarevic, 2015) are thinking and acting in terms of "agency" within "local peacebuilding" efforts. In a similar register, the movement of family photos within the Kosovar diaspora (see Halimi, 2023) are not discussed by family members in terms of "(de)territorializing" the local. Nor are war veteran subjectivities (see Warner III, 2022) in Croatia and Serbia only formed and filtered through "local infrastructures for peace." The ethnographic explorations into these dimensions of local life-worlds do not begin and end within the brackets of peace studies.

What I am claiming is that such ethnographic explorations in the post-Yugoslav space can be reservoirs of research for peacebuilding. Research often unknown or frequently revealing unseen relations to interdisciplinary practitioners and (trans)national politicians seeking peace. As Larisa Jasarevic (2015) asserts in thinking through "things," with such research comes the recognition of "plural and shared fields of consequential action [that] makes for a first step in reconstituting public relations and responsibilities" (p. 40). Re-reading this excerpt from Jasarevic in the context of this essay, we can sense a number of connections with the premises of peacebuilding, formation of local legitimacy, or how informal relationships are maintained beneath more formal networks. Forming into nodal points of everyday negotiation, these woven lines of local lives have to be encountered and experienced. Moreover, they have to be experienced without hastening along predetermined timelines to preordained points-of-arrival (an ode to such journeys is *Textures of the Ordinary* by Das, 2020). The resulting generation of knowledge is exemplified in the work of Jasarevic. In her case, she considers the exchange of home remedies made of what may or may not be mushrooms fermenting in jars in the kitchens of Sarajevo. Despite the "thing" in the jar remaining "precisely unknown," Jasarevic (2015) takes the jars and their transference as focal points rendering specific "objects of experiential knowledge and collective speculations" (p. 38). And what an interesting paper that would be: "fermenting fungi and the paths to peace" – a guide drawing from multispecies relations, in the vein of Haraway or Tsing, that shapes our approaches in peacebuilding.

Arguably, to move within peacebuilding narratives is to move within worlds that are walked by anthropologists. Follow Stef Jansen (2015) into a Sarajevo apartment complex to interrogate “peaceful ‘normality’ versus violent ‘abnormality.’” Or follow Van Wolputte & Fumanti (2010) into beer bars “where locality is continuously being negotiated in a changing context of reciprocity, gifting, and patterned social exchanges” (p.2). These movements and moments in “the local” are not explicit practices along paths to peace, but nor are they worlds away from the very considerations emerging today in peacebuilding. Similarly, Canolli (2022) sees in Kosovo how “caféscape shape almost every activity that occur in the public space,” with the act of a *makiato* (and where one gets it) in Prishtina signalling both everyday routine and the bricolage of emergent communities (p. 10). Alternately, Žikić (2008) looks to anthropology and cultural change in a “transitional” Serbia as Milenković (2023) takes up fieldwork to examine conflict management via the lens of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (see also Ćuković & Milenković 2023). This while Mikuš (2015), also looking to Serbia, adopts an anthropological perspective on law to reveal informal networks and interstitial arenas of power.

Or consider what Luci and Gusia reveal via their exploration of gendered publics in Kosovo. In what may be taken as an elemental component critically informing aspects of local legitimacy vis-à-vis *emancipatory* peacebuilding, they encounter the structures of a “political public – of assumed male citizenry – and a private public – of women” (Luci & Gusia, 2015, p. 208). Indeed, their embrace of feminist epistemologies can be seen as crucial to future developments in anthropology and peace studies. Read collectively, such are the very dynamics, though often unsung, that can (in)form what has come to be bracketed as “the local” turn in peacebuilding. Write alternately: fungi, apartments, veterans, beer, informal networks, and gender put the local in “the local” turn of peace studies. And anthropology – via ethically constructed, long-term participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork – takes us “there” and further. Assuming we accept, as anthropologists, the call of moral imagination into our research. And in so doing, we then work and write against “the new, vast, anonymous, but terribly effective regimen of absentee colonialism” (in Fabian, 2014, p. 69). Regimes are all too familiar in the past and present processes of peace.

Staying with “the local” in Southeast Europe and how anthropology senses these dynamics brings us to the work of HadžiMuhamedović. In *Waiting for Elijah*, HadžiMuhamedović expertly guides us from intimate ethnographic encounters to the heights of anthropological theory and back again. The chapters track HadžiMuhamedović as he immerses himself in the “everyday” particularities of life in Bosnia’s conflicted Field of Gacko

– a field long-home to contestations that range from local ethno-religious relations to the industrialized dreams once declared in a distant Belgrade. It is a work that speaks to many of the previous points articulated above (e.g., timescapes of the everyday, (intra)community relations, resistance to co-optation of anthropological research) by writing into the wider world the “deeply social temporality of space and the affective lingering of past trajectories, day-to-day and seasonal rhythms of a shared landscape” (HadžiMuhamedović, 2018, p. xii). An expansive work that probes and progresses along several axes, one central premise of HadžiMuhamedović is that “an understanding of communal relationships and landscapes...requires prior understanding of traditional time-reckoning...in both its structural and intimate aspects” (HadžiMuhamedović, 2018, p. 3).

