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Postscript

Perspectives on Today's Challenges and Opportunities for Peace Mediation – *Some Notes for Discussion*

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Introduction

This chapter is intended as a postscript to position the *Arts and Peace Mediation* (AiPM) initiative in lockstep with global trends. Following on from the Story So Far (Chapter 1), it sketches out some perspectives on the future. These are based on a series of informal discussions with experienced mediators and some arts practitioners, and on a rapid review of recent reports and ongoing research studies, including the consequences of the Covid pandemic on mediation and mediation support. It became clear that the community of mediation practitioners might need to examine larger questions. These include the effect of the rapidly shifting social, economic, political and security environments for political mediation, considering the changing nature of conflicts; issues around nationalism and sovereignty; the long-term impact of Covid-19; the need for greater digital literacy; the impact of the climate crisis on new conflicts; the role of insider mediation; and the debate on anti-colonialism.

Questions also emerged from the AiPM process (described in Chapter 1), such as: Do we need to rethink how mediation is conducted? Does mediation need a wake-up call? Do we need a new generation of mediators? How can existing mediation methodology and approaches adapt to the present?

The Changing Nature of Conflicts

Developments in the shifting environment of conflict and war need to inform peace mediation processes. New forms of violence and conflict have emerged that replace traditional wars. More people are displaced than ever before. There is a global rise of civil unrest, and the number of civil wars has tripled in the past decade. Countries are increasing military expenditure. Conflicts are becoming more intractable, which has led to a 'new' definition of conflict that includes the following elements:[1] conflicts happen between diverse combinations of state and non-state actors; many are driven by identity politics rather than ideology; the aim is no longer physical but political control; and increasingly they are privately financed. Fast-paced advances in technology have also altered the nature of conflict. In addition, climate change-propelled conflicts are proliferating –

for example, as noted by community mediation practitioners, in the US most of the drought areas resulting from climate change run through First Nations' reservations and create numerous local conflict environments.

Some mediators observed that in mediation processes, armed groups and non-state actors increasingly use the language of "fighting for a just cause" and of martyrdom, which underlines the uniqueness of 'new' conflicts in that they are ensconced in "sacred worldviews". This is equally pertinent in the debate surrounding the rise of nationalism and of anti-colonialism. Furthermore, conflicts are "usually about something very local". Jihadists are frequently referred to as a uniform group, yet they are deeply fragmented, complex in composition and their grievances are very specific and localised. For example, jihadists in the Sahel, such as in Mali or Burkina Faso, tend to engage because of local grievances and rarely because of ideology or religion, "that comes later." Even disputes at the global level between superpowers like China and Russia are often based on small incidents that accumulate and spark a larger event. This also highlights the importance of anthropological and cultural literacy for mediation practitioners. For example, one mediator suggested that it was essential for diplomats deployed to Russia to familiarise themselves with the long and influential history of Russian cinema, and with Russian literature dating back to the Russian Empire.

Mediation practitioners also expressed concern over the framework which serves as their current operating model: for example, the use of the term 'globalisation', while 'the global we' does not want to take global responsibility. "We seem to be in a paranoid situation – a global and more fragmented world without responsibilities".

The Changing Nature of Peace

The nature of peace, and in effect the manner of implementing peace agreements, is changing. The stepping stones towards reducing violence and achieving "peacefulness" are more complex. Implementation is increasingly decentralised and relies more heavily on social structures and non-state actors – and no longer exclusively on governments and formal militaries.

This in turn is linked to the changing role of the state. Some mediation observers felt that mediators have concentrated primarily on Track 1, effectively on 'War and Peace'. But when examining Peace vs War, questions arise: What is the role of the state now, in a so-called post-liberal period, characterised in part by identity politics? Is the traditional approach taken in mediation trapped by an outdated worldview, and an "old body of architecture?"

Governments today exercise power differently. Greater emphasis on the nation state and national sovereignty is leading to a new form of nationalism. Yet nationalism does not address the fundamental rifts in societies, and people are increasingly dissatisfied with governments, economies and social structures. After all, the primary concern for most of the population in conflict situations is a reduction in violence. In fact, violence is cited as the biggest risk to daily safety in almost a third of the world's countries. Conflict countries have lost their monopoly of military force and its authority is challenged by non-state actors. There is now a plethora of different actors, such as paramilitary units, local warlords, mercenary groups and criminal gangs. This in turn affects both the representation and interactions in the mediation space.

It is therefore important to ask whether we need a new way of looking at the implementation of agreements? For example, most commentators on the Oslo Accords have argued that hardly any of the aspects of successive agreements under the Accords have been implemented. The lessons learned from this failure should become part of present-day negotiations. Implementation assessment teams are brought into the mediation process to examine what is agreed upon. This then necessitates a delicate dance of sequencing the work in such a way that allows for implementation: an implementation schedule is developed that follows carefully sequenced, interlinked and alternative tracks. This also brings a sense of reality 'into the room'. "Mediators are not good implementers and need to get out of the way" at this stage. The problem here is that mediation as a process has to be seen to be doing something, while at the same time, practical, logistical, and especially financial constraints imposed on the process by the political conductors and funders rarely allow for sufficient time to actually implement agreements.

Is Mediation in Crisis?

Some mediation practitioners underlined that "we need new maps to make this work". For others, there was a sense that "mediation is always in crisis". The question is: Are we focusing on creating space for mediation? Some interlocutors felt that mediation was "sitting in the right space" until the end of the cold war, an era based on the notion of perpetual conflict with defined flash points. There used to be a belief in method and that everything follows precise rules. Yet reality defied these established methods and rules with a proliferation of unending small conflicts; for example, the civil war in Colombia with the FARC continued for over 65 years, and the war in Afghanistan lasted for 45 years and has arguably now been rekindled.

Others pointed out that mediation is based on a Western liberal model of the state. For example, in Somalia, when preparatory discussions for mediation were underway, the question that was NOT asked was: what do Somalis want? It was decreed by the governments sponsoring the process that Somalia needs to have a state or the construction of a state model to allow for an internationally acceptable interlocutor. This ignored the fact that the Somali system of clanship and regional control and government was not in line with the Western model of a state. In addition, Somalia's oral traditions of storytelling and poetry have historically played an important mediating function in localised regional and clan-based conflicts – apart from their inherent aesthetic value and appreciation.[2] This further supports the argument for greater cultural literacy to inform discussions on representation and understanding the interests of various social groups.

Some mediators underlined that a situation must be 'ripe' for mediation but that "people are not always interested in ripeness". The timeframe for international support in terms of political leverage and backing as well as financial and technical support is more limited. Parties come or are brought to the table often before they are ready, or in a stalemate, or optimistic about a successful outcome. What parties call mediation and what they seek can also be talks, negotiations, exchanges on differences, dialogue or facilitated discussions, and it is therefore more a

matter of "holding the door open" for parties to find a space to interact. There was a sense that theories of ripeness had been "thrown out of the window". Increasingly, many negotiations and peace agreements are concluded in the absence of a ceasefire that addresses the cessation of violence or any mechanism to stop it and prevent its resurgence.

Do We Need a New Style or a New Generation of Mediators?

Some mediation practitioners suggested that while no radical change is needed in the essential qualities of a mediator, there is a need to fine-tune certain skills given the changing global landscape. What matters most is to be human and practical, to follow the movement of the process and the dynamics, "like a river". Establishing real relationships is ultimately one of the most important aspects and it is crucial to build trust. A mediator needs to know who she/he is, why they are there and what and whom they represent, and be clear to themselves and the parties about their motivation. What also goes to the heart of this is: Whose agents are the mediators? What assumptions do they make? How does their view come into this system or context? How is that power being used? Is it a voluntary process? Are the parties willing to support the process, contribute to the discussions and implement the outcomes?