As with many other anthropologists I call upon to structure this section, HadžiMuhamedović does not position his work vis-à-vis peace(building). Furthermore, by arguing that his research attempts to “offer a ‘grounded’ comment on the ethics of anthropology of the fictitious ‘post-conflict’ space” (2018, p. 77), he sets his own terms-of-engagement within the discipline and beyond. Terms that are “significantly divergent from the nationalist imaginations of pure traditions” and structure a uselessness for “identitarian and developmental projects on the Gacko horizons” (HadžiMuhamedović, 2018, p. 47/174). In another sense, I also argue the ethnographic encounters combined with his assertive articulations can be read as almost singlehandedly refuting critics of “the local turn” in peacebuilding and their claims the turn obscures local power relations or “romanticizes” anything. It can be read then as kind of a proof-of-concept. One that can potentially demonstrate how nuanced anthropological amplification, informed by extensive ethnographic fieldwork, can be introduced into interdisciplinary spaces. Upon introduction, such work can affect transformations that do not “develop” Gacko, but position the people, places, and perspectives as potential partners in a process – should they so choose. “We gather glimpses, write up silhouettes,” reflects HadžiMuhamedović (2018), “but ‘being’ is always much wider, complex and more specific” (p. 149).

Considering but one element of Gacko encountered by HadžiMuhamedović (2018), he listens and learns of “sworn kinship and other forms of inter-religious intimacy” embodied by *kumstvo* – “godparenthood” (though he notes resistance to easy translation, p. 129). HadžiMuhamedović (2018) learns through his interlocutors the local narratives of *kumstvo*, a bond held as inviolable and indicating “the interplay of three qualities: trust, moral obligation and intimacy” (p. 140). And here again we read three dynamics crucial to peace processes; dynamics frequently sought but yet just as frequently lost when detached from their local roots

and relations. Via these dynamics, *kumstvo* can be said to make “the Other” a known relation and suggests that *kumstvo*-bonding is “a time ‘thickened’ in a landscape” (HadžiMuhamedović, 2018, p. 58/138). Through his time with(in) local narratives, “a contemporary relevance” is revealed of “the hope to be found in sworn kinship... as evidence of intimacy and morality across ‘ethno-religious’ boundaries” (HadžiMuhamedović, 2018, p. 141-142). Yet HadžiMuhamedović (2018) also argues that positioning *kumstvo* “in terms of violence (and its resolution) *only* may be problematized through anthropological research” (original emphasis; p. 141). This is because IR, for example, can “see social relationships as activated in a certain way and to a specific effect, but the affective webs usually escape it” (HadžiMuhamedović, 2018, p. 141).

CONCLUSION

Though “coddwompling” will never join the conceptual heights of social science that are home to “friction” or “thick description” or “habitus,” it moves comfortably in the unsung substrates of our professional wanderings and wonderings. Possibly, as a vehicle of speculative ambition and moral imagination, it remains intact so long as it is an act of insurgency against “rational” or known paradigms and praxes. Or insurgent against so-called authoritative assessments of knowing that are “unsullied by intuition, feeling or personal experience” (Ingold, 2015, p. 7). As with the very nature of anthropology, coddwompling may also only retain its transformative potential with the recognition that, to engage in such a journey, means to work towards a future you yourself may never see. Looking out to these horizontal figments of the future is to look forward to the vague, the indefinite, and the unknown. The very spaces that today are the free frontiers where anthropology can seek and sync its engagement with peace studies. Toward this goal, I have sought to illustrate such engagements by looking to anthropological research active today in Southeast Europe and/or connecting with post-Yugoslav space. Yet, just as with “local” life in highlighted here, anthropological research cannot simply be essentialized or extrapolated so as to legitimize the liberal or neocolonial agendas noted above.

Though “the vague” is used here as a semi-rhetorical device, it is a crosscurrent moving through much of the work assembled and reviewed for this white paper. We glimpse it everywhere and in every timescape when thinking through peace. Inescapably then, positive, emancipatory peace – however pluralized or however drawn from epistemological assemblages – is born of situated knowledge and the everyday learning processes played back into this knowledge. It is here then, that we find the “clues to directions” and the pointers calling for

unerring patience spoken of by Turner. Hence the inspiration behind the preceding lines; lines that bring degrees of conceptual scoping into conversation with critical strains of discourse and deliberation. A conversation that speaks to the interdisciplinary histories and hopes at play today when we speak about the politics of the possible. And in the process, I seek to align aspects of anthropology and peace(building) studies. With such alignments, fundamental to future-worldbuilding, we can continue to pursue paradigms of peace grounded and guided by local realities.

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