As noted above, the representation of the parties has changed and they come from less homogenous social groups. Hence, greater skills are required, especially given the new types of conflicts. Mediation now is about "more things than it used to be" and there is a demand for greater elasticity. It is also important to define boundaries since not everything can be mediated. Equally, more attention should be paid to the importance of "small moments", possible gear changes and the subtleties of language, especially for the role of translators. The most common languages used now are English, French, German and Arabic. Understanding the nuance in language and dialect is increasingly critical and poor translation or misinterpretations can have damaging consequences for the process and undermine trust and connections.

Mediation practitioners concurred that the basic steps of the actual process once the parties are 'in the room' remain broadly

unchanged. Some felt that this could be interpreted in both a positive and negative way: positive, because it is "tried and tested and it works", and negative, possibly because of an in-built inflexibility. The basic steps are:

1. She/he sets the objective: What do we want to do? What does the mediation team think is possible? More attention is now paid to the precursor of, for example, mapping the conflict or the outcomes of engaging in a national dialogue process to assist in defining the objectives.
2. She/he needs to apply "pragmatic inclusivity": Whom do we need on board? This now considers to a greater degree the need to anchor a mediation process in the composition of society, and include women and young people, as well as new tools such as adopting different rooms or spaces for diverse social groups and including consultations with civil society representatives.
3. She/he establishes the method: How are we going to work?
4. The time factor: How do we monitor and make sure we make progress?
5. The implementation: How does one ensure sufficient financial support to continue with mediation and ensure implementation of a negotiated agreement?

It has to be clearly understood that the process is owned by the parties and not by the mediator. In addition, nothing should be banned from the agenda and if either side wants to raise any issue, it needs to be tabled.

Increasingly another vital task for the mediation practitioners is to fine-tune language and terminology and develop almost a bespoke glossary in parallel to the process. There is a general presumption that commonly used international terminology means the same to all participants. However, in negotiations during the Colombian peace process, the parties had a different understanding of the term 'civil society'. In unpacking it, the question was posed: What do you call those people who are not politically affiliated but want to have a voice? As a result, the term deployed (for a while) was "invested independent actors".

Of note is that some mediation practitioners felt that there is a crisis of confidence in mediators and the mediation process

and that mediators are being increasingly viewed as ineffective. The perception is that "there is a lot of talking and then nothing happens". It was suggested that we need a new type, a new style, a new breed, and quite simply a younger generation of mediators and above all more women. Certainly, most mediators at Track 1 and Track 1.5 levels are male. Yet, many young women who are part of the new generation, would be far more creative and deserve being given a chance.

There was also a sense that as a profession, the mediation field has become too professionalised and technocratic. The new style of mediators, need to be "super listeners rather than super doers". What is needed is a new generation of "creative mediators", of activists who are themselves ethically engaged. The commitment and wealth of talent of younger people is illustrated in the number of youth-led and social media-enabled movements, as in South Sudan; or similar efforts in Gambia or Kenya;[3] or the Milk Tea Alliance in Southeast Asia, an online democratic solidarity movement mainly composed of young citizens from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand and Myanmar.[4] These are potent examples of creative engagement with political processes, attempts to hold politicians to account, and of questioning and not accepting the status quo. In particular, it opens a space for artists to play an important role to open conversations and foster and catalyse change.

Do We Need New Tools for a New Era in Mediation?

Some mediation practitioners stressed that the existing methodology is enshrined in our binary thinking of listeners and guests. In the existing Track 1 set-up, "the process follows the rules in a book", where things are supposed to happen in a linear way. Yet, there is now a need for hybrid methods and different forms of leadership of a process. For example, some people have waited for decades to be heard and their frustration has amplified because grievances were not heard or acknowledged. This leads to people defending a "sacred cause" and identifying with a form of sacred victimhood. Victims can be impelled into taking a fundamentalist position and hanging on to a particular representation of themselves.

Grassroots arts-based initiatives can play an important role in conflict environments and refugee contexts. Arts practice can assist in recreating a sense of agency, challenging self-images and images of victimhood, and give a voice and a platform to those who would otherwise be instrumentalised by those in power. Art does not require many resources and affected populations cannot easily be deprived of the capacity to make art.

There are several examples of 'narratives of victimhood' such as in the context of Kosovo (see Chapter 4). People cling on to a certain narrative, much of which is linked to a feeling of powerlessness or perceptions of power. Victimhood can be viewed from different angles: for instance, from a legal perspective, victims of crime represent a clear category. An important consideration for the mediation process is that there is also the frustration and perception of being a victim that can be passed down through a generation (or generations).

In this regard, mediators need to acknowledge trauma and have greater awareness of the dominant narratives that influence the perceptions and demeanour of the parties. The psychiatrist Vamik Volkan[5] highlighted the issue of chosen trauma and stories and large group identity, and that these choices are made unconsciously. The main task that members of a large group share is to maintain, protect and repair their group identity. 'Chosen trauma' is one component of their identity and refers to the shared mental representation of a major trauma the groups' ancestors suffered at the hands of an enemy. If a large group regresses, its chosen trauma is reactivated to support the group's identity, which can have dramatic and destructive consequences. Therefore, the 'new' mediator and her/his team should reflect on, and be more mindful of, the real facts, the multiple narratives representing different worldviews and be cognizant of cultural, historical and linguistic nuance. Many examples in literature and music highlight that this is also an area where art is at a high risk of being used as a propaganda tool by trying to anchor the chosen trauma in a population.

The Impact of Covid-19 on Mediation Practice

Fueled by Covid-19 there was a negative trend in civil unrest. Global militarisation also increased over the past two years.

This can impact the representation and dialogue in the mediation space, in that there is likely to be a more prominent military presence, and discussions about the implementation of agreements might seek more military-led outcomes.

At the same time, civil unrest could also be interpreted in a more positive light. There is greater willingness to speak out about inequality and injustice. New and creative forms of social organisation, music and art have emerged, which can be viewed as major indicators of change. Examples include the emergence of music bands in Lebanon[6] appealing for an open space for LGBTQ in Arab cultures. The important question here is how these diverse artistic expressions in a particular context at a given time can be better read by mediators as an indicator of issues that are important to different social groups. These include their search for social identity, opening up and freeing themselves from traditional values, and the debate around anti-colonialism that challenges an established narrative of history and underlying social norms.

A major consequence of Covid-19 is the heightened use of digital technologies. Several recent studies – with others underway – on the impact of the pandemic on peace mediation attest to this (see Bibliography below). Overall, mediation practitioners felt that technological progress can be efficient if used in a complementary way. The bottom line is that it remains a field that relies heavily on human contact. One mediation practitioner stated that it was not possible to conduct mediation via Skype or Zoom etc., but that the Covid period allowed for contact to be maintained and to hear about the evolving situation in various contexts. Above all it was critical to "keep the connections alive". At the same time challenges arose; in certain negotiations some non-state actors and armed groups did not trust the available digital links and stated that the other side or the government were listening and monitoring conversations. An added challenge cited was the difficulty in rescheduling face-to-face meetings with parties. The different waves of Covid-19 in various countries and regions are undermining the ability to plan and reschedule, and hence the continuity of exchanges.

The Need for Greater Digital Literacy and Unorthodoxy

A major ramification of the pandemic is the realisation that the boundaries between life on- and off-line have become blurred and are arguably breaking down. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is advancing at an explosive pace, which has a profound effect on how we relate to each other.[7] It is impossible for mediators to ignore that ICTs affect how we interact in all areas of life, including law, politics and security, and even the way war is conducted. Individuals and communities have become seamlessly connected to each other and, surrounded by small responsive objects, we have all become part of an "infosphere". This has impacted political engagement and dialogue. The question to be explored is: To what extent can tools in mediation processes integrate the changing pace of ICTs? A noteworthy example from recent talks in South Sudan describes how the establishment of an e-delegates forum allowed respective constituencies to be informed almost live about goings-on in the mediation room. Consequently, the negotiating parties were able to obtain swift feedback during the breaks between the sessions, enabling continuous connection and dialogue throughout.

It is increasingly clear that digital literacy is important – but it is also important to consider the implicit risks. To what extent can technologies empower, enable or constrain mediation processes? Is there a need to develop a clear ethical approach to deal with the new challenges posed by digital technologies and the information society?

Another aspect for consideration is the fast-paced progress in artificial intelligence (AI), which even reaches to experiments with AI-generated art.[8] Digital software packages allow artists to manipulate images, like a paintbrush. However, AI art is created by algorithms, a set of instructions programmed into a machine to tell it what to do. Hence with AI, the machine manipulates the paintbrush. Some artists employ artificial intelligence in their creations by using artificial neural networks, a machine whose architecture resembles how the human brain is wired. Data, often digital images are coded into a GAN (Generative Adversarial Network). The generator can create images

from sounds and perception. While this may be an unorthodox proposal, as an area it merits further exploration, in particular: To what extent can AI 'artists' contribute to the mediation space and processes – and potentially take on the role of, or assist in, making an artistic contribution? For example, this form of support might circumvent concerns that had been expressed over instrumentalisation of the artist, and even of impartiality as the AI 'artist' is not affiliated with either party to the conflict and could thus certainly occupy an impartial and possibly a more neutral space. A counter argument would be posed by many artists and those engaged in the philosophy of aesthetics. For example, Dieter Mersch characterised art as "anamorphic seeing", "an attention to what thwarts our pursuits, what makes them reach their limits, their conditions and biases, or what Pindar called the 'ephemeros': the fragile and vulnerable reality of human existence".[9]

Use of Social Media

Negotiating parties and populations as a whole and non-state armed groups in conflict-affected countries are increasingly using social media in new and sophisticated ways. This also represents an opportunity for mediators for social engagement to promote peace narratives and to broadcast information. It has been argued that a mediator's mandate should include a broader outreach strategy on the objectives of a particular peace process. At the same time there are challenges that deserve further exploration, especially around confidentiality, the sensibilities of the parties and the specific phase of a given process.[10] The many downsides to the uses of different forms of social media are well rehearsed, with the potential for disinformation and enabling new and very sophisticated channels of propaganda by authoritarian governments. There are crass examples of the use of social media, for example during the Trump 'reign' in the US, for proliferating misinformation about Covid-19 and the pandemic; or sophisticated forms of election and other interference purportedly by the Russian government; or grim examples of supporting a dominant narrative of hatred with TikTok messages distributing footage of the corpses of killed soldiers, as in the recent case of the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia. All these aspects (and many more) emphasise

the need for both greater social media savviness and multilayered and urbane outreach strategies by mediation practitioners at all levels.

How Can Advances in Neuroscience Be Integrated into Mediation?

Neuroscientists are already making a critical contribution to peacebuilding and mediation. This is a significant addition amidst ongoing political, security and social changes. Peacebuilders are increasingly conscious of the shortcomings of technical solutions. Conflicts are rooted in human perception, patterns of thought and behaviour at times linked to profound trauma. Both neuroscience and peacebuilding are fields that encompass a wide range of experts and practitioners. In peacebuilding there are specialists in law, human rights, security studies or governance. In neuroscience, some branches examine the role of emotions, or in neuro-engineering assess a more molecular quantitative approach. Peacebuilders could benefit from neuroscience and its insights into what drives violent behaviour. Peacebuilders and mediation practitioners can be limited by analysing situations in a more traditional way, in terms of 'drivers' of conflict, or under different indicators, such as inclusion, gender or (lack of) the rule of law.

Much work done in neuroscience on how attitudes change and how change happens has a strong affinity with mediation. It was suggested that dance offers ways in which people in conflict can access and influence perceptions and it can also bring about transformation in conflict and allow people to become 'unstuck'.[11] Research studies on cults and the motivation of followers demonstrate the immutability of certain beliefs and the impossibility of making progress "when stuck in a lane" or in a certain mindset. An extreme example cited is the demise of the cult of the Branch Davidians in Texas (the General Association of Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventists, a religious cult founded in 1955). This type of mindset has been likened to the adherence to certain beliefs in negotiation situations, as with some ideologically motivated non-state (often armed) actors or more authoritarian-minded government representatives. The challenge of how to become unstuck also dovetails with the discussions on arts practice in mediation (see Chapter 1), which

accentuated that some arts practices can unsettle us and "come obliquely rather than directly" – and therefore lead to a shift in understanding and mindset.

Conclusion

This is a sketch of perspectives on some of today's developments and challenges and how they might impact mediation practice. It aims to create a platform to provoke more conversation and provide a potential agenda for follow up, and to be incorporated into the AiPM initiative as it moves forward. It might also assist the initiative to undertake a reality check. The recommendation is therefore for further exchanges to explore these issues and questions in depth.

Some questions for future consideration might be:

1. Based on practice and experience, and considering the issues presented above: What are the additional challenges and dilemmas for mediation practice today? Where is the continuity and what are the changes or even paradigm shifts in how mediation processes are set up and conducted and outcomes implemented?
2. Looking towards the future: Who are the actors and what are the issues, contexts, representations, and practices that should be considered? What is now 'outdated'?
3. Where are the potential entry points for contributions by artists or psychologists? Do today's developments and challenges prompt mediation practitioners to consider the potential of the arts even more? What tools are currently lacking in mediation practice, and what additional experience or skills would benefit mediation practitioners?

NOTES

1 *The State of Global Peace in 2020,* Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP); Global Peace Index 2021
2 For example, "Hadraawi" Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame (e.g. https://princeclausfund.org/laureate/maxamed-ibraahim-warsame).
3 Gambia: #GambiaHasDecided https://www.openglobalrights.org/a-hashtag-that-inspired-hope-gambia-has-decided/ or Kenya: PAWA Initiative https://pawa254.org/.
4 See The Economist, 24 March 2021: "… The name is a reference to the milky tea that is drunk hot in Hong Kong, with tapioca pearls in Taiwan, and iced and sweetened in Thailand. This differs from the neat tea often drunk in China. The preference for milk can be seen as a hangover from British colonialism (in Hong Kong and Myanmar) or trade connections (in Taiwan and Thailand). "Undoubtedly we are countries with heavy Chinese influence but at the same time we also share this cosmopolitan history," says Wasana Wongusurawat, of Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. For protesters, how they take their tea represents a common pro-democracy, anti-China feeling".
5 Vamik Volkan, Transgenerational Transmission and Chosen Traumas: An Aspect of Large-Group Identity, 1 March 2001, https://doi.org/10.1177%2F05333160122077730.
6 Lebanese Band Mashrou Leila.
7 Luciano Floridi, The 4th Revolution – How the Infosphere is reshaping Human Reality.
8 See for example Arthur Miller: https://www.arthurimiller.com/articles/can-ai-be-truly-creative-an-article-in-american-scientist/
9 Dieter Mersch, oral presentation in the webinar on *Arts in Peace Mediation* on 7.6.2021.
10 See: swisspeace, 2021: Social Media in Peace Mediation – a practical framework.
11 Michelle LeBaron, "Transforming Cultural Conflict in an Age of Complexity", Allard Faculty publications, 2000, https://commons.allard.ubc.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1195&context=fac_pubs]; LeBaron, Macleod & Floyer Acland (eds) The Choreography of Resolution, Conflict Movement and Neuroscience.

FURTHER READING

Rethinking Peace Mediation: Challenges of Contemporary Peacemaking Practice, published by Catherine Turner and Martin Wählisch

Armed Conflict: Mediation, Conciliation, and Peacekeeping
https://www.icm2016.org/IMG/pdf/armed_conflict_discussion_paper-2.pdf

The Future of Mediation in the Post-COVID World
https://dam.gcsp.ch/files/images/the-future-of-mediation-in-the-post-covid-world

Mediation Library | UN Peacemaker
https://peacemaker.un.org/resources/mediation-library/section

Mediation | International Peace Institute
https://www.ipinst.org/tag/mediation

Mediation & Peacemaking – swisspeace
https://www.swisspeace.ch/continuing-education/postgraduate-courses/mediation-peacemaking-course

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